

Nov. 25, 1979

Dear Jim:

Herewith a few comments on the DHBender situation, the product of two conversations: one with Dan Kauffman after church this morning, and the other with my sister Verna, who reflects our mother's view.

Dan, in short space, thinks that the whole case was exaggerated heavily, and that likely DH was in no way culpable. DH was stern, authoritarian, and therefore made many enemies. Kansas was swept by revivalism moods, very strong indeed, in the 20s. During one period of widowhood, when Ruth was perhaps 12 or 13, DH invited Ruth into his bed during lightning-thunder storms, which in Kansas are fearsome indeed; she was primarily scared. Then, during revival meetings, when Ruth was in her late teens or early 20s, she became convinced of sin which was in reality the product of her fantasy, not real. She confessed to Maurice, and he vindictively carried the thing away and spilled all. Since DH was disliked, he had to flee, more from Mennonite than larger community wrath.

Well, that hardly takes into account the DH confessions, one of "gross sin" and the later one of "fornication." (It is still curious to me that they did not use the word incest; I suppose that their sexual vocabulary was influenced largely by the King James Bible, rather than secular usage; but the KJ does use the word, quite clearly.)

Verna has got a fantastically full and accurate memory. She is generally carefully to distinguish between what she remembers well and what she remembers less well and very indistinctly. But she therefore reflects our family's view, which is strongly pro-Ruth and anti-DH (but even more, anti-Maurice Yoder). I never got any of this; Mother would talk about such things only if asked, and I never asked.

Ruth had been living with her grandmother, or grandparents, during her father's widowhood; she came home, in her early teens, and accepted her father's invitation to go to bed with him, in the naive assumption that this is what happened in families. Only later did she become convinced that this was wrong, so that she confessed accordingly. But Verna says that Mother thought that Paul intervened and told his father to quit, else he would spill all.

Verna has a faint impression that Maurice Yoder was interested in Ruth for courting or even marriage purposes, and that the disclosure to him of the sexual encounter ~~was~~ made him angry so he revealed all.

Both Verna and Dan reported the community (Menn.) reaction that Maurice's accident in the garage was God's judgment on him.

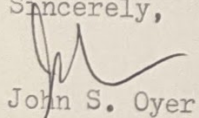
Verna was surprised to learn of our father's involvement. I find it credible, except that I have no idea what his relation was with Maurice Yoder. It is not only possible but even likely that he did not tell our mother about his involvement; he almost never spoke to her about church business of any kind.

There are obviously credible elements in both accounts, when put together with what you have unearthed. The entire incident would be an excellent exercise in the use of oral evidence, except that one should not really make much public again.

Thanks for your hospitality on the meeting. We really did feel that Phil Reinford was unfairly treated by the policeman. I thought he drove very carefully indeed. Hubert was convinced that the cop came after us because he saw Hubert, who leaned forward and looked off toward the cop and their eyes met suddenly--only after which did the cop drive out after us.

Bob Kreider is quite unhappy about the meeting at Bethel on Friday morning. It appears that we have some business ahead of us to explain some things that he seems not to understand at all, much to my astonishment.

Sincerely,



John S. Oyer