BRING ME BACK

Pablo Yoder and Jacinto Yoder



CHRISTIAN LIGHT
PUBLICATIONS

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Dedication—
to little Caitlyn

A bruised reed shall he not break,
and smoking flax shall he not quench.

Matthew 12:20

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Publisher's Note

You may have noticed the names of two writers on the cover of *Bring Me Back*. Here is how that came to be.

Pablo Yoder planned to spend a year working on a book about Elmer Peachey. In January 2022, Pablo and his wife Euni traveled to Pennsylvania and had a blessed time visiting Elmer and his children, asking questions and gathering information.

Returning home to Nicaragua, Pablo began writing, inspired and excited about the story. But as the months went by, Pablo felt a growing weariness, and writing required more effort. In August he learned why—cancer. Writing came to a halt. By mid-October, Pablo was home with God.

Pablo's son Jacinto accepted the challenge of completing the manuscript. Working from previously recorded interviews, consulting with Elmer, and with God's gracious help, Jacinto finished the book you now have in your hands.

As is common for narratives based on a person's life, details and dialogue are supplied for readability and story flow. Some names have been changed for privacy.

May God use this story of a redeemed sinner's testimony to encourage and challenge you.

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Introduction

An Amish Boy's Plea

The mockingbird stretched its neck, opened its beak wide, and warbled its melody from the very top of one of the cypress trees that formed the hedge between the potato field and the white Amish farmhouse. Its gray and yellow plumage stood out against the azure spring sky.

But little Elmer Peachey did not hear the mockingbird's song as he rode the roller packer pulled behind a pair of fine Belgian horses. His nine-year-old mind was busy processing what the minister had said in his message the day before. The minister's words had filled young Elmer's heart with fear.

"Hell," the minister had explained in Pennsylvania Dutch, "is for eternity. Eternity is like a ring that goes around and around and never ends."

Elmer already knew about the horrors of Hell. He had grown up understanding that Hell was where bad people went, and Heaven was where good people went. All his life he had heard about the eternal fire.

Instead of enjoying the beautiful sky and the mockingbird's song, his hands tightly gripped the leather reins. Below the rim of his straw hat, his long blond hair, cut off in a straight line from the center of one ear to the center of the other, waved slightly in the wind. A terrifying question churned in his mind. *What if I end up in Hell?*

Elmer knew several youth who had left the Amish church and moved away from Big Valley and into the world. It was frightening to think what might happen to them.

These were Elmer's thoughts as he and the team reached the end of the row. The mockingbird was no longer singing.

"Whoa!" Elmer yelled. The weary horses appreciated a moment of rest.

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Elmer jumped off the packer and walked to the hedgerow. There he knelt and pulled off his straw hat. He seldom prayed when he was alone, but now a passionate plea poured from his heart. "O Gott, please les mich net tsu da helie gieh!"[1]

The mockingbird cocked its head as if listening to the little boy's prayer. The Belgians twitched their ears and switched their tails. Elmer prayed on, "O God, I'm still young and don't know what's going to happen to my life. But please don't let me just die and go to Hell. If I go astray, bring me back to You."

The mockingbird flew away. The horses ignored the young boy. Though the Peachey house was close, the hedgerow was thick, and none of Elmer's family was near. Did anyone hear the young boy's cry?

Feeling better, Elmer mounted the packer and brought the team around to smooth out another row of freshly plowed dirt for the upcoming potato planting. Elmer had expressed his innermost feelings and hoped, as the Amish do, that God might have heard him.



Oh, if only Elmer had known Someone was listening. Not one word of his prayer was lost. The heavenly Father so deeply loved that young boy that He had given His only begotten Son so Elmer could believe in Him and have everlasting life with Him. And even now, as the boy kept packing the potato field, this kind Father watched over him.

Though much is mystery to us, there was also an evil and fierce opposition to Elmer's prayer and God's care. The devil and his followers are determined to draw everyone they can down the wide road to destruction and to defeat God's efforts to bring them back. Elmer didn't know that part.

Elmer's testimony today is the same as the psalmist's when he penned these words many, many years ago: "But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" (Psalm 66:19–20).

[1] "O God, please don't let me go to Hell!"

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Bring Me Back is the story of one man's battle between good and evil, between God's call and Satan's allurements. But God, in His eternal love, did not let Elmer go. As you read Elmer's story, allow your heart to be thrilled as you see a man so nearly gone be saved by the marvelous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!

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Chapter 1

Big Valley, Pennsylvania

The five-year-old boy felt submerged in an ocean of blue and gray and brown dresses. A wave of white caps crested the sea of fabric. Dozens of Amish ladies sat on backless benches waiting for church to start. Among them was young Elmer Peachey, feeling very small as he sat beside his mother. Other children also sat with their mothers, like his own little brother Leroy, who perched obediently on his mother's knee.

On the other side of the spacious living room, also on backless benches, sat a throng of Amish men, each wearing dark broadfall pants, a white shirt, one suspender, and lots of whiskers. In less than a year, Elmer would not sit with Mom on Sunday mornings but with Dad. He looked forward to that.

Elmer knew exactly what would happen next. When the big clock on the wall struck nine o'clock, a man's voice, loud and clear, started the Loblied.[1]

"Oh . . . oh . . . oh . . . oh . . . oh . . . oh . . . oh . . ."

The lone song leader, sitting among the rest of the men, sang "Oh," the first word of the Loblied, in a long, drawn-out series of seven different notes. Then the whole church joined in the next word, in unison, "Gott . . ."[2] Again, the word *Gott* was sung in a slow sequence of seven ascending and descending notes.

The Loblied is composed of deep words of worship in High German. But since each word of the hymn was sung in a drawn-out series of syllables,

[1] In every Amish church around the globe, the Loblied is always the first or second song in the Sunday morning service.

[2] God

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Elmer never connected the words and didn't understand what the song said. The four verses took from fifteen to twenty minutes to sing. To Elmer it seemed forever.

On this special morning, there was to be a baptism. The youth who were to be baptized had gone upstairs where the class usually received instruction for baptism while the congregation sang. Today was their last class.

Forty minutes and three more songs followed the Loblied. During the last song, the three ministers stepped softly down a stairway close to where Elmer sat. They walked solemnly to the front of the congregation and took their seats on a backless bench against the wall.

The group of ten youth to be baptized followed single file to the first row of benches and took their seats, the boys on the right and the girls on the left. Elmer watched the row of youth, clean and dressed in their Sunday best.

In a small way, Elmer understood that something important and good was happening to the young people that morning, something that had to do with God. A holy reverence gripped Elmer, and a sweet longing settled in his heart. *Someday I'll be baptized too!* he promised himself.

The Old Order Amish in Big Valley did not build church houses but gathered in homes. Every other week a family with ample space set up for Sunday morning worship. It was a special occasion for the host family, and much work went into preparation.

The women would practically do spring cleaning. The day before, the wagon full of benches and chairs was parked at the chosen home, and the men and boys set the benches and chairs in the living room and dining room area. If the house was too small, church was sometimes set up in a barn. Hundreds of half-moon pies with apple filling were prepared for the noon snack, along with bowls of sweet pickles, bread and a homemade smear cheese or peanut butter, and coffee for the adults.

The church service included two messages, one shorter message called the opening followed by the main message. The service was interspersed with singing with a time for testimonies at the end. Services were often two and a half to three hours long.

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Though Elmer at five years old didn't understand much of the sermons, he was used to the long services. Plus, between the two sermons, young girls came around giving out half-moon pies and glasses of water to all the children who still sat with their mothers. Overall, Elmer liked church Sundays. He realized at a young age that these were times to worship God and to learn from His Word.



Big Valley, nestled in the center of Pennsylvania, is not a big valley at all. It averages four miles wide and is approximately thirty miles long. The mountain ranges surrounding the valley are not high but stand out distinctly against the sky.

In 1791, several Amish families from Lancaster bought land in the fertile valley and started farming. By 1800, over fifty Amish families lived there. By 1830, the large fast-growing Amish church had split three ways: The Nebraska Amish were the most conservative. The Byler Amish were the most liberal. And the Reno Amish fit between them.

The Nebraska Amish were called White Toppers because they didn't allow painting the white vinyl used to build the buggies. The Byler Amish were called Yellow Toppers, because they permitted painting their buggy tops yellow. But the Reno Amish were called Black Toppers, because they were modest and only used black paint on their buggy tops.

Elmer grew up among the Reno Amish. And, as he grew up, he gleaned that the Reno Amish was the best church to belong to. Conservative, but not too strict. Open-minded, but not too liberal.

Big Valley was home to many Amish. Some of Elmer's neighbors were English,[3] but by far most of the people Elmer grew up with were Amish. He lived in an Amish world. It was a small world, but Elmer did not realize that. He was Amish, and that was all he knew . . . and loved.



[3] What the Amish call the non-Amish

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Rays of afternoon sun shone into the dark, dank barn through its only window, catching Sally, the calico cat, right on the face. Sally lay in a corner on the straw, patiently waiting for milk.

Elmer smiled as he saw Sally's whiskers stand out in the sunlight, her eyes squinting in the bright light. Sally was his favorite cat. *I'll give her a cup of warm milk when I'm done milking my cow*, Elmer thought. He looked at his bucket, half-full of foaming milk. *When will I ever finish?*

Elmer hadn't been milking very long on his own. During chores that summer after Elmer's fifth birthday, his dad had announced, "Elmer, it's time you start milking a cow." He pointed to Betsy, a Holstein that always chose to eat her feed in the first stanchion. "Betsy will be your cow to milk every day from now on," he said. "She's an easy milker, and you can't find a tamer cow."

Elmer had felt a warm glow inside as he selected a milking stool, then took the aluminum pail his dad handed him. Sitting close to the big black-and-white cow, he placed the bucket under her udder, just like Dad did.

Elmer had been coming to the barn most afternoons for almost a year. Often he sat on the opposite side of Betsy, or any of the other forty cows, and helped his dad or brothers or sisters milk. But milking Betsy by himself felt like a big job. Since his dad trusted him and encouraged him, he did it, even if his arms became painfully weary. Being able to milk a cow meant he was growing up.

Katie and Fanny, Elmer's two oldest sisters, were across the barn from him. "Did you hear the Yellow Toppers allow scooters now?" Katie asked. Her head, bound in a kerchief, was pressed into her cow's flank as she milked.

"Yes, I saw it!" Fanny said. "The other day Dad and I stopped by cousin Urie's, and the children were having fun going out the lane with their new scooters. They even let me have a turn. I tell you, scooters can really go."

"I'd like to try one just for fun," Katie acknowledged. "But I don't think it's a good thing. Just watch, they'll soon allow bicycles."

When the girls finished milking their cows, they hurried off to do other chores. A lot of work needed to be done before they could go to the house.

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