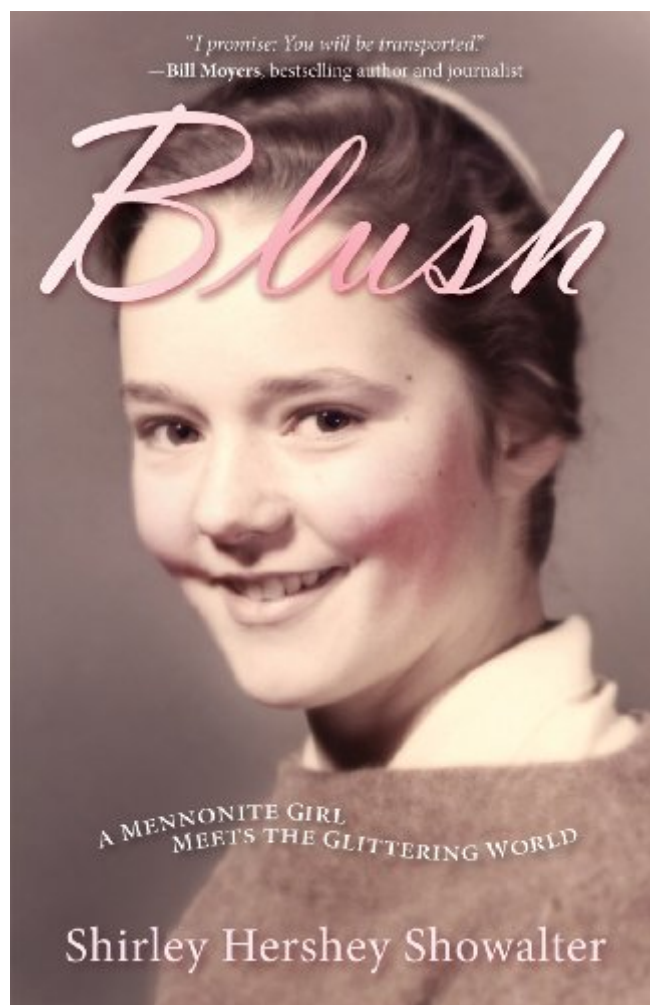


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Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets A Glittering World



Synopsis

“I promise: you will be transported,” says Bill Moyers of this memoir. Part Mennonite in a Little Black Dress, part Growing Up Amish, and part Little House on the Prairie, this book evokes a lost time, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, when a sheltered little girl with big dreams entered a family and church caught up in the midst of the cultural changes of the 1950s and 1960s. With gentle humor and clear-eyed affection the author, who grew up to become a college president, tells the story of her first encounters with the “glittering world” and her desire for “fancy” forbidden things she could see but not touch. The reader enters a plain Mennonite Church building, walks through the meadow, makes sweet and sour feasts in the kitchen and watches the little girl grow up. Along the way, five other children enter the family, one baby sister dies, the family moves to the “home place.” The major decisions, whether to join the church, and whether to leave home and become the first person in her family to attend college, will have the reader rooting for the girl to break a new path. In the tradition of Jill Ker Conway’s *The Road to Coorain*, this book details the formation of a future leader who does not yet know she’s being prepared to stand up to power and to find her own voice. The book contains many illustrations and resources, including recipes, a map, and an epilogue about why the author is still Mennonite. Topics covered include the death of a child, Pennsylvania Dutch cooking, the role of bishops in the Mennonite church, the paradoxes of plain life (including fancy cars and the practice of growing tobacco). The drama of passing on the family farm and Mennonite romance and courtship, as the author prepares to leave home for college, create the final challenges of the book.

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Customer Reviews

Shirley Hershey Showalter's *Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World* sings the song of her early life as a Mennonite girl in 250 pitch-perfect pages. Born into a family of Lancaster County Swiss Mennonite parents, the author recounts the story of the first 18 years of her girlhood on an 100-acre dairy farm in the 1950s and early '60s. The book delivers in its promise to play out her memories of school, church, and home, "the three legs of my childhood stool," as she puts it. "Each carried both sweet and sour memories" of ways this plain girl fit in and ways she stood out as different. Her melody line bravely hits the sharps and flats of her experiences. She grabs her reader by the hand to walk into their farm meadow as she and her brother Henry play amid the Holstein cows and fragrant bluebells by the creek on a cloudless, spring day. We learn secrets of good Pennsylvania Dutch cookery in her mother's kitchen and are privy to recipes of delicious dishes in an appendix to the book. She lets us hear the congregation joyously singing hymns of the faith a cappella in 4-part harmony though in a sex-segregated sanctuary. But her song turns to a minor key as she vividly describes the sudden death of her infant sister, her by turns affectionate and adversarial relationship with her conflicted father, and later in a brush with a rigid Mennonite bishop. This memoir abounds in artful motifs. In the preface the author is sitting on the sandstone steps on the way down to the arch cellar of The Home Place, now known as Forgotten Seasons Bed & Breakfast. She describes the arch in this cellar as the entrance to a storehouse of provision for her parents and grandparents against the want of the Great Depression and a bunker of bounty during the Cold War.

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