

Local author Arnold De Graff pens guide to an alternate path

Marni Walsh

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge.” Leviticus 19:9

In the serenity of the Hills of the Headwaters in Mono, Arnold De Graaff, psychotherapist, theologian, artist and author, has spent the last five years writing his book, *The Gods in Whom They Trusted*.

The book is “a guide for those who seek to develop an alternate vision and way of living” in a world of “ecological decline and disintegration.”

Born in Delft, the Netherlands, in the early 1930s, De Graff immigrated to Canada in 1951 at the urging of his parents. He began life in his new country as a ranch-hand in Seven Persons, Alberta; followed by working in forestry, learning about the food value of different grasses as feed for livestock; and then in banking in Abbotsford, B.C., where he was joined by his newly immigrated parents.

From there, the ambitious and clever young Arnold, who had been raised in the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, studied theology at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After three years, he graduated and took his doctoral degree in Pastoral Counselling and Educational Ministry in Amsterdam.

The Reformed Church invited De Graff to teach in Palos Heights, Chicago, where he spent four years during an historic time of unrest for the nation as young people resisted the controversial war in Vietnam. He spent the next 10 years working for the Institute for Christian studies in Toronto, where he taught psychology and curriculum studies in education, raised a family of four children, and wrote *Joy in Learning*, an integrated curriculum for elementary schools.

Always eager to learn more, De Graff spent the next five years retraining as a psycho-therapist and began a full-time practice in Toronto. He later remarried, to another psychotherapist, Rita Reitsma, and the couple moved to Mono in 1989 where, together, they run Mono Therapy Centre from their home, providing a wide range of counselling services.

It was this life, rich with learning and ideological study, that led De Graaff to publish *The Gods in Whom They Trusted*, based on “extensive multi-disciplinary research, scientific reports, journal articles, documentaries, case studies and first-hand accounts.”

This expansive work combines De Graaff’s study of the prophetic messages of social justice and the summary of laws of the Old Testament with his deep ecological research. The author focuses on “recapturing our basic human values” out of the “ecological decline and disintegration that is the inevitable result of global capitalism.”

In *The Gods in Whom They Trusted*, De Graaff challenges neo-liberal ideology “the obsessive drive for profit and unlimited growth which worships the economy and free market as a sociopolitical focal point above all concepts, including “love your neighbour as yourself.”

De Graaff refers to neo-liberal ideology as “one-dimensional.” The viewpoint he expresses in his book is a multi-dimensional one: “that every area of life should get equal attention; physical health and personal well being should be as important as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) numbers and the stock market.”

His book concludes that “the ongoing violation of nature’s and society’s thresholds has resulted in the degradation of land, water, air, oceans, and has created untold human suffering, social injustice, corruption, violence, inequality, dispossession, enslavement, and millions of climate, food, water and war refugees.”

De Graaff insists that he is not just presenting a “Utopian dream” in his book, but a guide that translates ideas for world change in “down to earth terms.” He addresses ecological, economical and ethical alternatives at a grassroots level. “A radical, but practical way of relating to nature, economics and ethics that leads to healing.”

The Gods in Whom They Trusted, The Disintegrative Effects of Capitalism is already available at BookLore, and more than 50 review copies are going to various organizations, magazines and professors like David Suzuki and Maude Barlow and the Council of Canadians.

The book and the table of contents can be seen on Heathwood Press’ website: www.heathwoodpress.com