



Amish Values

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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In August, I decided that I needed a rest! My son suggested that I go to a spa. I really wanted to go where I had never been before and told him that one of my goals had been to go to Amish country. Everything that I had read about the culture seemed inviting and I thought that I would benefit from the relaxing style and simplicity of being around their simple and relaxing culture.

Coincidentally, I had also been working on my family tree and was intrigued by the fact that my fifth great-grandfather, Conrad Eichelberger, had immigrated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania from Germany in the mid-1750s.

Bird in Hand is a rural village with a population of 300 people, but the area is a major drawing card for tourists. In fact, Pennsylvania boasts bringing in \$1.8 billion per year in tourism, most which can be attributed to summer guests in Amish communities.

I loved the six days that I stayed in Bird in Hand and also learned a great deal about the values that hold the community together:

1. Religion - Like many groups, the Amish left Europe because of religious persecution. It must have been quite an adventure to leave their homes and families in order to travel to the new land of America with the hope of securing freedom for their beliefs.
2. Community - There are not many Amish groups in Canada. They primarily reside in Ontario, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana. Although they live in single-family homes and on family farms, they are very close knit.
3. Self-support - They cooperate and share their work, religion and social activities with others in the area. They do not vote or believe in insurance but instead meet the needs of the vulnerable without outside support.
4. Rules - Each community has specific rules that their baptized members must follow. None of them use electricity, vehicles or technology in their lives. Although they are a branch of the Mennonites who tend to focus more on the Bible, the Amish tend to focus on rules made in their districts which are enforced by their chosen Bishops.
5. Family - Children are viewed as a gift from God. As a result, families are large and often consist of six or more siblings who are close in age. Relatives usually live within buggy-drive distance so there is inter-generational contact.
6. Language - The Amish speak Pennsylvania Dutch in the home. Their children do not learn English until they begin school which they attend until they have reached the grade eight level.
7. Living off the Land - In the past, Amish were primarily farmers who believed in hard work where fields were tilled, and crops harvested using horses. Corn, soybeans, tobacco, and cauliflower as well as garden produce brought income but now only twenty percent of the Amish have farming as their primary source of income. Some have moved from their original homesteads to areas where tourism isn't as prevalent in order to protect their unique identity.
8. Skills - The Amish are experts at finding niches and filling them. Today, many have businesses that sell their beautiful hand-made furniture, garden sheds, quilts, and food. There is nothing like a fresh pretzel and glass of homemade root beer on a warm summer day!
9. Simplicity - The Amish foster humility and this is evidenced in their unadorned houses, uniformity of dress and routines. Most restaurants in the Lancaster area have a row of

rocking chairs outside so people can just relax while waiting for a table. Lovely!

10. Forgiveness - The Amish strongly believe and practice the belief that the person who doesn't forgive is the one who suffers. From birth they are taught that God forgave them, and they are to do the same without question. That doesn't mean that they don't feel strong emotions such as anger, hurt or grief. They do, however, let go of resentment and bitterness quickly and find it hard to understand that others might not know that this is just common sense.

The Amish are not perfect! They are human. They do not like the idea that some "Englishers" have had an inaccurate and negative impression of them through television and movies.

Staying in an Amish community has given me some insight into how they could have remained so consistent and loyal to their values for over three hundred years while all the world around them has changed!

What are your values and how have they remained consistent or changed over the years?