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When Artists Meet

—By Betty Brookman



hen two artists' paths cross, something beautiful is likely to occur. That is what happened when Helen Neufeld Coon and Erna Harms Rempel created some lovely masterpieces. Helen does the poetry, and Erna illustrates—and so the piece "When God Made Oklahoma" (printed below) was born.

Helen Neufeld Coon is from the Chicago area, growing up in Brighton Park. She stayed there until graduation from high school and two years following. During one of those two years, she attended North Park Junior College on Chicago's North side and recalls doing her homework on the hour-long streetcar ride. The second year, she enjoyed the role of "white-collar girl" at Scripture Press—then located in Chicago.

Three years at Bluffton College followed. There she met her future husband, Robert Coon. Helen and Robert spent their first six years of marriage in two other Chicago neighborhoods where he finished seminary, she taught school, and they served their first church. They have since served churches in Illinois, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, Helen and Erna started working together; the Coons ministered at the Herold Mennonite Church near Bessie.

Helen says, "Books, libraries, and students have always had a big part in my life from the time a Chicago librarian and a kindergarten

teacher read aloud to me. I can recall almost being hit by a car as I read a book while crossing the street as I came home from the library. The smell of a newly opened book still gives me a thrill."

Helen Coon has published articles, stories, and poetry; her first book is *THE HOUSE AT THE BACK OF THE LOT*. She and her husband now live in Turpin, Oklahoma, and they have three grown children—Russell, Catherine, and Dorothy.

Helen serves on the Beaver County Library Board and does substitute teaching in schools in Liberal, Kansas.

Erna Harms Rempel is from the Clinton area. She has a twin brother, Ernest Harms, and other brothers and sisters. Their parents were J. A. and Eva Harms; like most pioneer parents, they stressed education and work on their farm. Erna has always had her artistic talent. She remembers that in third grade at Bear Creek School she won a blue ribbon for her drawing. She went on to Corn High School and upon graduation learned of her illness which has left her with a physical handicap.

"Helen Coon has published articles, stories, and poetry; her first book is *THE HOUSE AT THE BACK OF THE LOT*."

Erna is married to John Rempel, and they have one daughter, Eva Maxine Jones. The Rempels have farmed all their married life, and Erna has always helped—whether driving a tractor or preparing a delicious meal to take to the field during harvest time.

Erna met Helen Coon when the Coons were ministering at the Herold Mennonite Church several years ago. She has studied art under the direction of Edna Dresser of Chickasha and for several years did portrait painting at Blunck's Studio in Clinton. Now she does her art for enjoyment; her home beautifully mirrors her enjoyment, and her hospitality is most gracious.

The poem "When God Made Oklahoma" by Helen C. Coon and the accompanying illustration by Erna Rempel are presented here with the artists' permission.