

ENDORSEMENTS FOR *A JOURNEY HOME*

“Dr. John and Clara Schmidt were devout Christians who dedicated their lives as Mennonite missionaries to serving the medical and spiritual needs of the poor and marginalized in Paraguay, South America. John’s singlemindedness and faith that he was doing God’s work often drove him to embrace risky ventures in ways that alienated important allies and led to seeming foolhardiness. His mantra was “When there is no road, make a way.” That is the story many of us know about the remarkable life of a great medical pioneer who led the global revolution from corralling persons with leprosy in isolated colonies to compassionate home treatment. And when patients did not come to his clinic, he rode into the wilds on horseback to find them.

The turmoil of Dr. John’s inner life has remained largely hidden – until now. Based on extensive research into personal documents and family interviews, *A Journey Home* takes us deep into his psyche as he confronts his innermost fears and failings. We join Dr. John on a spiritual journey that is more about learning how to be present than bullying his way forward; about receiving love and forgiveness that arise more from open vulnerability than through forceful effort; and more about growing awareness of human limitations than certainty about being right. On this deeply personal journey with Dr. John, we come to understand that willful determination may not be enough to get us to our final destination with God. There is an element of grace, of something miraculous, that gives us the capacity to truly awaken to our spiritual home.”

—Edgar Stoesz, former associate executive secretary, Mennonite Central Committee, and former chairman, American Leprosy Missions

“Having read two previous books about John and Clara Schmidt, I wondered if a third one could take me into new territory. Indeed it did. I was reminded of one of my favorite novels, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* by Willa Cather. Using the diaries and other sources her mother entrusted to her, Marlena Fiol traces the history of her amazing parents one more time, this time through the eyes of her dying father. She and Ed O'Connor have combined imagination and insight gleaned from long experience in taking us to the bedside of John Schmidt, a man who could no longer communicate but who found extraordinary insight into his own life and faith at the end. This book would make great book club material, especially in retirement communities.”

—Shirley Showalter, PhD, former professor and president, Goshen College; former foundation executive, The Fetzer Institute; and author of *The Mindful Grandparent* and *Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World*

"It is one of axioms of the healing arts that 'hurt people hurt people.' So, the goal is to somehow break the cycle of violence, whether physical or spiritual. *A Journey Home* accomplishes exactly that by providing us with the autobiographical tale of Dr. John Schmidt, whose medical work in Paraguay is the stuff of legend but also of generational pain. His life is comprised of a dramatic

"overstory," but the real revelation here is the "understory," the spiritual and psychological aspects of his journey of transformation. To me, they reflect the original meaning of our word bless, which derives from the French "blesseur," or wound. Hence, our ultimate blessings often come from our wounds if they are approached honestly and soulfully. This book reveals the hows and whys of such rare but remarkable transformations."

—Phil Cousineau, author of *The Hero's Journey*, *The Art of Pilgrimage*, and *The Lost Notebooks of Sisyphus*

"*A Journey Home* is an extraordinary exploration of the probable inner world of my brilliant and troubled father, Dr. John, from which flowed a lifetime of achievements that benefitted his patients, his communities, and the world. He was a deeply religious person who was not afraid to admit to having lapses of faith. But the way his life and that of my mother blended is a testimony to God's guidance in the adventure they dedicated to His purpose in spite of their human flaws.

I was a present in many of the scenes described in this book. I witnessed my father's fierce work ethic and his sometimes-unpredictable actions and reactions. I can say that the book's depictions of this complicated man are totally accurate.

A Journey Home has encouraged me to look at my own inner world and recognize my fair share of similar hidden truths. I hope many readers will look at the mirror of their own inner lives, as I did, and find healing of the wounds we all have concealed someplace in our souls."

—Dr. Wesley Schmidt, son of Dr. John Schmidt, and medical director of the Km. 81 leprosy station 1975-1978

"On the surface, *A Journey Home: The Inner Turmoil of a Mennonite Hero* is a story about the life of Kansas-born Dr. John Schmidt and his nurse-wife Clara. Dr. Schmidt accomplished many remarkable things, and his one-track focus in life was clearly intense and at times risky. Like Dr. Paul Farmer, he worked tirelessly to bring health care to some of the poorest people in the developing world. And like Dr. Dame Cicely Saunders, the founder of modern hospice, he was a healthcare innovator.

At a deeper level, the book goes to the core question of what really constitutes a fulfilled life. As Dr. Schmidt looked back after a celebrated life of many achievements, including the treatment of patients with leprosy across Paraguay, he felt deep remorse about his lifelong need to be "special" rather than "loved and happy." Very late in life, from a hospital bed, he prayed, "For my unrelenting drive to be special and superior to others, forgive me. For hiding that drive behind a veil of seeming modesty and piety, forgive me. I beseech God and my family, please forgive me."

This is a great memoir by a fine author that helps the reader reflect more deeply on what makes for a good life."

—Stephen G. Post, PhD, best-selling author of *Dignity for Deeply Forgetful People: How Caregivers Can Meet the Challenges of Alzheimer's Disease*, and director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University.

“Similar to her previous books about Dr. John Schmidt (*Nothing Bad Between Us* and *CALLED*), Marlena Fiol manages to again provide a unique and interesting portrayal of this remarkable and flawed (like the rest of us) human being. *A Journey Home* encourages each of us to summon the courage to confront our own hidden fears in order to find the fullness of God's grace and love.”

—Dr. Franz Duerksen, plastic surgeon and medical director of the Km. 81 leprosy station
1971-1975 and 1978-1985

“In her recent memoir, *Nothing Bad Between Us*, author Marlena Fiol explored her own life's journey, especially in relationship to her father, Dr. John Schmidt. Then, together with her husband Ed O'Connor, she published *CALLED*, the epic true story of her parents' romance, adventures, and lasting contributions during their 60 years as medical missionaries in Paraguay, South America.

Marlena Fiol and Ed O'Connor have once again collaborated to share their latest heavily researched book, *A Journey Home*, which traces the inner journey of the brilliant and tortured Dr. John. It invites readers to dig deep into an emotional and spiritual exploration of human frailty and strength. Through honest examination of both his many successes and failures in his family as well as professional life, Dr. John gains awareness of the legacy that both the highs and the lows of his life have left in their wake. This awareness leads to healing and peace in the sunset of his journey.

A Journey Home is a thought-provoking read.”

—M. Albert Duerksen, retired minister, Mennonite Church Canada

“This is the extraordinary story of an extraordinary couple—a driven, bull-headed, pioneering Mennonite physician who brought his gifts of healing to the sick, the deformed, and the poor suffering from leprosy in the country of Paraguay, and his wife-nurse, helpmate, and mother of their six children—who both made a huge difference in the lives of the destitute people they served. Telling his poignant and action-packed story is Dr. John Schmidt, who through his diary entries captivates us with surgeries in mud-floor clinics, but he also designs and builds those clinics, digs wells and erects outhouses, clears lands and plants trees and vegetables, raises cattle and builds roads, all while training student nurses and initiating a revolutionary model of home care for those suffering from leprosy. Using any free time (exhausted yet?), he raises money

from Mennonite supporters and friends and family to import medical equipment and supplies to their remote clinic in rural Paraguay.

But more importantly, this is the universal story of Dr. John's inner journey of self-discovery and healing...healing his own wounds of self-righteousness, out-sized ego, pride, defensiveness, fear, and insecurity. It is his journey to humility and self-forgiveness. This 'God-fearing' physician who charged into projects and charged through life, ultimately learns the meaning of the biblical admonition he loves, and learns what it means to 'walk humbly' with his God."

—Leigh Farrell, PhD, former senior program leader, Context International Trainings

"I've had the pleasure of following Dr. John Schmidt's story through the different perspectives of two earlier books, *Nothing Bad Between Us: A Mennonite Missionary's Daughter Finds Healing in Her Brokenness* and *CALLED*. I have come to know him and his wife Clara as flawed human beings whose selfless and heroic work in Paraguay during the 1900s changed the world, especially for the underserved and those stigmatized with leprosy. In *A Journey Home*, Marlena Fiol and Ed O'Connor bring us along on the tumultuous inner journey of the brilliant and tortured Dr. John as he peels off the layers of his hidden fears to move from anger and self-loathing to forgiveness and peace. It invites each of us to reflect on the protective layers we, too, may need to peel back to find our best selves."

—Terri Griffith, PhD, Keith Beedie Chair in Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University