



THE HIGH PLAINS PREACHER

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher, stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle

Stained Glass and Railroad Tracks

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

Imagine your childhood house being lifted up and carted off to another town. Imagine your hometown itself demolished by bulldozers. This experience rest at the heart of a book written by Virginia Malicoat, a parishioner at St. Hyacinth Church in Amarillo. The title of her book is *Stained Glass and Railroad Tracks*. It tells the story of her family and the life they lived in Phillips, Texas, a town that no longer exists.

The opening chapters of the book relate the journey of her family from Kentucky to the Texas Panhandle in the 1800's. These chapters read more like a novel than a family history. We enter the lives of young, anxious parents—some with newborns—trekking across Missouri and Arkansas and eventually to an oil camp in the Texas Panhandle which is eventually named Phillips. Vivid scenes are imagined anew and intense conversations are related in the present tense.

The close-knit Phillips community provides a self-contained world in which we come to know the grit and character of Virginia's family. Told with compassion and honesty, Virginia revisits a lifetime of memories: a hardworking and loving father with the eye of an artist, the voice of a poet and a thirst for vodka; the musty smell of old churches and the beauty of their stained-glass windows; a faded photo of a soldier holding an infant sister in his arms; high school dances and small-town gossip; romance and marriage in the 1950's.

Following an explosion in a refinery in 1980, the Phillips Petroleum Company dismantled the town and relocated the families to surrounding communities. Fortunately for us, the stories of Virginia's family and their town—letters, photographs, newspaper clippings—once stored in boxes shoved into an attic, are now bound into a handsome book.

This tender and, at times, humorous memoir closes not with a stroll down memory lane but a bittersweet walk along the edge of a canyon where the town of Philips once stood. With a brother at her side, the author endeavors to locate the roadbed of forgotten streets, lots where stores once stood and trees once climbed with their neighborhood friends.

Beneath the stories of this family is the unifying story of faith in God and how one's place in the world shapes each person's journey to the next. *Stained Glass and Railroad Tracks* by Virginia Malicoat is a wonderful book and one which I highly recommend.