

Write On



*A compilation
of prize winning entries in the
Alberta Womens' Institutes
Creative Writing Competition*

2001

WINNERS ALL

Each year, Alberta Womens' Institutes sponsors a creative writing competition, open to the more than 1000 members in the organization. The contest consists of six categories; Short Story Fiction, Short Story Non-Fiction (Memoir), Short Story Non-Fiction (Travel), Short Story Non-Fiction (Essay), Play, and Poetry. Any member may enter once in each category.

These are judged by professional writers and awards are given out at the annual AWI Convention.

Awards may be given for First, Second and Third place but, if the judges determine there is no entry that deserves first place, they may award a lower placing or none at all in that category.

Each year, as members cheer the winners, many wish they could read the entries so, starting in 2001, the Executive have asked all members who enter the contest to agree in writing that their story, play or poem may be used for AWI fundraising. As a result, this booklet, to be published yearly, is made possible.

We hope you will enjoy the many and varied writings it contains. It may give you some ideas as to what is judged to be 'a winner'. Maybe it will inspire you to give it a try yourself and enter a future competition.

Our AWI is a talented group of women. This booklet highlights just one aspect of their accomplishments.

READ ON!

My Homeland

Mary Maggs, Princess Anne W.I.
1st Place, Poetry, 2001

I came from England long ago,
To a land I did not know.
For a year I was to stay,
Then I could be on my way.
Forty years have come and gone,
And to this country I belong
Husband and children are all here,
Everything that I hold dear.
At first I missed small fields of green,
And at night I would dream,
Of my home so far away,
Birdsong at the break of day.
The little streams that gently flow,
As wandering through the fields they go.
The village greens, the little towns,
Horses on the Epsom Downs.
Now I have seen the mountains high,
Ridden under an azure sky.
I've fished for salmon off the coast,
And spent some time in little boats.
I've seen the majestic eagle soar,
And heard the mighty rivers roar.
I've been drenched by salt sea spray,
While watching dolphins at their play.
I've seen the sparkly diamond glow,
Of moonlight on new fallen snow.
I've roamed the prairies, breathed the air,
Swam in lakes so clean and clear.
I've watched the sunset in the west,
And feel that I've been truly blest.
O Canada this land so vast,
I know you as my home at last. □

Summertime

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley W.I.
2nd Place, Poetry, 2001

It's summertime and ice still melts in pockets by the creek
It's summertime, the children run and splash and shout and shriek.
The flowers spread their fragrance sweet upon the morning dawns,
And sleepy headed parents sip their coffee through their yawns.

It's summertime, and early risers savor sun's first light,
It's fingers spreading 'cross the land, dispelling dark of night.
While ten-ti-ve-ly sparrows call to meadowlark and finch.
The cowboy smiles and hums a tune while tightening his cinch.

This is his favorite time of year, an easy ride, no extra gear.
The cows contented, chew their cuds,
The calves skip off with milky suds.
The calvings done, the summer fields
provide the nourishment it yields
And he is free to roam the place, contentment written on his face.

It's summertime, the land is ripe, the air is clear, he lights his pipe.
He slowly mounts his aging bay, and ambles calmly on his way.
Like summer, soon his days will pass,
and he will lay beneath the grass
In summertime, or in the snow when winter comes to earth below.
Like summer blazing through the fields,
he's seen the changes time did yield,
And watched the horse give way to tractor,
filling hill and vale with clatter.
Set aside his one horse shay
and bought a car, it took his pay.
From birds to planes to rocket ships
from telegrams to Email slips;
He's seen the changes, lived them all;
but still to him the cattle call.

It's summertime and he explores the fields and hills just as before.
The cattle bring him joy and pleasure,
they're his own, his pride, his treasure.
And they need his tender care, his love of land and life they share.
It's summertime and he's content,
to contemplate this life he's spent. □

Thoughts on Time

Phyllis Kosik, Darwell W.I
3rd place, Poetry, 2001

Remember when as kids we ran
No matter where we went
Sometime for dinner or for school
Our energy never spent.

As years rolled on, in age we grew
Our steps slowed slightly downward
Until today we've almost stopped
Yet we keep moving onward.

We wonder where the time has gone
Did we use her well or weakly?
Should we be proud of time well spent?
Or shudder and wonder meekly?

Time can be enemy or friend
Perspective is our concern.
You never know until time passes
Which way her bent will turn.

Once things are said and done we know
Time has no turning back
The choices that we make each day
Of them there is no lack.

We live each day as best we can
Try not to harm or sorrow
But take opportunity to do
What's best for our tomorrow. □

PETUNIA: PIG EXTRAORDINAIRE

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley W.I.
2nd Place, Non Fiction, 2001

Petunia trotted into our lives behind a small herd of cows we had purchased from a neighbour upriver. She was a runty little thing, and rather than try to herd her back home, they threw her in with the deal. The children were delighted! The horse was confused, not knowing how to take this arrogant, confident, fun loving addition to our barnyard.

We read what little material we had on hand about raising pigs, and learned that by adding vitamin E to the pig's diet at a critical time of development, a runty pig could fully develop. Being the only pig was also an advantage, as there was no competition for the grain or scraps set out, other than a few chickens which were easily intimidated by Miss Piggy.

She soon fit into the family routine and was readily accepted by the milk cow, who came with the herd. Petunia shared a space in the incomplete barn with the cow, the rabbits, and any stray chicken that had missed out on being tucked to bed in the old car which had become their nesting place.

She became impatient if the children had not finished their lessons at the regular noon hour. She learned to knock on the door. Coming to the porch, she would root at the wood pile, then bang her snout on the door. The children would let her in (much to my consternation), but she never disgraced us or herself. She had much better manners than the cat.

She would follow the children or visitors fishing. We would tell them to safely secure their catch, for Petunia loved fish. If the fisherman had strung his catch on a pole, a common habit, and slung it over his shoulder, Petunia would quietly come up behind and delicately bite the fish from its resting place, swallowing it before the fisherman could turn around.

We tried to warn our guests that Petunia considered their tackle boxes fair game. But finding themselves alone on the river, with not another human being for miles, the peace and tranquility of the situation caused them to become careless and forgetful. Petunia would root quietly up to the tackle box and the peaceful scene would suddenly erupt into a nasty scream as Petunia overturned the box, often getting caught up in the fish hooks.

The children found her to be as much fun as the dog, and she followed them everywhere. It was a nuisance when we went berry picking. She relished the fruit, and could pick faster with her snout than we could by hand. However, as she was well fed with grain, her appetite sufficed, she would snuggle down in a hollow and watch as we completed our task. We were careful with our pickings, and didn't leave any open pails about.

She grew! The neighbours, who raised a number of pigs on a limited diet, could not believe this was the same pig who had trotted over behind their cows. Upon being convinced that this indeed was that very same pig, they had an idea. They decided we had done such a great job of raising her that we should buy more piglets, from them, of course.

We discussed the possibility, and having decided that it may indeed become profitable to raise pigs, we ordered half a dozen from the same neighbours. We thought of raising some piglets ourselves, so specified half a dozen sows.

It was not an easy ride over to the neighbours. To stay on the same side of the river meant riding horseback through swampland, which was not considered a good idea for the uninitiated. The alternative, when the river was down, was to ford it on the post office trail and recross it several miles upstream. Here the neighbours had constructed a basket crossing. In dry weather this trail was usable by vehicular traffic. One could park the vehicle and cross the river in this basket.

While visiting us, Uncle Gene offered to drive over and purchase the sows, and did so. We were sure that our order for half a dozen sows would be a good start to our endeavors in the pork industry.

After having a good visit with Gene, the neighbours gleefully placed the pigs in an old gas barrel and swung them across the river to where Gene parked the car. Putting them into his vehicle, they returned and then sent Gene across in the basket, cheerfully waving him goodbye.

It was dark when Gene arrived at the homestead, and the little pigs were unloaded into a pen in the barn by being unceremoniously dumped out of the barrel.

What excitement the next morning as the children rushed out to feed and inspect our herd. They hurried back inside to complete their morning session in school before having the afternoon free to examine the new arrivals.

Petunia, having determined what had been added to the barnyard collection, immediately decided they were of no consequence and totally ignored them.

I was busy: firing up the wood stove for breakfast; completing arrangements for the morning school program; setting the bread dough to rise; separating the morning's milk; teaching and then preparing and washing up after lunch. The children ran outside and went directly into the barn to get better acquainted with our latest purchase.

"Mommy Mommy!" called the eldest, "They're not girls, they are boys."

"O no," said I, without a thought or concern. "They are girls."

"O no!...They are not," said Anne.

"Boy pigs have tits too." I responded from my kitchen table, where the bread had risen and I was busily punching down the dough. I had remembered the old adage 'AS USELESS AS TITS ON A BOAR.'

"Then," said the eldest, "what's that?" She was pointing out the window to a little piglet running about the yard with an obvious appendage beneath its belly...

"Must be their belly button," said I in my ignorance concerning pig anatomy, and thinking how at times the calves developed enlarged navels.

"Mommy," said the six year old, "Do you pee through your belly button?"

That got my attention. Leaving the dough and wiping my hands, I followed her out to the barn yard to give our purchase closer inspection.

Sure enough, that little pig was indeed male, or had experienced a rapid sex change overnight. We decided to give each of the others a closer inspection, and what did we discover? They were all males. What a joke! The neighbours must be choking on their tea, to think they had pulled off such a stunt.

It was perhaps a good thing we had no telephone, and that the ride upstream was too long and too hazardous to make a return trip. As Gene was leaving, we decided it was easier to raise the boars and eat them rather than having too many sows around. Besides, it was obvious that Petunia would brook no usurpers in her kingdom. It was also obvious that our lack of knowledge and experience was a further detriment to this idea of expansion.

So we fed the runty little things. And we fed them and fed them. Finally we decided they were too old or too genetically disadvantaged to gain the weight advantage Petunia had shown. We butchered them one by one to supplement our wild game, rabbit and fish diet. Tasted pretty good too.

We thought it a good April Fools joke that the neighbour had played and forgot about it, except to be duly embarrassed by thinking boars were sows, even for a short length of time.

What we had not anticipated, was the neighbours reaction the next time we met on the trail. They must have thought we would retaliate in some violent manner, for they wheeled their horses about and took off in the opposite direction rather abruptly. I guess they learned of our amusement from other folk, because the next time our paths crossed they visited civilly enough, although the subject of pigs was not addressed.

Meanwhile Petunia continued to grow and grow and grow. We were thinking that we would have to procure the services of a boar to increase our herd, but discovered she was already pregnant. Perhaps one of those runty misfits.

Our informed consultant suggested that October first would possibly be the day she would deliver. Of course, she didn't, but the children were becoming increasingly concerned and the weather was becoming crispier. They wanted her to sleep in the house. I compromised by allowing them to sleep in the barn with her, but after a very restless night, with visions of grizzlies being alerted by the smell of blood during her farrowing, I said, "No more nights in the barn!"

The children were devastated, but after a great bear poked his head up to the kitchen window, they were content to stay inside, but continually pleaded for Petunia's inclusion in the house.

During the day, blankets were dragged out to the barn as the children kept vigil over her pen. And even fresh buns were smuggled into the nursery. That was the longest October I can remember.

She delivered October 31, Halloween, and it was indeed a time for howling. Six babies were dead. Six were alive, but Petunia wanted nothing to do with them. One by one they died, although the children spent hours trying to nurse them; cajoling and pestering Petunia to give them a tit to chew on.

They would bring the shivery little things into bed with them and we all cried as the last one succumbed to Petunia's neglect. The little doll's bottle they had used to feed cows milk to the wee piggies were washed and put away, never to be played with again.

Petunia seemed unaware of the devastation she had wrought upon her offspring and once again took up her duties of playmate, fisherman, berry picker and watchdog.

We never tried to breed her a second time, and of course we could not even think of eating her. Neither did we consider another venture into the pork industry.

When it came time to leave the homestead, we gave her to the old cowboy who lived just across the river. We never asked what he did with her, but whenever we have pork chops, we think about Petunia, pig extraordinaire.

If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much room. anon

Going to the Bush

Betty Welter, Grande Prairie W.I.
3rd Place, Nonfiction, 2001

In the 1930s and early '40s, 'going to the bush' was a very familiar activity in Northern Alberta. Nearly all homes were heated with wood stoves, as natural gas was not commercialized until the late 40's in this area. There were miles and miles of crown land on both sides of the Wapiti and Smoky rivers which produced many types of trees used for firewood, building logs, fence posts, rails, lumber, etc. This wood was free for the taking plus a lot of hard work to cut, load and haul it home.

Money and jobs were very scarce during these years and people did whatever they could to earn a few dollars. Many farmers cut and hauled loads of wood to town during the winter months for firewood at prices around \$5.00 a load. This probably took two men plus a team of horses and sleigh, saws and axes from morning until night, traveling quite a few miles for this amount of cash. Yet, it was a job and 'times were rough' as the saying went and money precious indeed.

Our family had moved to a homestead in the early '30s with very little money. We surely started from scratch as this piece of land had no house, barn, fences, or well and not an acre broken. Poor Dad had his hands full to provide for the five of us and certainly made many trips to the bush to harvest whatever was needed.

I accompanied him on many of these trips, sort of a junior hired man. Dad wouldn't venture out when the temperature was below -20F or blizzarding and would wait for a better day. It was rather a plus in a way that grade VIII was the end of public school in our area and there was no way to continue on in town at the high school so I was available to help on these trips to the bush now any day of the week. The following two years we were taking our high school by correspondence at home. Lesson time could be juggled to suit farm obligations. I can well remember Mother waking me up half way through an evening lesson after being outdoors and really active in the cold all day - it was very difficult to stay alert in the warm house after a day in the bush.

Dad would go out to the barn first thing to do chores before breakfast. It was always a bit exciting when he would announce that we should make a trip today for firewood or whatever building materials were needed. Lunch had to be made for us and oat bundles for the horses and axes and saws fastened on the sleigh bunks. Our dog 'Spot' knew what was happening and pranced about while we were getting ready to leave, as he loved these trips too.

We would be on the road around 9 a.m. and home by 5 p.m. if possible. The distance varied by what kind of timber we were after in different areas. Traveling on the road allowance where there would be some sort of trail was rather uneventful. When we got closer to the timber we would go across some sloughs and make our own trail as everything was frozen. The ice would crack with the weight of our outfit and this would upset poor Spot to no end. He would jump up in the air and pounce and follow the cracks under the snow and through bulrushes barking and yelping and never seemed to learn he couldn't find them.

Once we arrived at the spot where we were going to cut our load Dad would trample the snow down and plan his day. It was my job to unhook the horses and tie them out of the way of falling trees. Dad would never let me use an axe except to limb a tree once it was felled. I guess my aim wasn't that accurate. This was before the chain saws of any type and lots of strength and experience was required. However I surely knew how to use the cross cut saw to top the trees, cut them in lengths or whatever. Sometimes a tree had to be 'snaked out' closer to the sleigh and this was also my job. One horse would be used with a logging chain to pull the tree out - if the snow was deep this was quite a task but necessary as the horse was stronger than we were.

In 1934 Dad decided he had to build a new barn from logs of course. This project required far more searching once in the bush for suitable trees. Also the rear bunk on the sleigh had to be lengthened out with logging chains to accommodate the longer logs. This was a pesky nuisance in many ways plus more work and it took longer to load these heavy green logs.

The crack of the axe and zing of the saw hitting the tree plus the cry of "timber" as it came down echoed all through the bush as many neighbours were working within ear shot. About 11:30 a.m. Dad would say it was almost lunch time. I'm sure the dog understood him too. I would build a fire, and sometimes had to dig through a lot of snow to get closer to the ground. Our coffee in a syrup pail had to be heated, lunch spread out and horses fed too. As we were eating or as soon as there was any smoke from the camp fire several jays, 'whisky jacks', sometimes called 'camp robbers', would appear. We would throw a piece of our sandwich in one direction to them and in the other direction to Spot. The latter detested these birds and would sometimes leave his piece and dash in the other direction to grab their piece, then come back to his. There were numerous squirrels chattering away to further annoy the poor dog and he never seemed to learn he couldn't catch them. Dad and I quite enjoyed the circus anyway.

We were always very glad to get the load on the sleigh chained down, and the team hooked up and ready to go home. Spot was ready too but he always seemed to have enough energy to chase a frightened rabbit and follow the ice cracks again on the sloughs. The trip home was slow with the load on and many times we were quite wet from the snow and took turns walking

behind and driving the horses just to keep warm. The clothes then were a far cry from the wind and waterproof fabrics of today.

It was usually getting dark by the time we arrived in our yard having traveled from five to ten miles back from the bush. The horses had to be looked after plus other animal chores and our load unloaded. It was quite a long hard day. We were one of dozens of outfits doing exactly the same to either add to the firewood pile or for whatever other project required at the time. No one needed to go to the gym or use a treadmill to keep fit in those days. However, I must admit I quite enjoyed those 'trips to the bush' despite the hard work involved. Incidentally, we did build our log barn during 1935 and '36. Although the bottom row of logs is deteriorating, it still stands fairly straight and square and is in use today in the next millennium. How proud my father would be to know this barn housed animals and hay in the loft some sixty years later. □



Alberta Womens' Institute

Over the years we have heard many concerns with the term *Institute*. Since some mistakenly see the word as related to *institution*, indicating a place of confinement, there have been suggestions that we should change the name. I believe, however, that the name accurately describes our organization.

Webster's dictionary defines the word(s) as follows:

"Institute: (noun) An institution for study or research // an institution devoted to some specific welfare purpose// an institution offering social and educational activities for adults."

"Institute: (verb) To set up or found// to take the initial steps that will cause something to come into being."

"Institution: (noun) an organization whose purpose is to further public welfare, learning, etc."

By the above definitions: We are an organization whose purpose is to further public welfare, learning, etc. We study or research a specific purpose. We offer social and educational activities for adults. As a result of our studies and research we do take the initial steps that will cause something to come into being. □

Second Chances

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley W.I.
1st place, Fiction, 2001

What a day this has been! The bride is indeed radiant as she snuggles up to her husband and dances off. Our family is excited and everyone is so pleased with this wonderful young lady Philip has chosen to marry. Pleased with most of all the choices Philip has made throughout his life. A shudder racks my body as I think how close we came to missing it all.

I will never forget the day his mother announced she was pregnant. I was on my way to a very busy, very full day, of entertaining in our local and area coffee houses. Seven scheduled performances for the day, many people involved, and audience size increasing with each show.

She called me from her sister's and asked me to drop by on my way to work. I thought they must have wanted some letters mailed, or had a grocery list for me to fill before returning home. I opened the door and stood in the foyer.

"Got a moment?" she asked.

Looking at my watch I replied, "Not more than two!"

"I'm pregnant," she announced.

I grabbed the bookcase behind me and the world stopped.

"Who did it?" was my response.

"It doesn't matter," she said, "he isn't interested in me any more, and he certainly doesn't want anything to do with my baby."

"When?" was my next question.

"Thirty-one days," she said. "I guess you have to go now."

"Yes," I managed to gasp. "I have to go, now."

I started to address her older sister, but she just shook her head and said, "I just heard it myself!"

It was late and I ran out of the house. Getting into my car I thought, "How could I have missed?" I realized she had gained some weight, but she hadn't popped out in front. Spread more like it. Well, so had I. Never did wear maternity clothes for more than six weeks with any of them.

"Dear God! How can I get through this day?"

Forget it! Something deep inside took over. How can I forget it? What can I do? How am I going to handle this?

Keep busy: came the reply. That would be easy, especially today.

By noon, my cast was aware that I was in distress, and filled in, taking over some of my physical duties, setting chairs, packing, telling me to take a minute and sit. I slid down the wall and collapsed on the floor.

"What is the matter?" they asked.

"She's pregnant." I cried.

"My daughter!" I sobbed, "Ellimae's pregnant!"

"What is she going to do about it?" they asked.

"Have the baby," I choked, "in thirty-one days."

Their answers were very supportive, I could tell by the tones in their voices, but I could not tell you what was said.

As we packed up the final performance, everyone helped, and no one shirked their responsibilities, nor mine.

"Will you be okay?" someone said as I prepared to drive home.

"Yes," I replied. But I wasn't. Only a block later and the tears were streaming down my face. To think that she had carried this secret, all these months, all alone. Tears were interfering with my driving, so I turned into the local health clinic, and fortunately our family doctor was still in his office.

When the receptionist saw my distress, she said, 'Please sit here a moment, I'm sure the Doctor will see you now.'

He did, and as I burst into sobbing, the nurse entered the room, but the doctor, sensitively, sent her out.

"What's wrong?" he gently asked.

"She's pregnant," I sobbed.

"Who?" he probed.

"Ellimae" I wailed, "My daughter Ellimae!"

"And?" he said, "Why is this such a disaster?"

"Did you know?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "I was not aware of her condition."

Bursting one more time into a cascade of tears I sobbed, "You didn't know either? She never told you?"

"First I heard of it," was his calm reply, "and it isn't the end of the world, you know, you've faced this situation before." He was referring to her older sister.

"Yes," I cried, "but then I knew, I was able to help, be supportive.

"Why are you taking this so hard?" he queried.

"Because all I can think of is the pain, the despair, the aloneness she must have carried, not sharing this with anyone, and none of us alert enough to catch on."

"Is she home now?" he asked.

"I think so," I responded.

"Fine," he said, "Then she will probably be in to see me soon. Do you need something to help you get over this?"

"No." I almost laughed at the thought of me being the patient, and not my daughter.

"Will you be all right to drive?" he was concerned, for me, and I was grateful. It was the impetus I needed to get going.

Arriving home, I wondered how to break the news to her father. First I fed him. Afterwards, while at the sink, washing dishes, I timidly unfolded the news.

"I thought so," he declared. I nearly dropped the dish. "Didn't I tell you this summer I thought she was pregnant?"

Flashback! Summer, working on her cabin. I had forgotten! She was sunning on the roof, and I was annoyed that she wasn't pulling her fair share of the work, on her cabin.

"You did," I remembered, "and I asked her if she was pregnant and she said no and I believed her and it obviously never entered my head again. Why didn't you say something?"

The dishes were no longer important and I turned to face my husband.

"Well," he replied, "if she wasn't, she wasn't, but if she was, I knew sooner or later we'd hear about it. No sense fussing about it."

Where had I been all this time? How could I put such a thing out of my mind? It's true she was working away from home, and had even changed towns, but she made it sound so...natural. Just my rebellious daughter doing her own thing; sky diving; motorcycle racing; skidoo trips; speed; excitement; danger. She thrived on it. And now, pregnant.

She telephoned to say I was probably too tired to talk that night, but that she would be over for tea next day. I think she thought I needed time to ingest the information and formulate a plan of action. I did need the night to recoup, rethink, and prepare. The next morning, she arrived for tea and we all sat to talk.

"I know I've been rebellious," she began, "but I would like a second chance, to come home, and to submit to your authority."

I was only half listening, as my head was full of unanswered questions clamoring for understanding. I blurted out, "Why didn't you tell us?"

Her reply cut to the quick, and immobilized all further inquiries.

"Because I knew," she said, with love and appreciation, "I knew that if I decided to keep this baby, you would support me in every way; but if I decided to give it up for adoption, I did not want anyone else to have to carry that burden."

My heart crumbled within me, and my tears overflowed, but what a comfort to know that this daughter of mine, this fun loving, loud, raucous, rebel knew she was cared for. Isn't that what mothering, what parenting is all about? Being there for each other, and here we were, getting a second chance together.

She moved back into her old room that night. Things didn't always go smoothly. She had been on her own for several years, not responsible to anyone but herself, and her anger, that volcanic eruption which I never saw coming, and had no skill to extinguish, still ambushed us. Thank God she was able to return and apologize and say, "we need to talk," because we did, and she did, and that original bond, that mother child relationship we began with, grew again, stronger, because it was between equals. She worked hard on herself, and gently with me. Her father smiled, a lot. When the baby was born we had the joy of nourishing and nurturing another child, and what a child he

was Wise beyond his years, willing to do what he was asked, loving every minute and challenge life had to offer. She left with him for a few years, then married and returned to live nearby, and we experienced the many joys of grand parenting. And now he is married.

I look at him, smiling as if he would burst. There's not a dry eye in the place. My heart overflows with gratitude to God, who allowed us a second chance, and to my daughter for having the courage to raise this child, and to work through our relationship, to bring us to this day. How depleted our lives would have been without this child, this precious gift from God and our daughter.

As he comes to dance with me, my eyes fill, and his face lights up as he squeezes me and says, "Thanks Gramma, thanks for helping Mom to raise me, for being there for us, and being so supportive."

Ah, Philip, my heart whispers as I nod my head. Only God knows how much you were needed in this family to bind us together, to give us a second chance. But aloud I reply, "Dear Philip, you will be just as supportive and there for your family. We are confident that your love will carry you through life's challenges. We will always be there for each other."

His beautiful wife glided over and hugged him as he grinned and handed me back to his grandfather. "There's a good chance of that," he smiled, dancing off with his fortunate bride, leaving me thanking God for second chances. □

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Alberta Womens' Institute

Some feel that we have too many areas of study; that we spread ourselves all over the place and don't have time to examine any issue in depth. Consider, though, that every convenership in AWI can be studied from aspects that address a single issue.

If, for instance, your group is most interested in Environment...study each convenership from that angle i.e. Agriculture & Industry...how it effects environment; Health, Home Ec. & Soc. Serv. ...how environment affects health, how we can be more environmentally friendly in our homes; Cit. & Int. Affairs...environment issues in the world, what is our responsibility as citizens; Education .do our schools address the environment? This same method can be done with an interest in Agriculture: ie. how it is presented in schools, how homemakers use the products, contaminants in the food chain from the environment, misuse of farm land by industry or international farming practices.

Similarly, Education, International affairs, industry, etc. can also be the main focus while studying all our convenerships. Be creative in program planning.

And resolutions: whatever you study is an opportunity to prepare a resolution to effect change. □

Bernie's Adventure

Donna Korsiger, Drayton Valley W.I.
2nd place, Fiction, 2001

Hi. My name is Bernie and I am a Guinea Pig. I live in the pet area of a hardware store. My best friend is another Guinea Pig named Billie and she gets to live in my pen with me until I she gets fat and then Brenda, the pet lady, moves her to her own cage next to mine until she has her babies and then she gets to live with me again.

This is what happened the day before my story begins. I was feeling kind of lonely by myself and Billie was having a nap when the trouble started.

Two boys came up to our cages and started teasing us. One got the idea to open my cage and chase me around trying to catch me. The other boy reached in Billie's cage and tried to catch her, too. It was very frightening until Brenda came along and made the boys leave. My heart was beating so fast with fright that at first I just curled up in a corner and shook.

"Billie," I called softly, "Billie, my door is open. I think I will get out of here "

Billie mumbled something but did not move from her napping spot. She just snuggled down more into the shavings that was her bed.

"Billie," I spoke a little louder, "why don't you see if your door is open, too. We can get out together. Come on, Billie, wake up and come look."

"Bernie, I am so tired and I don't want to go anywhere but right here. Go if you want to but just leave me alone. I'm not feeling so good after being chased by those boys. That was enough excitement for me today." Billie spoke sharply and turned her back on me.

"OK," I said feeling kind of mad at her. "If that's the way you want it, fine. I'm going anyway." With that I climbed out of my cage and down to the floor.

I looked down the huge aisle which was illuminated by the night lights in the store. Cautiously, at first, I started down the aisle trying to take in all the sights on either side of me. Then I started to run and it was so much fun I called back to Billie.

"Billie, wake up. This is so much fun. This place is so big. Billie, come with me, come with me."

I raced up one aisle and down another until I played myself out. Panting, I looked around for a place to rest. Under a shelf I found what I needed, a stuffed toy. I snuggled down for a short nap before I continued this wonderful adventure.

I was startled out of my pleasant dream by the familiar sound of Donna, the cleaning lady, coming down the aisle dragging the garbage bags. It was morning already and I was confused as to where I was, at first. Then I remembered getting out of my cage and all the fun I had had during the night.

The lights came on and I thought of how hungry and thirsty I suddenly was. I thought of my cage and food dish and water bottle. This only made me more hungry.

I cautiously peered out from under the shelf and took a step out but a cart nearly hit me and I darted back to my stuffed animal, shaking.

I stayed there until I heard the familiar sound of the floor scrubber coming down the aisle. Donna was pushing it and, when she got right in front of me, she stopped to pick something up off the floor in front of the scrubber. My mouth watered with the smell of the water and I stole forward to get just a taste.

Just as I got close, she moved the scrubber and I jumped back in fright. My stuffed toy became my sanctuary and I cuddled down in it.

Then I noticed the puddle of water left by the scrubber and made my way toward it again. I only got a few sips of the puddle when a cart pushed by a woman and little boy came down the aisle.

Not waiting to be seen, I raced back to my stuffed toy. All of a sudden I got a sharp pain in my stomach and I knew I had gotten some bad water from that puddle. I curled up on my stuffed toy and thought maybe if I had a little nap my stomach would feel better.

A short time later I heard the laughter of children as maybe four small children came down the aisle with an adult. I watched their feet as they passed my hiding place and smelled the wonderful smell of cheese. Farther down the aisle I watched one of the children drop one of the cheese sticks and leave it.

Hunger gnawed at my stomach as I waited for them to leave so I could go get that cheese. It seemed like forever before they finally disappeared around the corner.

Cautiously I made my way around all the stuff stored under the shelf until I was right in front of the cheese. Glancing down the aisle to make sure no one was coming I stole out to it and drug it back under the shelf before hungrily gobbling it all up.

I had barely finished when two men came to stand right in front of me. I scurried back to my stuffed toy. I felt safer there and decided I should have another little nap while half listening to the hustle and bustle around me in the store.

I don't know what woke me but maybe it was the silence. Glancing around, I noticed that the store was dark. I stretched and decided it was safe to come out and have a look around.

The now familiar hunger pangs and relentless thirst drove me to make finding water and food my first priority. If I could only find Billie and my cage, there was food and a water bottle there. I called loudly, "Billie," no answer. "Billie, where are you?" Still no answer.

Where was I anyway? I tried to see something that looked familiar. I trotted up one aisle and down another calling to Billie the whole time but I could hear none of the familiar sound of the pet area.

Finally I stopped to rest and maybe catch a whiff of water. Now I was lost. I couldn't even find my stuffed toy.

It seemed a long time since I had left my cage behind. Where could I find a drink of water? Where was my home? Where was Billie? I was tired and hungry and there was nothing around that was familiar.

Finally, I found an empty box to curl up in and have a rest before I went on with my search.

The familiar sounds of Donna dragging the garbage bags woke me and then the lights came on. I listened and I could hear water running.

Cautiously I crept from my hiding place and down a short hall to where the water was running. I peeked around the door into a small room where Donna was filling a bucket on wheels with water. She didn't see me creep under a stool close to the bucket.

Then, as she turned around from shutting off the water, she spied me. Startled, we stood there staring at each other for a full minute. Then she calmly skirted around the other side of the bucket and left the room.

I was just about to come out from under my stool when I heard her call from the hall, "Sheldon, I say, there is a critter in my janitor room and I need you to get it out of there NOW!"

I cringed back under the stool in fright at the loudness of her voice. Why hadn't I stayed away until I was sure there was no one in this room before I came in here? Why?

Suddenly the door was filled with the biggest man I had ever seen. He crouched down and spoke to me. "Hello there, little fellow. Now you aren't going to bite me if I pick you up are you?" With that he reached his hand down to grab me.

I bit him as hard as I could and tried to make myself smaller. I looked around for a better place to hide and noticed a darkened corner beneath a nearby shelf and made a mad dash for it.

Sheldon jerked his hand back and cried out, "Ouch! Donna, get me a pair of gloves." I watched from my corner as a pair of gloves appeared as if by magic from around the corner.

Sheldon put them on while keeping a watchful eye on my hiding place. Then he got closer and reached under the shelf.

I cringed tighter to the wall, trying in vain to keep out of reach of that gloved hand but it was no use. There was nowhere to go.

Suddenly he grabbed me and I was in total darkness as I struggled to get free. The more I struggled the tighter he held me and finally I was too frightened and exhausted to fight. As soon as I held still, Sheldon relaxed his hold on me and I found I could breath better, even if I couldn't see.

He and Donna were talking as Sheldon carried me - where, I didn't even want to think. It seemed like a long time before, suddenly, I found myself being dropped.

Bright light blinded me and I crouched in a corner trying to calm my pounding heart and catch my breath. I was afraid to open my eyes to whatever new horror awaited me.

Minutes passed before I was calm enough to look around. Confusion overwhelmed me as I stared around me. There was my food dish and my water bottle. This looked like my cage. Am I dreaming, I wondered? This can't be real.

The all too familiar smells finally brought comprehension and I raced over to my water bottle and drank thirstily. Then I went over to my food dish and ate my fill.

I went over to my bed corner and stretched out for a little nap. I had only been there a few minutes when I heard a welcome voice.

"Bernie, you're back. Where have you been? What have you been doing? I missed you and thought I would never see you again," an excited Billie called to me.

I opened one eye and looked over to a much thinner Billie. "Billie, it's good to see you, too, but I am really tired right now. I promise to tell you all about my adventure as soon as I have a little nap." With that I turned my back on her and snuggled down into my bed.

So that is the story of my wonderful adventure. Would I leave my little home again if given the chance? You bet I would. ■

Erland Lee

Erland Lee, and his wife, Janet were very instrumental in forming the Women's Institute movement. It was Mr. Lee who invited Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless to speak in Stony Creek, Ontario, in February 1897, on the need to create an educational society for poorly educated rural women. As a result of that speech, the very first Women's Institute was formed. As treasurer of the well-established Farmer's Institute, Mr. Lee lobbied the government for similar financial and political support for WI.

The Lee Homestead, later known as Edgemont Farm, is now a museum. It was built in 1808 by John Lee, Erland's grandfather. In 1873, Erland inherited the farm from his father, Abram Lee, and he and his wife, Janet, lived there after their marriage in 1890. Six generations of Lees have lived in the house from 1808 until 1972. It has now been developed into a museum. It was in the living room that the Constitution and By-Laws of the very first Women's Institute were hand-penned by Janet Lee. ■

Let's Make it a Crisis

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley W.I.
1st Place, Play, 2001

We enter WORLD WIDE headquarters...a top line meeting is about to commence

PROPS REQUIRED: Conference table
 Five chairs
 Lap Top
 Pencil
 Note Book
 Five agendas (script)

MeLORD	Arrogant Chairperson and CEO of WORLDWIDE
COMPUTE:	Secretary to MeLord
HARDLINE:	Board member, attentive to rules
SAYYAH	Knowledgeable, Canadian Board member, Cowboy Hat.
MARS	Warlord of WORLDWIDE

CHAIRPERSON MeLORD AND SECRETARY COMPUTE ARE STUDYING THE AGENDA WHILE AWAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, HARDLINE, SAYYAH AND MARS.

A KNOCK IS HEARD ON THE DOOR

ENTER HARDLINE AND SAYYAH

MeLORD RISES TO SHAKE HANDS WITH SAYYAH AND NOD TO HARDLINE

MeLORD Greetings, Sayyah, where is Mars?

SAYYAH On his way, MeLord.

HARDLINE PICKS UP TWO AGENDAS - HANDS ONE TO SAYYAH

SAYYAH Hardline's here. Hello Mr. Compute.

COMPUTE Regulations state he should be present at these decision
 -making meetings

MeLORD We are here to make regulations, not to follow them

COMPUTE CHECKING SCHEDULE ON LAPTOP. If he left Arabia via
Overland Air, he should arrive here within the hour, plus or
minus six minutes.

HARDLINE I say we wait, MeLord.

MeLORD I say we begin. We have no time to waste.

SAYYAH I say there is a lot to consider. PULLS UP CHAIR We can
fill him in on his arrival. DRAPES LEG OVER CHAIR

HARDLINE I suspect the success with which his methods have
created havoc in the East, particularly the way Bush took
his bait, he will assume our problems are of no immediate
concern.

MeLORD Cowmen are not excitable Arabs!

SAYYAH True, MeLord, True...They are the stubbornest, most
independent breed left on earth.

COMPUTE The time needed to convince a cowboy to change his
mind, let alone his ways, is almost beyond calculating.

MeLORD It is time to confuse the issue.

COMPUTE Yes, As long as this breed is allowed its independence,
we will never control Western Canada.

MARS War is out of the question. The whole country will rush to
their defense.

MeLORD We must wrought economical destruction.

COMPUTE Can that be done?

HARDLINE Cowmen feed this nation.

SAYYAH Canada's sure to protect her native food source.

COMPUTE Less than 20% of Canadians participate in farming.

- HARDLINE Two years of drought on the prairies have caused great hardships for many of their impetuous youth, who have over-reached their credit on those magnificent machines you created MeLord.
- SAYYAH That was a stroke of genius! overpriced, overpowered machinery... Who'd have thought anyone in their right mind would pay more for a piece of equipment than his farm was worth.
- HARDLINE Particularly when the old John Deere D, with minor adjustments... a road gear... power steering... would serve most of their needs.
- MeLORD Image, my friends, image... Asia needs to save face...
America needs to create one.
- HARDLINE Brilliant, MeLord, brilliant!
- COMPUTE But...these are stubborn cowmen, they insist on using out-dated equipment... saddling a horse instead of fueling up a four by four.
- SAYYAH It'll definitely be difficult to stop them, even with our inflating the gas prices.
- COMPUTE Hm... High fuel costs will knock out travel and raise food prices. That should make homegrown food... cows... more valuable.
- MeLORD We cannot afford valuable cows. That would make the cowboy more stubborn and independent than ever.
- SAYYAH They are very difficult to brainwash. Don't spend near enough time at the T V.
- HARDLINE Too much time outside, chasing cows. Too much time to think clearly.
- COMPUTE They still talk to their neighbours... are actually interested in them.
- HARDLINE They talk to their M.P.'s and phone their M.L.A.'s.

COMPUTE They vote, they campaign.

MeLORD They must be stopped!

HARDLINE True... but it must not be obvious.

A KNOCK IS HEARD ON THE DOOR AND MARS ARRIVES- BREATHLESS

MARS Sorry I'm late... What's on the agenda?
TAKING A SEAT NEXT TO COMPUTE

MeLORD Our take over in Canada.

MARS Simple... create confusion. cause a war.

HARDLINE Canadians will see through that in a minute... This land is
their dream, their heritage. They will defend it to the death.

MARS Stir up prejudices. There are lots of Arabs and Jews...

COMPUTE That works in Jerusalem...

MARS ...French and English...

HARDLINE We're working on that in Quebec.

MARS ...Black and white...

COMPUTE That has South Africa in turmoil.

SAYYAH But here? They have become Canadians and have
developed some problem solving skills.

MeLORD The obvious won't work!

MARS What's holding us up?

HARDLINE Those red-necked, rough and ready western ranchers.

MARS What supports them?

COMPUTE Beef...Good Canadian beef!

MARS	Make it illegal.
SAYYAH	Beef? Illegal? have you ever experienced a Canadian winter? You can't survive on fresh veggies in the snow, and Canadians must see how fragile the food supply is elsewhere, what with all the havoc we've created.
COMPUTE	Remember... over 80% of the population are urban, Think beef <u>comes</u> in cellophane.
MELORD	Come now... We have not all day... Wars are out... Prejudice cannot be pushed to its usable conclusion.
COMPUTE	Canadians are law-abiding citizens. They swallowed metric whole... and almost took Meech Lake lying down.
MeLORD	The West, again.
HARDLINE	Then <u>legal</u> it must be
MARS	Takes too long.
MeLORD	Not necessarily. RISING TO PACE ABOUT TABLE. What <u>is</u> needed to break the West?
COMPUTE	Get rid of the cowmen...eliminate cowboys
MeLORD	And what makes these cowmen?
HARDLINE COMPUTE SAYYAH	Cows!
MeLORD	Get rid of them.
SAYYAH	Cows are the lifeline of the West. Cows feed this nation!
MARS	Consider how we achieved control in Africa ..evacuating the farmers off their lands until the people starved.
HARDLINE	Starving people are easily controlled and manipulated
COMPUTE	Starving people will do anything

- SAYYAH You'll never starve Canadians. They're totally independent with their milk, butter, eggs, cheese and lots of beef.
- MeLORD Get rid of the beef!
- SAYYAH It can't be done, MeLord.
- MeLORD It will be done!
What is the world's present password?
- COMPUTE
&
SAYYAH Pollution!
- MeLORD Cows pollute...
- COMPUTE MeLord, cows are a natural part of the environment.
- MeLORD They pollute!
- HARDLINE Cattle have fed and clothed man since the dawn of recorded history.
- MeLORD They must pollute!
- MARS They create the most effective, recyclable fertilizer...putting back into the land what they extract.
- MeLORD INSISTENTLY. Define their pollutants!
- SAYYAH Of course, MeLord. (BEGINNING TO COMPREHEND THE PLOT) If cattle truly pollute...cattle must be banned.
 CHUCKLES
- MARS Ah ha. Without Canada's own food supply, we can create havoc and hunger...But...how do we convince intellectual Canadians that what is natural... is not?
- MeLORD
HARDLINE Because it is pollution.
CYNICALLY. Because it's pollution.
- MARS ADAMANTLY But of course it's not.

MeLORD RETURNING TO CHAIR. Has anyone studied it?... Do so!

COMPUTE WORKING ON LAPTOP Methane...They produce a flatulence containing methane.

MeLORD Very hazardous Ha ha ha.

MARS Not for 5000 years.

MeLORD But now?

SAYYAH Oh, clever, clever, MeLord. I love it! You are going to convince 80% of the population who think beef comes in cellophane that cows are actually BAD for the environment?

HARDLINE A marvelous plan MeLord. But how?

MeLORD Think, my friends. That is what you are here to do.

COMPUTE THOUGHTFULLY Methane affects the ozone layer, about which the populace is already concerned.

MeLORD Play it up!

COMPUTE Cows need water...

HARDLINE Could cows possibly be perceived as polluting the water, too?

MeLORD Work on it.

COMPUTE And...cows need to eat, and be eaten.

SAYYAH Cows eat grass. They keep the prairies trim and lessen the likelihood of grass fires.

COMPUTE They eat grain... people's food.

SAYYAH Not out west. The short growing season causes a low-grade grain, sometimes cut as greened. Not mature enough for human consumption. So feeding the cows utilizes this vegetation otherwise unsuitable for human consumption. This creates a local food supply which keeps itself until required for food.

MeLORD Who would know all that?

COMPUTE Farmers, ranchers, cowboys.

HARDLINE Them again!

MARS It's maddening!

HARDLINE What's mad?

MARS Cows.

MeLORD Mad cows...Can we do anything with that?

MARS Doubtful MeLord, but we can manipulate world grain prices.
GETS UP

SAYYAH These Westerners are very efficient.

COMPUTE Cheap grain prices only feed more cows.

MeLORD There will be NO cheap grain. If grains cost more to raise
than to sell... the producers will simply quit raising grain.

SAYYAH Then they will need the cows to eat the grass and wild
vegetation that will spring up in the fields.

MARS CRAFTILY Ah ha! so that is why it is important to make
cattle appear "unsuitable" for the environment.

COMPUTE Unsuitable... as in pollutant?

MeLORD Correct!

COMPUTE So... we encourage... or discourage, subsidies... at our
discretion... to our advantage... Thus making beef
too expensive... or too cheap.

HARDLINE And... we advertise to change people's eating habits.

MARS Distort their perception of bovine flatulence. Make beef too
expensive... and illegal.

SAYYAH Will Americans and Canadians swallow this?

COMPUTE All but the cowboys.

MeLORD There won't be any cowboys when cows are illegal, expensive and environmentally unfriendly.

COMPUTE So... this is how we will eliminate these stubborn, unmanageable cowmen.

MARS A brilliant strategy, MeLord.

MeLORD You have the plan. Put it into action!

MARS Yes, MeLord, Good day sir. EXIT MARS

HARDLINE I will attend to the advertising MeLord. Good day, Gentlemen. EXIT HARDLINE

MeLORD Prepare the facts, Compute...as we want them known. Make plans to extend this agenda next month. EXIT MeLORD

COMPUTE Until next time, Sir. Get on with it Sayyah. A neatly packaged deal, this.

SAYYAH SPINNING HIS STETSON You just don't know cowboys. They take time... They think too much.

EXIT SAYYAH, LEAVING BEHIND A PUZZLED COMPUTE ❑



Women's Institute Mission Statement

Women of all ages who achieve change
through personal growth, communication and education.

W.I. Rant

compiled by Gladys Seltenrich,
Drayton Valley W.I.
from answers to a roll call.

We are not Kinettes or Lioness'.
We don't join with our husbands at meetings.
We are not members of an institution.
We do belong to an organization called an institute.
We promote clean and healthy homes and sanitary environments.
We believe in women in politics and business.
We don't believe in keeping women in slavery.
We are not a coffee drinking social club.
We do drink tea or coffee as we plan how to meet our communities needs.
We have plant sales.
We have garage sales.
We have craft sales.
We collect pop can tabs and aluminum for community wheelchairs.
We have a president, not a chairperson.
We proudly wear our WI pins.
We believe in Home and Country.
We belong to a worldwide organization called "The Associated Country Women
of the World".
We are always willing to give more.
We are the members of Alberta Womens' institute.

*from summer 2001 edition of Home and Country
(Alberta Women's Institute newsletter)*

*We hope you have enjoyed this little book.
If so, be sure to get next year's edition.
We all have stories and we love to share them.
Please consider sharing yours by entering the annual
AWI Creative Writing Competition.*

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