

Write On



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

2002

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 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!

DOG GONE LUCKY

Marilee Kosik, Darwell W.I.
1st Place, Fiction, 2002

It wasn't the fleas that bothered me or even his smell. I contributed my share of those. In most ways, actually, he was a great companion. He was loyal, didn't ask questions and didn't burn my smokes. But the one habit he had that annoyed me to distraction was his snoring.

My name is Richard, I am thirty-six years old, and I am an alcoholic. A year ago I had a job uptown, a family and a house in the suburbs. Most bosses, mine included, can't retain an employee who chronically shows up late, if at all, and is in no shape to deal with the public when he is there. Wives expect, rightly so, a husband who is faithful, dependable and sober. Friends eventually give up on a man who lies to them and borrows money he will never repay. That explains, at least partly, why I was living in a cardboard box under a bridge, now sharing with a flea-bitten, smelly dog that snores.

He just showed up a few weeks ago. At first, he would hang around my camp and I occasionally threw him scraps. I would leave each day to panhandle for money to buy booze and return later to drink myself into a stupor. Sometimes in the night I would hear a strange noise and sense a warmth but, rather than investigate, I would return to my alcohol induced sleep. Then yesterday morning I awoke early, hung over but sober, and rolled over to find the dog curled up to my back.

He was the most decrepit, dirty, shaggy mutt that I had ever encountered. Mid-sized, possibly part collie, some sheepdog and the remainder unknown, he looked like he had hit on some hard times. It appeared that, at one time, he had been white but his matted hair was now a dirty gray. He had a black patch over his one functioning eye, an ear badly chewed from some ancient fight and recently healed scabs on his hindquarters. He wore no collar, no identification; a stray like me.

"Well dog", I greeted him, "you sure do help keep the old homestead warm. I don't have food for you, but you're welcome to share the box." He gave me a calculating look from his one good eye, turned around a couple times to arrange his bed, lay down, tucked his nose under his tail and went to sleep. That's how the dog and I became roommates. I had no prescience of how important this relationship would be in my life.

When I awoke later the need for a drink held precedence over my hangover so I ventured out, planning to panhandle enough for a small meal and a big bottle of cheap whiskey. But this day, as I headed to my favorite area, the dog followed along. After scoping the area for a good location and checking to be sure there were no cops in evidence, I uncased my scratched and scarred guitar, my only worldly possession, lowered myself to the pavement and began to pick an old tune. In my rush to raise enough cash for that first, much needed drink I'd almost forgotten my new sidekick.

With my first strum across the strings, the dog opened with his own rendition of opera. He howled as if the banshees had him in their grasp!

"Quiet," I admonished him. "This is how I get money. If you want to eat, cooperate."

As I switched to another song, he too switched to an even more dreadful racket.

"Quiet!" I commanded in my sharpest voice. "Sit! Quiet!"

He looked at me with his head cocked, as if with intelligence, and stopped the clamor. Thinking I had finally succeeded, and with some pride in my voice of command, I started a soft, sentimental ballad. This sad tearjerker usually netted me quite a few coins and I played it well...for about six chords, then the mutt joined in with his mournful howl!

I tried everything. I yelled at him, cursed him, even begged him but he couldn't, or wouldn't, desist from singing along. Finally, in fit of acerbic rage, worsened by my need for a drink, I grabbed him by the scuff of the neck and frog-stepped him back the way we had come. I don't know, exactly, what I planned to do; I just wanted to get rid of him. He responded to this treatment with a high pitched whine that grated on my ragged nerves and, when I jerked him even more roughly, he fell into a three-legged limp.

"For Pete's sake," I raged at him. "I'm the injured party here. You're the one who caused this whole problem. Now just go away! Get lost!"

He limped off a few feet, turned and looked at me in his beseeching way, and continued to whine. I turned to walk away, but soon realized that he was slinking along behind me, tail down and back humped as if it was him, not me, that needed the drink.

"Oh my," said a soft voice near me, "what a sad little dog. Is he yours?"

"No", I started to say. "He's just..."

"I love dogs," said the young woman of the voice. "It's so obvious that you and your dog have hit on some hard times. Let me give you a few dollars for food for the two of you."

She reached into her wallet and handed me two crisp tens; more money than I had seen at one time in many months.

"What's his name?" she asked.

"Well," I stammered, "I don't know if he has a name". Seeing her look of consternation and fearing the loss of my windfall, I quickly continued, "I just call him Dog."

"You be sure to buy food for the both of you and have a good meal," she said as she walked away.

I looked at the money. It would buy four bottles of rotgut and I was strongly tempted. I needed a drink. I always needed a drink. I turned towards my favorite liquor store but a soft whimper made me turn around. For the first time I noticed that he looked half-starved and the look of hope in his eye reached even my scarred heart. Well, maybe I could get just a bit of food and still have money left over for booze.

"Come on, Dog. Let's chow down before I change my mind."

We walked to a nearby store and I sidled through the doors, grabbed a cart and started to choose my purchases. I had planned on just a loaf of bread, a jar of peanut butter and maybe a bone for the dog. As I walked down the aisle, though, I found myself picking up other delicacies I had almost forgotten existed. Cheese, sliced ham, canned fruit and vegetables all found their way into my cart. Wondering what possessed me to do it, I topped off my purchases with a large bag of dog kibbles. The bill came to within a couple dollars of my twenty, but I bought it anyway. I don't know why. I didn't even really like the darn dog, did I?

Dog met me in front of the store where he had been waiting and we started back to our box. It was kind of nice, you know, having company while I ate. Dog chewed on his kibbles while I feasted on all my favorite things. Afterwards, as my coffee brewed in a tin can over a small campfire, I rummaged through the bags to find the makings. Sitting with coffee and a smoke, with Dog's chin on my knee, I felt happier, more centered, than I had in months. It was some hours before I realized that I felt good and I still hadn't had a drink.

As the autumn sky darkened and the temperature dropped, I retreated to my sparse bed. Dog followed me and, after his canine routine of snuffling around, curled up against my back and we slept. At least he slept. Without the anesthesia of alcohol, I was shocked awake by the unexpected volume of his snoring. I tried everything. I made him roll over, only to have the noise resume as soon as he fell asleep in this new position. I pinched his nose and he snored as powerfully through his mouth. I sent him to sleep out side and the sound barely abated. It was hopeless.

With no sleep possible and nothing in the way of entertainment available, I decided we might as well go for a walk. The sun was just a promise in the sky over the river. I had not seen this hour of the morning since drinking had taken over my life. The streets seemed softer, somehow quieter and friendlier. So few people were out and about that they greeted others they met. Many smiled at the sight of the ragged dog and me. I found myself nodding to total strangers.

What was I doing? I didn't want to be awake. The only way I got through my miserable days was to spend most of the time in an alcohol induced sleep. The rest of the day stretched interminably in front of me. Sinking into a morass of self-pity, my only thoughts were of methods to dispose of my uninvited companion. Suddenly, the sound of his maniacal barking ripped open the early morning quiet. I looked around to see him dancing around and jumping at an older man who was trying to avoid him and balance a load of produce on his shoulder.

"Down," I shouted at Dog, as I ran over to save the farmer.

"I'm so sorry," I said. "Are you all right? I don't know what got into him."

Something didn't seem right. I had thought he was being attacked, but the old gentleman was down on his knees with his arms around Dog, as if greeting an old friend. And Dog...he was wagging and quivering with glee, not anger. With a firm hold on the scruffy dog, the man looked up at me with tears in his eyes.

"Where did you find him? Is he all right?" he asked me.

I quickly told him of my tribulations as Dog's adopted companion. I left nothing out. I told of his sing along tendencies ruining my chances of scoring a handout and his subsequent assistance in securing the twenty dollars. I told him of my uncharacteristic action in purchasing food rather than alcohol. I told him of the intolerable snoring that resulted in my being out on the street at such an unholy hour. As I bitterly complained about Dog's intrusion in my life, I was surprised to find myself scratching the ragged ear of my antagonist and hearing my voice soften into a kind of affectionate grumble.

The old fellow replied to my tale with one of his own. It seemed he was bringing produce to the nearby market six weeks ago when he was involved in a minor accident on the freeway. He had not been hurt and the truck was repairable. However, in all the excitement, Dog had disappeared. He had looked for him every day as he traveled back and forth to his farm, but had accepted that the dog was probably, by now, dead. Although he missed the dog immensely, it was his grandson who mourned most grievously. His grandson was a paraplegic and Dog (or, as he called him, "Lucky") was his constant companion and friend.

"Oh, how can I thank you for finding him and feeding him? It must be fate or maybe a Higher Power that caused you to be here at this early hour that I might meet up with you."

"Well," I answered, "I don't know if his snoring could be considered intervention of a Higher Power but I'm glad you have your dog back. He was a good companion but I don't really have the means to look after a pet. He'll be much better off with you."

"Wait!" said the fellow. "You said 'companion'. That makes me think of something. What do you do?"

With some embarrassment I admitted that, although I had once worked as a physiotherapist in a local clinic, I was now no more than a bum and an alcoholic.

"You're an answer to my prayers. Would you like a job? My grandson needs a companion/therapist. I can't afford to pay the prices they ask but, if you would consider coming, I could offer you a small wage and room and board. Once you are on your feet again, I realize you will want to move on and return to the higher wages you can get here in town. But," he asked, with an expression of hope, "would you please consider my offer in the interim?"

Well, the offer was not just the best but the only one I had received. Could I do it? Would I really be able to make it in the real world again? Winter was coming and I didn't know how I would survive. Panhandling barely kept me alive and it, too, would fall off in the cold weather. There were many reasons I should jump at this chance. Not allowing myself to think of all the reasons I shouldn't, I accepted.

We picked up my guitar and the remainder of our groceries and headed for the country. As we traveled north on increasingly narrower and bumpier roads, Dog (sorry, "Lucky") slept with his head on my knee. The rattle of the old truck somewhat muffled his snores, but couldn't completely cover

the noise. My hand moved up to his ruff and, as I absently scratched his ears, his one good eye looked up at me with such a gleam of happiness.

"Well, Dog, if you can find a miracle and get back home, who knows? Maybe someday I, too, can go home again."

Who knows what's in the future? Maybe this is the luckiest day of my life or maybe I'm just setting myself up for another fall. I don't know if I can defeat the hold booze has on me. Maybe I can't handle the job. Maybe I'll fail again. But, I am going to take this chance I've been given and go with it. I will do my best; give it my best shot. Meanwhile I'll take it one day at a time. ▣

COMPANIONS

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley W.I.
2nd Place, Fiction, 2002

I pulled over at the sign which read SPCA, and entered the building. I had no prior intention of coming here. Although I had been raised on a farm with any number of dogs and cats, I'd always preferred the cows, or perhaps a horse or two over the years. By far the best pet I'd ever had was a pig.

At this stage in my life I really wasn't interested in being tied down by any four-legged companion, so why on earth had I come in here?

"Margaret!" The call was clear. A definite masculine sound. I looked about. No one. Who here could be interested or acquainted with me?

"We may not be acquainted, but I am interested in you, and you could be interested in me."

I wasn't aware I had spoken aloud. Now I was puzzled. Who was this conversationalist and where?

"Over here -- station 4B," came the distinct reply.

Glancing around, I saw a large pair of expressive eyes locked into mine.

"It's all right to be confused," came the laughing reply. "It's not every day you can meet up with a kindred spirit."

"Kindred spirit indeed," I retorted, but all I can see is this great shaggy dog, locked into a retrieval cage and looking quite ...

"Intelligent, I presume," the voice completed my observation.

Now thoroughly confused, I felt somehow strangely drawn to the beautiful dog that was now intently staring right into my face. I felt completely at ease with him, despite his size and breeding, just as he seemed to be at ease with me.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance," came that voice again.

I looked for a hand to shake, but there was none. The dog had raised a paw as if in anticipation of a response.

"Goodness me," I said. "Am I really talking to a dog?"

"Such a nice, clever, thoughtful one. Take him home."

"Oh no," I thought. "I'm not here for a dog."

"Right, you're here for a companion and I'm it."

"Howdy!" came a voice from the hall, "Picking out a dog to adopt?"

"I hadn't thought of it," I replied.

"But now you've decided on this one." The voice was quite precise.

"Right nice dog, that one," said the attendant, "Here, I'll let you in to get better acquainted."

I was about to say, "Don't bother" when my mind was flooded with the overwhelming desire to take the dog and keep it. A strange mixture of command and pleading.

By this time, the attendant had unlocked the cage, released the dog, leashed him and handed me the lead.

"Just sign him out at the desk. Put him on Master Card." With that comment he locked 4B and left me out in the hall with the dog.

"Now what?" I groaned.

"Head out to the desk and get the paper work done," I heard someone say, and I was walking, dog beside, up to the desk.

"That will be sixty dollars...Got his shots" monotoned the clerk from behind the desk, "but will need fixing."

"Not on your life!" came a heated response.

The clerk shoved the paperwork at me, asked for cheque, card or cash, and there I was, handing over my Master Card, signing my name, adopting the dog and fumbling in my purse for the car keys.

"Look in your pocket, Margaret."

"All right," I exploded. "You've talked me into this dog, in spite of my better judgment, and now the least you can do is show yourself."

"Lady," said the desk clerk, "If you don't want no dog, no one is making you take one, and it ain't me talkin' you into it, and there ain't anyone else here but me and the guy with the keys!"

She was getting agitated and my head filled with...not laughter so much but a gentle humour and the voice said, "It's okay, I'll explain later. You and me, we are going to have great adventures, and we will each look out for the other. Just because you can't hear me doesn't make you deaf."

The dog was pulling at the leash and I was being hurried outside.

Getting into the car, I heard him say, "Perfect! This is the beginning of a great adventure."

Now I knew there was only me and this -- this dog. "What? How?" the questions formulated in my mind.

"Genetics!" came the response. "Mind talk-- heart to heart really, for not everyone can hear me, and it's not everyone that I want to hear me, but you, I trust, so let's get going."

He laid his great head on my shoulder. I turned the key, started the car, glanced over my shoulder and we drove away.

I wasn't sure what I had gotten myself into, but his gentle laughter filled my mind, and an assurance of companionship and adventure flooded

every unsettling thought.

"Yes, indeed," he chuckled, "Companions, friends, adventurers. That we will be."

I was about to slow down for a red light, when it suddenly turned green, and I stepped on the gas. As the car shot forward I heard the dog say, "We're off to a good start! Companions for life!"

"Companions," I thought, "That has a nice ring to it."

And that's how it all started for me and my dog. □



COLLECT FOR CLUB WOMEN

For many years women's clubs in Canada, United States, Britain and other countries have used a prayer for opening or closing meetings. Usually called *Our Creed* or *Club Women's Creed* it is widely known and popular on this continent. The author, Mary Stewart, wrote the prayer in 1904 while she was principle of Longmont High School in Colorado and titled it "Collect for Club Women". We are indebted to a Canadian woman, the late Mrs. Maude (Alfred) Watt, M.B.E., for a true and correct version of the prayer. Mrs. Watt, who carried the Women's Institute idea to Britain and later became president of Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), came back to Canada in 1939 to attend and speak at the eleventh biennial conference of Federated Women's Institutes of Canada (FWIC) in Edmonton where she presented "Collect For Club Women" to the assembly.

Mary Stewart had spent some time visiting Mrs. Watt at her English home. The author expressed concern about the garbled versions being circulated. Errors had crept into the various printings of the prayer and she felt that they marred the beauty of expression and the clarity of thought. In the studio of Robin Watt, the artist son of Mrs. Watt, Miss Stewart personally supervised his work of copying the prayer, down to even fine points of placing a comma or a period. Many WI offices have a copy of that original hand lettered document.

"It was written as a prayer for the day. I called it 'Collect for Club Women' because I felt that women working together with wide interests for large ends was a new thing and that, perhaps they had need for special petition and mediation of their own. This must have been true for the Collect has found its way about the world, especially wherever English-speaking women get together. Indeed it has been reprinted in many forms in many lands."

It was officially adopted by the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, meeting at their second convention in 1920 in St. Paul. It was read into the printed record of the Congress of the United States by Senator Tobey of New Hampshire, at the closing session in 1949. Mary Stewart held a number of special teaching posts in Colorado and Montana. In 1921 she became a junior guidance and placement officer in the pioneer period of U.S. employment services. She continued to write for American newspapers and magazines. Her Alma Mater, University of Colorado, in 1927 conferred upon her an honorary degree in recognition of her distinguished work in education, social and civic service. □

THE BERRY PATCH INCIDENT

Phyllis Kosik, Darwell W.I.
1st Place, Memoir, 2002

"I'm going to go check on the blueberries west of Elliot Lake today," said Joe over his morning coffee. "I could take David with me, that would give you a bit of a break."

"Sure, that would be great!" I answered. "That would help a lot! I have plenty to do if we're moving out to the bush next week. I'll pack you some lunch. David will need it even if you don't."

At that time we lived in a small town east of Elliot Lake and we wanted to get our berries picked as soon as they were ready. We had several crews of pickers anxious to join us in the bush. Picking had been our main income in the summer, since Joe hurt his back.

David was four and very active. I had been complaining about the constant strain of keeping up with him while trying to watch the two younger ones, so I was looking forward to having a day off from running after him.

I packed a good sized lunch and filled a couple of thermoses with cool drinks, and warned David to do everything Daddy told him because the bush can be dangerous. When they drove off, I sighed with relief.

I did up all my chores along with spending some quality time with Donnie and Dwaine. About five p.m. I started getting supper ready and I was surprised to hear the truck pull into the driveway. I didn't expect Joe and David back for at least another hour. When they walked in the house I could tell David was excited about something, but Joe was white as a ghost.

"What's wrong?" I inquired of Joe. David wanted to answer, but Joe admonished him with, "Remember what we talked about on the way home David!" Then he sent him to play with Donnie in the other room.

"Come on Joe. You can't fool me. You're as white as a sheet. Something happened, now give!"

"I'll tell you, just give me some time to calm down a bit, will you?" He started to shake.

"All right. Would you like a coffee? I just made a fresh pot. I'll get on with making supper. You take your coffee into the living room and try to get yourself together."

Supper was almost ready when Joe came back into the kitchen. He sat down, and asked me to do the same.

Joe started, "We stopped at four or five places and found lots of berries. We stopped up at that little lake behind Dennison Mine and had our lunch at the picnic grounds there. The berries are really ready. It's a bit early in the season to have them so ready, but that's good. We need the money!"

He stopped to get up and fill his coffee cup again. When he sat down, he began again. "I stopped at one more place. The bush was just blue with berries. They were hanging like grapes! So I sat David in the middle of a good patch with his pail about half way up a hill. I wanted to tramp around some to check how good the berries were in the immediate area. I told David to stay put

and pick, but to keep talking to me so I would know he was all right and I'd answer him so he would know I hadn't left him. He said, "Okay Daddy, but what will I talk about?" I told him to tell me a story. One Mommy read to him or make up a story. He started talking and I started walking. You know how I do. Every few minutes David would ask 'Can you hear me Daddy?' and I would answer. Boy! That kid must memorize every story you read to him! He even adds expressions and voice changes when he tells a story! Is that how you read to him?"

"Yes," I said, "I play the parts of everyone in the story. I've done that since he was old enough to listen. He loves to be read to. Now, please continue."

"Well, I tramped around in a circle and found that there were lots of berries in that area. When I came back towards David, I was a little lower on the hill." At that point Joe started shaking again, he could hardly hold his cup steady enough to take a sip of coffee. I knew we were getting to the crisis.... whatever that was. I was tempted to say something, but held my tongue as I knew it would just prolong Joe's story.

"I looked up the hill toward David as I asked him how he was doing with his berry picking. Then I saw it. About fifteen to twenty feet behind him there was a huge black bear, just chomping away on blueberries. It didn't seem to notice David or else it was tolerating this little creature in his berry patch." I sucked in my breath, putting a hand up to my throat.

Joe continued, "I knew if I walked up the hill to get David, the bear might get angry. I wanted to yell at David to get up and run down the hill, but I knew that would be wrong too. So I told him 'Daddy's tired David. Can you get up and walk down the hill with your pail of berries? Then we'll go home okay?'"

"Okay Daddy."

"I thought he might hurry and cause the bear to get excited so I said, 'Don't run David, just walk so you don't spill your berries, okay?' As David came down the hill, I took a few scary steps towards him. When we met, I grabbed him up into my arms, turned and ran all the way to the truck. I strapped him in and took off. I don't remember being so scared in my whole life!"

"Did David see the bear? Did you tell him why you picked him up and ran?"

"Yes I told him and no I don't think he saw the bear. All the way home I kept thinking what could have happened. Thank God I had the presence of mind to keep him from running."

"Thank God, the bear didn't decide to run after you", I gasped.

"I get all shaky every time it crosses my mind. I'd rather die than have something happen to one of our kids." Joe quaked. "I can't seem to stop shaking any more than a few minutes at a time. I'll never do that again. If I take him with me, no matter if it's in town, in the bush or at the neighbours, I'm keeping my eyes on him!"

I should have known that the berry patch incident was an omen of things to come. That summer was the most eventful one we had, up to that time in our lives together. But then, that's the way life was when you were married to a man like Joe. □

A NEAR TRAGEDY

Betty Welter, Grande Prairie W.I.
2nd Place, Memoir, 2002

The spring of 1935 arrived early and very rapidly with a strong, steady and warm southwest wind. We had been making plans to go to town as this was the day the baby chicks were to arrive on the train. No hatchery here at the time so chicks were ordered from Edmonton weeks in advance. These day old chicks arrived in a very sturdy, 50 to 100 size cardboard box lined with excelsior plus holes in the sides and lid to allow for air in transit. We lived seven miles from our train station and they had to be transported home by horse and wagon. Box covered up with blankets for some warmth, I held the box on my knee hoping to lessen some bumps from the very rough road due to spring breakup.

Dad and I left home with the usual list of weekly errands to be attended to before train arrival time. The closer we got to town the worse the road conditions got and more water everywhere. We lived southwest of town and had to cross Bear Creek. That bridge was the one and only one then save the trestle railway one a bit farther south. Horrors! As we came over the hill the entire Bear Creek flat was under water as the creek had overflowed it's banks. It was a huge roaring, noisy mass of swirling muddy water full of huge ice slabs, driftwood and junk in general being rapidly swept along its way. Now the bridge deck was just above this churning mass and our horses sensed the danger. "Polly" hesitated and snorted whereas "Topsy" was really spooked so Dad had to urge them on right now with the flip of the whip. The bridge was shaking slightly from the force of the rapidly moving water and debris in it. Relief - we were across and now to do the most important errands and be at the station when the train arrived.

I can remember running to the Post office and the drug store for weekly papers while dad was at the grocery and hardware shops. I'm sure some shoppers must have wondered why this tall, skinny blonde girl was tearing around town. I knew anyway and had an urgent job to do and in a hurry too.

To the train station as the train was arriving and slowing to a stop. Dad knew Mr. Card, our stationmaster, and he was always very helpful and considerate. Dad explained how urgent our mission was and to get the chicks right now and across the bridge in case it was swept away. As soon as the baggage car door opened, Mr. Card requested the box of chicks, through the check out counter, onto the wagon and on our way home.

Bear Creek had risen another two or three inches and seemed to be moving faster than ever. What tension -- would the bridge break away and go down with the rushing water -- a frightening possibility. The horses knew they were headed for home but were still very leery of the flood conditions. Topsy again protested about proceeding and certainly let us know too. Dad definitely

used his driving expertise and voiced encouragement and we were across that shaky bridge – relief indeed! I'm sure my father received a few more grey hairs that day.

As we bounced along the rough road on our way home we couldn't help but think how fortunate we were to be on the right side – our side of that Bear Creek Bridge. There were no phones in the area, nor radio station and absolutely no way of letting Mother and family at home know what the conditions were had the bridge gone out or where we were, alive or not, plus the precious chicks. We had several head of stock at home and no chore man. There were two fresh cows and neither Mother nor my sister could milk them. Our little log house and barnyard never looked more attractive and secure to us than on this very stressful day. I'm sure the baby chicks were more than ready to be warmly housed and fed also. Yes, we had survived a near tragedy in the early days on the homestead.

Incidentally, the bridge held and didn't float down the creek. It is still in about the same spot but was replaced with a larger, higher and sturdier structure years later. The water in this creek was barely running last fall and one could easily walk across. Some of us "old timers" can only marvel at the power of "Old Mother Nature" with memories of years gone by. □

HERO'S STORY

Marilee Kosik, Darwell W.I.
3rd Place, Memoir, 2002

We all have our heroes...sports figures, movie stars, great explorers and men of medicine. But, all my life I guess, I have been intrigued by flying and flyers. As a small child in Central Ontario I remember gathering armloads of silver strands from the countryside that had been ejected from aircraft, supposedly to interfere with radar contact. Aluminum foil was not a household staple in those days and this gift from the airplanes was used in many Christmas decorations and gifts. I remember being startled by the artificial thunder of planes breaking the sound barrier and running outside in hopes of catching a glimpse of the tiny contrail they sometimes left high in the sky. I never could see the plane itself, just where it had been. I envisioned their bird's eye view of the world, the thrill of such great speed and the adventure of far off travel. Although I had never met a pilot, I thought the men who flew planes must be some superhuman beings. Then I moved to Northern Ontario and my life became intricately entwined with airplanes and the men who flew them. My home was a fly-in fishing lodge on a three-acre island. Airplanes were our transportation and our lifeline, bringing groceries, fuel, mail, building materials, boats and new faces. Pilots brought news from the world "outside" and were a great source of entertainment. We had no TV but those pilots offered it all; news, sports, drama, comedy and adventure. No longer did I have to look up from the ground and imagine: my heroes had come to me.

For some years I spent the school months in Muskoka with my grandparents and summer holidays at the camp. From age seven I was put on a train in MacTear and picked up by "someone" in Sudbury the next day. Often that someone was a pilot from Austin Airways. A well worn leather flying jacket, tinted aviator glasses and a special soft-footed walk, as if he was not quite at home on the ground, all advertised him as what he was -- a pilot. And oh how proud I felt to walk out beside him, knowing that everyone watching knew he was a pilot and I was with him! Although numerous flyers, many now famous, became a part of my life, that one dear man, Thurston (Rusty) Blakey, was my special friend and hero.

Austin Airways, well documented in the book "Canada's Oldest Airline", was a fixture in Sudbury. With a remarkable safety record, they flew floatplanes from their docks on Ramsay Lake in the center of town to camps and settlements near and far all over the north. Their founder and at least two of their pilots are in the Aviation Hall of Fame. Rusty started his career as a pilot at Austin Airways in 1938 and flew 48 years almost exclusively with them. The one short time he spent away from Austin's came as a result of his years of experience as a Northern bush pilot. Often navigating by following a river or a dogsled trail, conducting seismological surveys, search and rescue, fire spotting and mercy flights, Rusty was considered the best low-level flyer in the world so, when the U.S. and Canada decided to build the Alaska Highway, he was hired to come west to train pilots in the low level, rugged bush flying necessary to do the survey work. His stories of the west including Alberta and Edmonton, the land he saw and the people he met, enthralled me. They not only helped me win an award for a short story in Junior High but, like all the places and people I 'met' through his stories, I dreamed of someday going there, too. Many years later, of course, I did come west and did travel the Alaska Highway. I often looked up and wondered if Rusty had flown over this very spot.

By the time I met him, in 1950 or so, he was back in Sudbury and again flying for Austin's. He would pick me up at the train station and take me home. He lived in a small house, within easy walking distance of the air base, with his wife and two children. How I envied those kids; having him for a dad. Much later, of course, I learned that they envied me; living on an island with my own boat. Mrs. Blakey (although he was always just *Rusty*, I never thought of her as anything but *Mrs. Blakey*), was a tiny, delicate and beautiful lady; much stronger, I realize now, than what I thought at the time. The hours, days and weeks that he was away, often on dangerous flights into the north, would require great strength in a wife; raising a family, keeping the home and worrying about him. Although they were all proud of Rusty, I'm sure life as a flyer's family was not as glamorous from their point of view as from mine. Rusty himself never thought of himself as a hero: he was a *flyer*. Aviation fuel flowed in his veins and he loved what he did, but the mercy flights and other dangerous missions were just 'doing his job'.

Flying was dangerous back then. Equipment was not as safe,

Radios often 'wonked out' and weather reports were sketchy at best. One pilot said that he forecasted the weather by looking at his wings...if they were wet, it was raining! It was the pilots, their ingenuity, bravery, dedication and great skill and, as many of them claimed, sometimes just plain good luck that kept the planes in the air. Hours alone, fighting the elements, doing maintenance and repairs in frigid cold, often lost and out of radio touch, 'just doing their job' made these men a breed apart, made each and every one of them heroes.

In 1947, Austin's had bought a brand new Norseman aircraft, call letters BSC. Of his more than 30,000 flying hours, Rusty flew over 10,000 of them in that plane. CF-BSC, retired with more hours in the air than any other Norseman, is in the Aircraft Hall of Fame in Surrey, BC. BSC and Rusty became synonymous to everyone in the north. If a child was sick, someone injured, medicine needed, someone stranded or lost, people knew that Rusty and the BSC would get there if it was humanly possible. All over the north, when a plane flew overhead, adults and children alike would run outside, look up and wave. BSC would waggle it's wings as it flew over...a "hello and all's well" from Rusty.

As a side result of the many, many mercy flights he made in the north, a great number of those waving children carried the name "Thurston" or just plain "Rusty". Rusty always said he lost count of how many babies he had flown to hospital to be born and, in many cases, even helped deliver but I'm sure he really knew each and every one. I listened to stories of flying a woman to hospital, only to be forced to land, deliver her baby in the airplane on some remote lake, then take off again and proceed to hospital. Hal McCracken, another long time pilot at Austin's, once told me that Rusty had probably delivered at least four or five dozen babies, maybe more. He laughed about it, saying they could never be sure. Rusty's laconic radio message would be something like, "Austin base from BSC...14:20 hours; landed safely at Moose Factory, with two passengers". From that, Hal said, you could check his back communications to see how many passengers he had picked up and often deduce that he had delivered another baby enroute. Sometimes, of course, by the time he got to the isolated mother-to-be, it was too late to even try for the hospital and Rusty would often help in the delivery before transporting the new mother and child. To a woman in labour in a remote village, he must have seemed an angel from the sky; no wonder they'd want to honour him and their new child by giving it his name?

These are the stories I grew up hearing. I remember so many times, usually in bad weather (the only time you found a pilot sitting around on the ground), at Blakey's, at the base or in our camp lodge listening to the many pilots who flew in and out. And what stories they told!

One pilot recounted a tale about flying a team of sled dogs to an Inuit hunting camp when the tether line in the plane broke. With ten frightened half wild and half wolf animals loose and fighting in his plane, the pilot was in real danger. He had a pistol for protection but it was relatively useless in this case. First, he could not kill all the dogs without reloading, probably a fatal delay and second, to start shooting in an airplane would likely cause a crash, also fatal.

As a last-ditch effort (or as he related it..."like pissing on a forest fire") he threw his lunch into the fray and, while the dogs were fighting over it, managed to land the plane, get out and shut the door. Then, in his words again, he approached the situation like "a hive of hornets". Opening the side door momentarily, one at a time he looped a rope over the nearest dog, pulled it out, shut the door and tied the snarling animal to whatever he could find till they were all out and separated. After repairing the tether he reloaded his 'passengers' and continued on to destination. When someone, probably me, asked if he was afraid, he laughed and said it was no worse than handling a plane load of drunken hunters. Of course we all laughed, it was a funny story, but I know it would have been terrifying to be alone and in such danger. Sled dogs are dangerous...if he had once gone down they would have attacked in a pack and much later, when he was reported missing and when weather permitted, some other pilot would have retrieved his remains and a wife would have been notified.

Rusty once told us of a Northern mercy flight. It was in the fall so, since the water was still open in Sudbury, he took off on pontoons. His destination, however, was frozen so he would need skis to land. He came down on open water on Hudson Bay, and ran in close to shore. When the tide went out, the plane was up on shore ice. He had just a few hours to change from pontoons to skis and take off on this ice before the tide came back in and covered it again with water. Can you imagine such a task, one man with minimum tools and equipment, in the dark and in bitter cold? Well, he accomplished it and, I might add, did it all over again in reverse on the return trip. Another life was saved because of the dedication and ingenuity of a Northern bush pilot.

Another fabulous story involved a plane that went through the ice on a far Northern lake. Apparently the pilot taxied it into a thinly frozen over area where the village had cut their summer ice supply. No one was hurt and another plane came in to fly everyone on to their destination. Retrieving the plane, however, took awhile. With primitive lifting devices, they finally raised the plane from the frigid water and skidded it back onto secure ice. A mechanic flew in and looked it over. After drying necessary electrical components and getting the motor running, he and a pilot climbed in to fly it back to Sudbury for a complete overhaul. Upon landing in Sudbury, it was put on a flat bed and taken to the big hanger across town and put inside to warm up before starting repairs. Imagine the look on the faces of the mechanic and pilot when they walked into the hanger the next day to find the wings hanging down on the floor. It seems they had been badly stressed when the plane went through the ice. When they thawed, they literally fell off... and it had been flown back! As gullible as I was and as much as I had faith in Rusty's veracity, I did wonder if this was true but many years later I read this exact same story in the book about Austin Airways. I had the opportunity to talk to the author and he confirmed it as true: he had met the pilot and had seen pictures.

To this day, when I hear a small plane fly over, I look up and watch its progress. I try to identify its make, check the weather conditions and guess where it's going. I try to picture the pilot and I wonder about his stories, because I know all pilots have stories.

So there I was; a kid living her dream. Whenever I was in Sudbury I would stay at Rusty's until a plane was heading my way and hitchhike a ride home. Sometimes this was a matter of hours or sometimes a couple days. I never minded. At the house I had Rusty's two kids for company (although his son, Dick, who was a few years older, often teased me to tears) and the hours I spent hanging around the base sped by too fast. I never tired of the smell of aviation gas, the whine of planes warming up, the chatter of the radio and the pilots coming from and going to, I was sure, great adventures. They all took time to buy me a soda and stop for a chat. No disrespect to my folks, but sometimes I was disappointed when my ride home finally became available. When Rusty was my pilot, the adventure continued through the flight. He would show me the buttons to push and the levers to pull, and then sometimes let me put my hands over his during takeoff to feel how the plane responded. He let me make the radio call to base with takeoff time, destination and ETA. Then, wonder of wonders, once we were in the air, many times he would trade me seats and let me fly. Sometimes he even crawled in the back to retrieve his beloved sports pages while I flew the plane. What power, what excitement! I was a flyer! Although he came back to take over the plane for landing, my "high" lasted many days!

What a life it was for a kid! The wilderness, water, fishing, swimming and campfires. I missed some school parties, had few friends my age and we did work hard as we all had our duties in the family business, but I always felt lucky to be where I was. I remember a schoolmate who shuddered when I told her we didn't have TV. She was aghast! I tried to explain that I certainly didn't miss it. The stories I heard; any could well make it as a TV drama. But no TV drama could do justice to the pictures I painted in my mind, the crackle of the fireplace, the distinctive smell of worn leather and aviation fuel and the voices of those quiet spoken men as they told of 'just doing their job'. And what TV can answer a kid's million questions or stop to sketch the location of a 'dicey' landing or map of a remote Inuit village?

Rusty collapsed and died on the docks at Austin's in 1986 at age 74, flying right up to the end. His wife and kids still live in Sudbury, son Dick a pilot and aerial photographer of some fame, himself. A wonderful monument in Rusty's memory stands near the entranceway to Sudbury's 'Science Centre North', overlooking Ramsay Lake and Austin's Base. At first it appears to be just a 10' X10' block of upright metal pipes placed about 8" apart, then you notice that on each pipe there is a strategically placed daub of paint. When you stand back, you can see these 'daubs' paint a bush plane within the pipes and, as you walk around it, the plane flies and swoops through this 'forest'. It is a beautiful, fitting memorial.

Sudbury hosts an annual 'Rusty Blakey Days'. The year I was there for the celebration the Canadian Snow Birds did a spectacular flying

demonstration over Lake Ramsay, ending with a lone pontoon bush plane taking off from the lake and flying north as the Snow Birds flew their famous shooting star formation in the sky beyond...what an emotional moment!

Throughout the city, decorated in 'Bush Plane', there were displays and celebrations. Austin's held an open house with a whole room of Rusty memorabilia. I looked out the window of this modern new base over the extended and renovated docks and, for just a moment, I imagined the old BSC waiting there and Rusty waving from the pontoon as he steps into the pilot's seat.

A few years after his death, I had the honour to be invited to Rusty's induction into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame, right here in Alberta at the Reynolds Museum in Wetaskiwin. Mrs. Blakey and Dick attended and it was great to talk over old times. What a shame that Rusty couldn't be there, but his stories were still being told; by friends, family, co-workers and even those who had never actually known the man...just the stories. The many tributes given that evening by other famous pilots, politicians and various dignitaries showed that they, too, have their heroes: Rusty was one. As I listened to their memories of this great and wonderful man, my mind drifted back and I allowed myself a secret smile. I bet they never got a hug from him in a train station or sat on his knee to fly a plane. ■

Bushman's Daughter

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International Women's Day

International Women's Day (8 March) is an occasion marked by women's groups around the world. This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday. When women on all continents, often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate their Day, they can look back to a tradition that represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

International Women's Day is the story of ordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men. In ancient Greece, Lysistrata initiated a sexual strike against men in order to end war; during the French Revolution, Parisian women calling for "liberty, equality, and fraternity" marched on Versailles to demand women's suffrage.

The idea of an International Women's Day first arose at the turn of the century, which in the industrialized world was a period of expansion and turbulence, booming population growth and radical ideologies.

GRIEF AND RECOVERY

To Understand the Phases of Grief and Proceed Towards Recovery

Marilee Kosik, Darwell W.I.
2nd Place, Non-Fiction, Essay, 2002

Grief is the natural and necessary reaction to loss. Loss of a job, divorce (loss of a family), loss of a pet, moving (loss of a lifestyle and friends) and loss of health and/or mobility are all very real causes of grief in varying degrees, but in this paper we will center our attention on the grieving caused by death of a friend or loved one. We will discuss the different aspects of grieving you may expect to experience and some strategies to aid you in learning to cope and, ultimately, recover.

Because the reaction to loss is a very personal one, not everyone will grieve in the same way or within the same time frame. Although there are some common reactions or 'stages', you may or may not experience them all. You may experience them in a different order than listed and you may experience them in varying degrees of intensity. Understanding these stages and the universality of some reactions and feelings may prepare you for them and bring assurance that, generally, they are quite normal. Knowing them will not make the pain go away, but may help you understand your feelings and friends to understand and help.

Your first reaction to a death may be shock, disbelief and/or denial. In the case of an accidental or sudden death this is more common but even when you know death is imminent your mind may still try to deny the awful reality. This is a normal reaction; denial acts as an emotional shock absorber. The death is too much to accept all at once so, in order to cope, your mind will accept small parts at a time and deny the rest until it is ready to accept another piece of reality. It will take time and no one, not even you, can force acceptance of reality until your body and mind are ready. Physical reactions at this stage may include a tight feeling in your throat, which makes swallowing difficult, experience a choking sensation and inability to catch a breath and even suffer 'flu-like' symptoms such as muscle aches and severe exhaustion. As reality sets in and waves of grief wash over you, you may find yourself unable to quit crying or crying at unusual times. Be assured that this is normal and, that for most people, crying is a healthy release of pain. This stage may last only moments or much longer.

As the original numbness of shock wears off, you may be barraged with waves of very strong emotions. Your thoughts and feelings may bounce around uncontrollably; some emotions may be so strong as to be frightening or so unacceptable as to be embarrassing. Remember, your whole being has had a severe blow and it is reeling so, however you feel is how, at this time, you must feel and is perfectly normal.

Some people find that the most difficult emotion to accept or understand is anger. Anger may be directed towards ourselves for the things we did or didn't do for, or words we did or didn't say to, the deceased.

This is often referred to as the time of 'if only'. You may direct anger towards anyone associated with the death, police, medical personnel, funeral home staff or someone who was involved in the death, even if only by accident or by association. Anger is often difficult to discuss or share with anyone, sometimes because you fear that once you 'let it out' you will never stop yelling. Even more difficult to accept or share is the anger you may feel towards the deceased. You may be angry with her for dying and causing you pain, or because he didn't look after himself and now you are alone to face all the grief and work. This sometimes hits us when we are trying to unravel the intricacies of settling the estate. All anger, no matter to whom it is directed, is absolutely natural. It is a part of the normal process of letting go. *Karen Martin*, author of *Learning To Live With Loss*, said, "Anger is the outward reaction to inner pain". So, don't try to hide it, share how you feel with someone you trust. This is important because it does not go away unless it is acknowledged.

Feelings of guilt are another common reaction. You may feel guilty for being alive when a loved one has died. This is particularly common in accidents where one dies and one survived. You may feel, in some way, responsible for the death or regret a missed chance to say words of forgiveness or love while you had the chance. As humans we have all made some mistakes in our relationships with others but, when a person close to us dies, these mistakes often assume major importance in our grief. You must try to be realistic in assessing your culpability. If there is some realistic reason to feel guilt, you must learn to forgive yourself. The guilt associated with feelings of anger towards the deceased is a result of what we feel is inappropriate, i.e.: "we should never speak ill of the dead", but we must realize that it is simply an outer display of inner pain and is a very normal reaction. Again, sharing with a caring and nonjudgmental person can put these feelings in perspective and may help you discover that you are over estimating your responsibility and/or guilt.

Sadness and depression can make your life seem pointless and without hope. These, too, are normal reactions to loss. When you feel depressed, life seems without joy. Food tastes different or bad and your appetite may range from nonexistent to voracious. Sleep patterns may be altered, from sleeplessness to finding it difficult to stay awake. Your ability to concentrate is hampered and you may find it difficult to comprehend or remember. Thoughts of suicide are fairly common. Remember that rational thinking is impaired at this time. Do not make any long term or life style decisions. Although sadness and depression are a natural reaction to grief, be aware that if the depression becomes debilitating or frightening thoughts persist or worsen, you should ask for help. Throughout this time of despair and emotional upheaval, it is important that you share it with someone. If you are alone or find it uncomfortable talking to those close to you, find someone less closely involved. Professional counseling can be beneficial in helping you understand these unfamiliar, confusing and overwhelming feelings and help you learn to cope.

Following this period of intense emotions you often enter a time of detachment. You pull away from those around you and resist getting involved in new opportunities and experiences. When there is a choice of being with others or alone, you will usually choose to be alone. Accepting the death of another is, in itself, difficult but you are also facing the growing awareness of your own mortality and the temporary nature of all relationships. You may fear getting close to another as their loss would cause more pain, and your subconscious draws away from others to protect yourself. New experiences are frightening, especially alone. Lifestyle, friends and activities have all changed due to your loss. You fear how others will react, with too much sympathy or too little. You are going through a personal crisis in terms of redefining yourself in the eyes of yourself and others. It is natural to want to be alone. If, however, you shut yourself off from everyone, you deprive yourself of the support you need to give your life meaning. Hiding away will slow the process of making a new life for yourself. The trick is to find a balance between time alone and involvement with those who care. Sometimes you must push yourself to become involved. Start small; small groups, familiar places, 'baby steps'.

Eventually you will begin to recover. There is no set time, in fact a couple years is not unusual. Recovery is a reinvestment in life, new and old relationships, and in your future. It doesn't mean forgetting the person who died and the pain you have felt. Rather, it means incorporating that loss and pain into your life and becoming a whole person again, better and stronger for having survived the experience. Recovery comes in many forms. It may mean taking on new challenges. You may realize that during your grief, you have been putting things off, not really living your life or planning your future. As you recover, you will find the strength to carry on, making necessary changes and plans to fulfill your life. During this period you will discover that you can think of the person as not just dead, but as the loving and fun person they were when alive. You may remember certain times together and actually laugh about it. Good memories of their life will at least equal the sad memories of their death and, eventually, may even be more prominent in your memory. For the rest of your life, recovery is an on-going process. You will never forget, but each day will be easier; life will continue and new interests will happen.

By being aware of these stages of grief, you will not be frightened by them. However, don't try to fit your personal grief into any particular pattern. These are just a guideline. In your case they may not all occur, they may not occur in the precise sequence indicated in this article, they may occur in less or more intensity, they may keep switching back and forth and/or occur simultaneously. All these scenarios are 'normal'. However you feel at any specific time is how you should feel.

As you experience grief and all its ramifications, in the beginning it may seem that you will never survive this loss. Grief affects you emotionally and physically. Through years of meeting and talking to people in different phases of the grief process, Victims' Services Advocates have gathered some ideas for coping and amassed them in a training manual. Some of their comments and strategies are incorporated in the section that follows.

Stress takes a toll on your body so be sure to pay special attention to your diet, rest and exercise. Even if you get no enjoyment from eating, force yourself to eat regularly and well. Sometimes it is easier to eat small, frequent meals. If you can't sleep at night, take daytime naps. Get exercise and fresh air. You may have to force yourself to follow these suggestions but you will be able to withstand more stress if your body is cared for.

The most important thing you can do for yourself is to accept your grief and let yourself express it. You have a right to be upset so don't feel you are 'bothering' others. Burying these feelings now may cause them to later emerge as severe physiological or psychological problems and, by delaying your grief process in this way, you may find that, when you are ready to grieve, others have moved on and you find yourself alone. Find someone who cares and share how you feel.

Grief seems to come in 'waves'. At first these waves may be so big and strong as to be overwhelming. As time passes they will become smaller and less frequent, coming and going, often without warning. They can be triggered by small things such as a familiar place, a birthday or an anniversary of a special event you shared with the deceased. A familiar smell is a little known but powerful trigger and can hit you, literally, out of the blue. Prepare yourself when possible. If a melancholy event such as a birthday or anniversary is coming up, plan to be somewhere else or doing something different. Sometimes, though, you may be caught unaware. Accept this as normal and prepare yourself mentally so you will not be completely overwhelmed.

There may be times in the midst of all these painful feelings that you experience bursts of happiness. Enjoy them. Don't feel guilty, for they are the gifts that can give you the strength and perspective to carry on. A widow I interviewed told me, "One morning the death and pain was *not* the first thing I thought of. At first I felt a little guilty that maybe I was forgetting him. Then I realized that, actually, this was a sign that I was recovering and would survive". Those around you may not understand and you may feel criticized for doing 'too well'. Remember, you are the true judge of how you are doing. Don't let others control your recovery.

Sometimes you will feel a desperate need to be with others and sometimes you will need to be alone. Tell your friends and loved ones what you need. They care for you and wish to make it easier for you but they cannot know how you feel or how they can help unless you tell them. People do want to help but often don't know how. Asking them for specifics benefits them, too,

Loss often triggers unresolved problems from your past and this can intensify or lengthen the grief process. If other issues seem to be a factor, or if you feel unable to cope with raging emotions and overwhelming feelings, there's no shame in asking for professional help. Anger or guilt that's taking over every interaction is sometimes an indication that a problem should be handled professionally. Thoughts of suicide, particularly if you start to formulate plans, need attention before they get out of hand. Asking for help is not a weakness; it's often a sign of inner strength.

In a time of grief you may notice that your ability to concentrate, plan and think is impaired. This is temporary. You are under stress and strong feelings impair cognitive thought process. Explain to those around you that you may not remember. Make notes of important things and ask family and friends to repeat and remind. It's sensible, at this time, to avoid making any big, life changing decisions.

Understanding that grief is a process rather than a permanent condition may help you express your feelings. Remember that each person grieves in their own way at their own speed. You may feel that others are not grieving as much or as deeply. Remember that, even if others are suffering from the same loss/experience, they will not likely feel exactly as you do, and may be at a different stage in their grieving. This does not mean that they are less sad or that either of you are grieving 'wrong'. How you feel at this time is right for you. Don't try to judge your feelings or reactions by others' and don't judge theirs by yours. There are no 'normal' time lines on any one phase or stage of the grieving process. Be assured that your grief is normal for you. Only in cases where you are severely depressed or suicidal or cannot progress past a certain point in the process is it anything to worry about. Professional help is readily available. Don't hesitate to ask.

It is not uncommon for those grieving to discover untapped creativity. Many have reported a new-found ability to paint or write. Try to give yourself a chance to express your feeling in these ways. Creative pursuits often allow feelings to emerge that might otherwise have been too deeply buried to even remember. Creativity may assist in rebuilding your self-esteem and, perhaps, develop a new aspect of 'self'.

For some, grieving may develop a new or deeper commitment to their faith. Others may feel they have lost their faith. If this is a concern, talk to a spiritual adviser and be honest about how you feel. The bottom line is to talk out your grief with someone. If the first person you connect with, friend or professional, is not someone to whom you can relate, keep looking for someone who is tolerant, nonjudgmental and has the patience to listen to your confusion. Dr. Ronna Jeune, author of *Coming Back From Life's Hardships*, warns, "Talking it out is important and should not be put off because of fear of others' reactions". You are undergoing a major crisis in your life and it is natural that you may now question many things that you have previously taken for granted. Talk it out.

Know that you will heal. Maybe not today or even tomorrow, but one day you will awake and this will not be the first thing on your mind. One day you will see a sunset, hear a bird, feel a breeze on your face or smell a flower and it will be a good thing. One day you will see sunshine and happiness and not feel guilt for enjoying them. One day you will remember the happy times of your loved one's life, not just the pain of his death. It cannot be rushed but it will come. Your life will go on. You will recover. □

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Stony Plain & District Victims' Services Unit Handbook

MAGDA: A Soliloquy

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley W.I.
1st Place, Play, 2002

PROPS: Notes, Rolling Pin, Bowl, Playdough for flatbread
COSTUME: Modest long dress, Apron, Shawl
STAGING: A work place to roll out bread cakes
A place for Tibias' notes and Magda's shawl
A bench or stool to sit on

MAGNA ENTERS IN A LONG DRESS, WITH HER APRON ON, CARRYING HER BOWL AND DOUGH. SHE BUSIES HERSELF PREPARING THE DOUGH. SHE REACHES FOR HER SHAWL AND, PULLING IT ABOUT HER SHOULDERS, SHE NOTICES TIBIAS' PAPERS ON THE TABLE. PICKING THEM UP SHE CALLS FROM THE IMAGINARY DOORWAY (The position of which needs to be established and maintained throughout the play) AFTER HER HUSBAND.....WAVING THE PAPERS...Tibias!! Tibias, you forgot! SIGHING Oh he will never hear me in this wind. Look at that sky. I do hope the weather will hold. STEPPING OUT AND LOOKING UP TO THE SKY There is such a strange closeness to the sky. It does seem to be getting strangely dark for this time of day. And the wind, it seems to be crying. HUGS PAPERS TO HERSELF AND SAYS CHIDINGLY O woman, what an imagination! SHE SHIVERS Yet -- what is it I feel? Such a heaviness, more of an oppression ... even in the skies.

RETURNS TO BAKE TABLE, PLACES PAPERS ASIDE AND MUSES What a strange day, what strange colors in the sky. They say there's a crucifixion happening ...again. SHAKES HER HEAD Seems like too many these days ...but THOUGHTFULLY if they are right... If it is really Joseph's son ...how can that be? MAGDA BUSIES HERSELF WITH MAKING THE CAKES MURMURING Joseph's son ...I've wondered ...He's never disclaimed the child, but he did hurry Mary off to Bethlehem, for the census, I remember. But, why did they dash off to Egypt? ROLLING THE DOUGH Joseph seemed content enough when they returned to Nazareth ...and the boy ...Jesus, FURROWS HER BROW I think they called him Jesus... The boy was obedient enough, often worked with his father. Although I remember how frantic Joseph and Mary were that time they came to the Passover feast and lost the lad. PATS THE DOUGH Three days they searched for him. Found him in the temple. The teachers were amazed at his insight. They were in no hurry for him to be found... WIPES HER FOREHEAD... but his parents were upset! ... not Jesus... MAGDA CHUCKLES What was it he said? POINTING WITH HER ROLLING PIN "You should have known where to find me," He said ... Children ... NODDING they don't understand why we parents worry, and won't, until they're parents themselves. MAGDA SETS THE FLATBREAD INTO THE PAN AND ROLLS ANOTHER We never saw much more of them until the wedding at Cana. Someone said it was Mary who saved the day when

the wine ran out. Apparently she asked the servants to do as Jesus said, and then there was wine for all. **PENSIVELY** He seemed reluctant to talk about it. There must be some explanation... Some thought it a miracle! **DISMISSES THE THOUGHT WITH A SHAKE OF HER HEAD...** but it did save the family some embarrassment, and that is true. **SHE PATS THE BREAD FIRMLY** Jesus **THOUGHTFULLY** Seems to me I heard he was wandering about the country with his cousins... Some kind of teacher he became. Some say his words were wondrous fine ... **ROLLING THE DOUGH** others said he was meddling in their affairs. **HAH!** I wonder where he got all his information...? **JUMPS BACK, STARTLED** What is that? Lightening? **MAGDA BECOMES INCREASINGLY UNEASY** Sounds like thunder! **CARRYING HER ROLLING PIN SHE STEPS OUTSIDE TO LISTEN** Seems to come from Mount Calvary. **PULLING HER SHAWL CLOSELY ABOUT HER, SHE SHIVERS** Come on woman... get a hold of yourself. **MUTTERING AND POINTING UPWARD WITH THE ROLLING PIN** It's this peculiar sky. I wonder... We've heard about strange happenings ... miracles, yes, and healings. **MAGDA EYES THE SKY AND SHAKES HER HEAD** Where can Tibias have gone in such a rush? **LOOKING ABOUT** Wasn't it Jesus who called Lazarus right out of the grave? **LIFTING HER ROLLING PIN IN BOTH HANDS** ... four days dead and should have been stinking ... called him "Lazarus, come..." **HOLDS ROLLING PIN UPRIGHT** and they said ...he did! **DROPPING ROLLING PIN IN ONE HAND** I wasn't there of course, but Mary and Martha, well, they are not given to story telling. **SEARCHES IMAGINARY ROAD IN FRONT OF HER** And then there was a great procession went right by the house here just last week. **INDICATING POSSESSION WITH HER HAND** A king on a donkey... "Hosanna!" the crowds were yelling. Stripped the palms right off my tree. **MAKES A PULLING MOTION** They were laying coats and palms on the ground in front of him. **PULLS OFF SHAWL AND SWEEPS THE FLOOR WITH IT** Not just any donkey either ... it was a colt, from the Mount of Olives. Never been ridden before. Some fellows came up and said, "The Lord has need of it!" the owners simply let go, and away it went. Next thing we knew, this fellow... could that have been Jesus? **MAGDA FURROWS HER BROW AND RETURNS HER SHAWL TO HER SHOULDERS** Joseph is of the line and lineage of David. Mary is too. **NODDING** It could have been Jesus, but ... **SHAKING HER HEAD** Ah, he's just a local boy ... **PLAYING WITH HER ROLLING PIN** Whoever he was, he was riding this colt. The streets were filled with people shouting, welcoming him, saying

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord."

"Peace in heaven and glory on earth."

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"...

I guess being the son of David was what they thought makes him a King. **MAGDA STEPS BACK INTO THE HOUSE CONTINUING HER REVERIE AT HER BAKING TABLE** The priests at the temple were not happy, and insisted the crowd stop. Rebuke them, they cried. Someone answered and said if the people were quiet, the stones would call out. Talking stones ...just think!

MAGDA ROLLS HER BAKING The praetorian guard of course kept saying **STILTEDLY** "We have no king but Caesar. We have no king but Caesar." **DEJECTEDLY** One gets tired of that after awhile. **PREPARING ANOTHER CAKE** But, who was it? Someone said he drove the merchants out of the temple, so angry he was. Was that Jesus? I do believe they said it was Jesus. Such a humble man, it must have taken a great injustice to provoke him into such a violent act. In the temple too. I wonder if he could have emptied The Palace of its malpractices. Pontius Pilate is governor now, **SNIFFS** not much given to us folks. **POUNDS THE CAKE** Nice wife though. She's more interested in what goes on here than he seems to be. And Herod -- **ROLLS HER EYES AND SHAKES HER HEAD** that's one for the gossips! ... here from Galilee for the celebrations... The Palace is full!

MAGDA SETS THE CAKES ASIDE AND PICKS UP TIBIAS' NOTES Tibias was saying there was some disturbance at the palace last night ... and early this morning, and I mean early. Seems like the temple was in an uproar. Imagine getting folks out of bed at that hour ... A bunch of riffraff hanging about. Do anything for a penny, raise a riot for the fun of it, they would!

MAGDA PUTS DOWN THE NOTES AND CONTINUES PREPARING THE CAKES It was time for Rome to release a prisoner. I could hear them from here, yelling, "Barabas, give us Barabas!" I wonder who Pilate wanted to give them? **PATting THE CAKES** Then again this morning ...you could hear ...muffled like it was ... women weeping ...soldiers cracking their whips ... Seemed like quite a commotion up the street.

BECOMING UNCOMFORTABLE Listen! Did you hear that crack? Sounded like thunder, but this is not the time of year for it. There ... it sounds again, and it's raining, pouring, and it's dark ...so very dark. What ever is the matter? **MAGDA SETS DOWN HER BAKING AND LOOKS FURTIVELY ABOUT, COCKING HER HEAD**

Listen, from the temple, sounds like something fell, no, a wind perhaps? More like a great tearing. What could that be all about?

UNSTEADILY STANDING AT THE DOOR POST

Ah Lord God, have you forsaken us? This is no time for such darkness. It smells of death. O God, the earth shakes. **MAGDA ROCKS WITH THE EARTHQUAKE** Surely you are displeased with us Lord God. What is it Lord? **REELING BACKWARDS** What is happening? What have they done? Will the Sabbath never come? Who goes there? **MAGDA STEPS OUT AND RECOGNIZING PASSERBY SHE CALLS...**Joseph! ...Joseph of Arimathea! Where are you going? For whom are the spices, and the burial clothes you carry? **SHE SHUDDERS, SHRINKING FROM THE NOISE OF THUNDER** Who has died Joseph? Ah, the wind blows the words back in my face. He cannot hear me. But it must be someone of importance, some one of good standing. **MAGDA SITS HEAVILY AND COVERS HER HEAD** There is evil afoot this day. Perhaps a good man has died. **LIFTING HER HEAD** Listen! Even the heavens cry. Even the heavens cry. **BOWS WITH OVERWHELMING GRIEF** O Lord, what have we done?

LOOKING UP, STUTTERS Tibias? Who is that coming down the street?
Why is he crying in the street? PEERING Is it Tibias? STAMMERS,
QUESTIONLY Mary's son, Tibias ... was it Mary's son? IN GREAT
DISTRESS they've crucified him? Jesus...Jesus is dead? SOBBING May
God have mercy on our souls, may God have mercy on us all!
MAGDA CRUMPLES IN A HEAP AND THE LIGHTS GO OUT.

The End

THE VISIT

A One Act Play... Four Scenes

Marilee Kosik, Darwell WI
2nd Place, PLAY, 2002

CAST:

Rick Belden: (age 35) designer jeans, sport shirt
 (second generation Canadian homeowner)

Louise Belden: (age 33) dress slacks, comfortable pullover
sweater

 (Rick's wife)

Alexander Belden: (age 12) jeans & Oilers sweater
 (Rick & Louise' s son...clean-cut pre-teen,
 spiked hair his only apparent 'protest')

Nicolas Belden: (age 6) sweat pants and shirt with Tonka insignia
 (Rick & Louise' s son...cute, freckles, brushcut)

Edgar Cargill-Smythe: (age mid-50's)... three piece pinstripe suit, shirt &
tie

 (Rick's cousin, visiting from England,
 very British in speech...stereotypical stuffy
 mannerisms)

SCENERY:

The action takes place in three rooms of the Belden home in Edmonton,
Dining room....Family room...Front foyer.
The Beldens are middle class and their home is very nice but not pretentious.

PROPS

Scene 1...Dining room: Table...dishes and food befitting an evening meal...a
platter of ham.

Scene 2...Family room: Couch...coffee table.. television..

Scene 3...Family room: The above, plus two trays containing three cups of
coffee, coffeepot, cream & sugar...cake on five plates

Scene 4...Front foyer: Door to outside, closet, light coat & fedora for guest

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Scene 3...Taped sounds of an NHL Hockey game...an unseen announcer

Scene 4...Rain, lightening and thunder visible through the open door... sounds of a storm.. sound of a car door slamming

SCENE ONE

Setting:

Dining Room of the Belden's house...dinner in progress

Boys are sitting together, Nicolas is next to Louise, Rick sits between Louise and Edgar. Throughout the scene, food is passed around and eaten.

LOUISE: Mr. Cargill-Smythe, I am so pleased you could visit us. Rick has spoken of his cousin in England many times and it's wonderful to finally meet you.

EDGAR: *(very British accent and manner)*

Call me Edgar, please. We are, after all, relatives. Chips off the same block, you might say, what?

RICK: So tell me, Edgar, how was your trip over?

EDGAR: Well, old chap, I came down to old London town on the M-5 a day before my flight. With lorries whizzing by, cars bonnet to boot and wing-to-wing, all at remarkable speeds...it was a frightful drive!

NICOLAS: What's a lorry?

RICK: That's an English word for truck, son.

NICOLAS: I'm English and I call it a truck.

RICK: Quiet, Nic! Don't interrupt.

NICOLAS: But why were the cars wearing bonnets and boots?

LOUISE: Hush. I'll explain it later.

NICOLAS: *(voice raising in frustration)* But what had wings?

RICK: *(sharply)* Nicolas! Listen to your mother!

NICOLAS: But dad...

RICK: You heard me.

NICOLAS: *(abashed)* Yes sir.

RICK: Sorry about that Edgar. Please go on with your story.

EDGAR: Perfectly fine, old boy. Young jiggers do have their questions. All part of their education and all that, you know...Now, where was I?

ALEX: *(muttering)* In some silly vehicle wearing boots and touques, it seems.

RICK: Alexander!!!!

ALEX: Sorry dad.

EDGAR: Well, as I was saying, the trip was terrible. I had an early flight so I had the clerk at the hotel knock me up at four in the morning...

LOUISE: You did what?!!!

RICK: *(sotto voice)* Wake him up.

LOUISE: *(looking startled)* Oh!

EDGAR: I didn't even have time for tea before the car came to take me to Heathrow. Of course, once I got there, it was wait, wait and wait! It was so confusing...people hurrying every which way...a babble of unrecognizable languages...you don't know what that was like!

ALEX: *(quietly but with a tone of disgust)* Yeh...I understand.

EDGAR: What was that, young man?

ALEX: Ahhh ... please pass the ham.

(With a sharp look at Alexander, Rick passes the ham).

RICK: Go ahead, Edgar.

EDGAR: Yes. Well, when I finally got on board the plane and we took off for Canada, I really enjoyed the flight. Jolly young birds flitting around, bringing my tea and crumpets, answering my every need. It was grand! ...BOAC, of course.

NICOLAS: But doesn't a plane fly too high for birds?

RICK: Shhhhh

NICOLAS:*(obviously confused but resigned to not finding out).* Sorry.

(As Edgar's story continues, the boys appear alternately confused, bored and amused but, eventually, as it drags on, they start to fidget. Rick & Louise give them an occasional hard look which settles them for a short time, but soon they are again restless.)

EDGAR: It was a long plane ride, but eventually the pilot announced that we would soon drop down to Edmonton. I collected my satchel and my brollie and followed the rest of the blokes getting off. Customs was quite crowded and confusing. (You do hire a lot of foreigners in government posts, don't you?) But, once I got out of there I whistled up a hack and he drove me up to the Inn where I'm staying.

LOUISE: So what do you think of Edmonton?

EDGAR: *(as he speaks, his attitude becomes increasingly more condescending)* It has certainly been an eye-opener for me. I really didn't know there were cities of this size in the colonies. The Inn is quite comfortable, actually, but the cafeteria menu Appalling! ... What are per...oghies? and ca..cha..tory? *(both items pronounced slowly and badly)*

Why, for breakfast today I asked for bangers and mash and the bird looked at me like I was a foreigner! For lunch I ordered a chop and the server asked how I'd like my potatoes," home fries, French fries, trucker fries, baked, roasted or mashed". When I suggested that I would like just plain chips, she brought me a blasted bag of crisps! ...And what, in the name of Mary, is poo...tine?

LOUISE: Oh, that's a French-Canadian dish. It's French fries covered with cheese curd and gravy. It's really quite popular here.

EDGAR: Sounds nauseating.

RICK:*(pacifying tone)* Well, we're glad you're here. Will you be in town long?

EDGAR: Yes, I plan to stay a couple weeks as I have some custom to promote. Maybe in that time I will grow accustomed to your strange way of speaking and quaint customs.

LOUISE: I see we're finished dinner...

EDGAR: *(interrupting)* Supper!

LOUISE: Yes...well... whatever. The boys have been waiting to see tonight's hockey game, so let's take our dessert and coffee to the family room.

(The boys jump up and hurry out, whispering to each other, and the adults follow)

CURTAIN

End of Scene One

SCENE TWO

Setting:

Family room of Belden's house

Edgar is seated on the couch. The boys are sprawled on the floor in front of the TV.

Rick & Louise are off-stage.

Note. Actors face the audience, so the audience cannot actually see the TV screen.

TV announcer's voice and sounds of the hockey game actually come from off stage, but actors react as if they see the game on the TV))

EDGAR: So chappies. Do you enjoy the telly?

ALEX: *(Looking askance at Nicolas and neither knowing what 'telly' means)*
Yessss... I think so.

EDGAR: And what are we to be watching?

NICOLAS: *(excited)* The hockey game! It's great!

EDGAR: Oh, yes, just so, I suppose.

ALEX: Do you like hockey, Uncle Edgar?

EDGAR: Well, as a matter of fact, this will be the first one I have seen. You lads may have to perk me on it, won't you?

ALEX: That's OK..we'll explain it to you.

EDGAR: Oh, I'm sure I'll have no trouble following it.

Meanwhile, ... Alexander isn't it?...Would you direct me to the loo?

ALEX: The what?

EDGAR: The loo!

NICOLAS:*(whisper to his brother)* Alex, what's a loo?

ALEX: *(in aside to Nicolas)* I don't know.

(in a normal voice to Edgar) Where do you want to go, Uncle Edgar?

EDGAR: The loo....you know....to refresh myself.

(Alexander and Nicolas look at him with blank stares.)

EDGAR: Come now, you must have a loo.

ALEX: *(puzzled)* I don't think so.

EDGAR: The loo...so I can relieve myself: you know, spend a penny, water my horse... whatever you call it over here.

(Both boys still look at him blankly.)

EDGAR: *(slowly and distinctly, as if speaking to an idiot)* Now see here...I drank a lot of beverage at supper, now I wish to empty my bladder...surely you understand...I need to visit the loo.

(Rick & Louise enter with a tray of coffee and cake)

ALEX: Oh! You mean the bathroom! Why didn't you say so? It's right down the hall, first door on the left.

(With an exasperated look at Alex and an embarrassed look at Louise, Edgar scurries out in direction indicated)

Rick pulls over a coffee table and Louise sets the coffee and cake on it.

Rick then goes over to fuss with getting the TV turned on.

As TV comes on, we hear the ending of "O Canada".)

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, Welcome to Hockey Night in Canada. ..Tonight our Oilers take on the Anaheim Mighty Ducks.

(Uncle Edgar returns, sits on the couch and everyone turns their attention to the TV.

On TV are the sounds of a hockey game)

ANNOUNCER: Marchant gets the puck, he passes it to Brewer and they're inside the blue line. Look at that! ... the Duck's defenseman just stripped him of the puck!

But wait, he didn't succeed in clearing it. Now Carter has it. He passes it to Smythe. Smythe goes around the net; passes it out to the point; it's back to Smythe...

He shoots! He Scores!!!!

(Boys cheer loudly and you can hear cheering on the TV.

Uncle Edgar has sat staring at the TV with an uncomprehending stare since he sat down)

ANNOUNCER: Smythe has scored at 1:15 in the first period, assist to Carter. Well Chris, that sat the Ducks back on their heels a bit, didn't it?

It can be pretty defeating when the opposition makes that quick play.

ALEX: Did you see that Uncle Edgar? Neat dipsy doodle play, wasn't it?

EDGAR: *(uncomprehending)* Yes, of course.

(game continues on TV as curtains close)

CURTAIN

End of Scene Two

SCENE THREE

Setting:

(Two hours later)

Still in family room.

Cake has been eaten and Uncle Edgar has just sat down his cup.

Hockey game is just over.

ANNOUNCER: So that's it Dick, the Oil has flattened the Ducks 5 to nothing; a good night for the Oil, don't you think? They really seemed to come on strong in the third period. Ryan Smythe came through on three of the goals...looks like his drought is over.

(Rick gets up and turns off the TV.)

LOUISE: Would you like some more coffee, Edgar?

EDGAR: No thanks: not really my beverage, you know.

LOUISE: *(flustered)* Oh, I'm sorry. We could have had tea. I can make some. Would you like tea?

EDGAR: *(in a rather condescending tone)* No. No, never mind. I guess a person has to make do when away from the old sod. You know, "When in Rome.....", and all that rot.

RICK: So, Edgar, what did you think of your first hockey game?

NICOLAS: Yeh, Uncle Edgar, cool, wasn't it?

ALEX: Boy, did we cream those Ducks! Talk about smooth! Did you see that drop pass that Carter made? Wow!

NICOLAS: And when Laroque dropped his gloves...I thought we'd see a real good fight. Too bad the refs got in on it so quick.

ALEX: Sure, but George could have creamed him, easy.

NICOLAS: Sure he coulda...isn't that right Uncle Edgar?

EDGAR: Why did he want to fight?

ALEX: Why, to show the Ducks that they couldn't rough up his men. That's what Laroque does.

EDGAR: Whatever for? Isn't he supposed to be trying to get the puck in the other team's net?

ALEX: Well...sure...but he's an enforcer, you know.

EDGAR: Enforcer? What does he enforce? I thought the referees were supposed to enforce the rules.

NICOLAS: Yeh, they do. But sometimes a guy has to intimer... intimade... intimerate....

ALEX: Intimidate...

NICOLAS: *(glancing towards Alex)* Yeh... intimidate the goons on the other team.

EDGAR: Savages! So colonial!

RICK: *(slightly insulted but trying to calm the waters)* It's really not as rough or mean as it may seem. Actually, it's a game of great skill and finesse.

EDGAR: *(sarcastic)* Harrumph! Really? I certainly didn't see much finesse.

RICK: *(getting a bit annoyed)* Well, if it's finesse you want...did you see Salo?

EDGAR: What's a salo?

RICK: Salo is the goalie for the Oilers.... Tommy Salo.

EDGAR: Salo...sounds like a foreigner.

RICK: Yes, well actually he is a Swede...

EDGAR: Then why is he on a Canadian team? Aren't there enough Canadians that know how to play the game?

RICK: Of course, but our goalie happens to be a Swede. Anyway, as I was saying...he showed some smooth moves. Did you see when the Ducks had that two-man breakaway and he just grinned them down? The first guy tried to deke him but he just waited him out and when he finally made his move, Salo stopped him cold.... Beautiful!

ALEX: *(enthusiastically)* Yeh, and when he stopped that slap shot with his blocker... man he was fast!

NICOLAS: *(excited)* And did you see how he stacked his pads against that neat wrist shot in the second. Salo robbed him!

RICK: Yes, Salo is a great goalie. He's one of the best puck handlers in the league and when he stands up to the offense, he leaves them nothing to shoot at!

EDGAR:*(obviously confused and getting huffy)* Yes... Well... Whatever... In any case, I really must be going. Up early and nose to the old block, and all that, you know.

LOUISE: *(As she gets up...obviously relieved)* Well, if you're sure. *(Insincerely)* There's really no need to rush off you know.

EDGAR: No, really, I must be off.

(The adults stand and start towards the door. The kids stay on the floor until Rick jerks his head in the direction of the door.)

RICK: Come on, boys, and say goodbye to Uncle Edgar.

(The boys get up and follow the adults out)

CURTAIN

End of Scene Three

SCENE FOUR

Setting:

In the front-door foyer (Edgar is preparing to leave).

(Rick hands Edgar his fedora).

LOUISE: *(politely but with no enthusiasm)* Well, Edgar, it was nice to see you.

RICK: Yes. I do hope you'll drop in again while you're here.

ALEX: Bye, Uncle Edgar.

(A moment of silence...then Rick nudges Nicolas)

NICOLAS: What?.....Oh yeh.....Bye.

EDGAR: Rick....Louise. Thank you for supper. I enjoyed the meal, although the coffee may well cause me indigestion.

LOUISE: I'm sorry. You should have said something sooner. I did, finally, offer you tea during the game.

EDGAR: The game! I'm afraid that I find your game of hockey to be foolish and barbaric. "Dippy doodle... stacked pads... stoned... slapshot... deke... five hole..." I never heard such rot! Maybe that's why your boys have such a poor command of the Queen's English.

Well, I will just have to dash over and hope the wands will keep the windscreen clear on my way back.... Blast!

Ta Ta

(Everyone laughs)

CURTAIN The End

[illegible]

QUOTE

This year will go down in history. For the first time, a civilized nation has full gun registration. Our streets will be safer, our police more effective, and the world will follow our lead into the future.

...Adolph Hitler, 1935

TO SWIM OR NOT TO SWIM is NOT the Question

Margaret Dinnsen, Eagle Valley WI

1st Place, Non-Fiction, 2002

After years of struggling with arthritis, I required aids such as strategically placed bars and walkers, in ever increasing complexity. Two years ago a severe deep vein thrombosis put me into hospital and further immobilized me. I required a wheel chair.

Without the encouragement and daily assistance of my youngest daughter, I would surely have given in and cashed out. Her persistent and constant care over the year convinced me to put some effort into recuperation, which I did.

My general overall health improved, but my legs were becoming weaker as I depended more and more on the wheel chair, the walker, and my arms to get me about. I spent a lot of time contemplating what to do, and swimming always came to mind. The problem was how to get into a pool that I could get out of... I figured I could fall into any of them.

Didsbury and Innisfail pools were suggested, and we tried them both. Both are wheelchair friendly, and with the assistance of my daughter, I was wheeled in and out of the pools. Scheduling was a problem. On several occasions we were refused entry due to staff meetings or pool cleaning. As each of these pools require a drive, a driver and several hours, the trips to the pool soon petered out. But then Sundre opened their pool and I was excited.

Here was a facility near to home and in the very town we often frequented, so getting there and back was much less of a problem. An older grandson attended Sundre School, and my husband drove in and out for farm supplies and repairs, banking and grocery shopping. Imagine my disappointment when I discovered there was no way for me to get out of the pool! I became very discouraged and stopped trying to swim.

After a time my arms began to object to the weight they were required to hold and I spent many hours in my lift chair. I put on 50 pounds. This was over and above the extra hundred pounds the surgeon required me to lose before operating on my right hip.

From the beginning I had not liked the idea of being cut open and my leg bone being forcibly removed, sawn off, attached to a metal socket and replaced. The idea was even less appealing when I was told it was not a permanent fix, that after five years it may have to be redone. As time progressed and pain control kicked in, the operation seemed less and less attractive.

In January, I began to devise ways of getting once again into the water. Now it was not a question of whether to swim or not, but how I could swim, and where.

I investigated hotels with swimming pools and convinced myself that if I could swim for an hour every day, my muscles would respond.

I could put more weight on my feet and lose some weight from my body.

I explored assisted living, as I require assistance to get my socks on and off. There are places in Edmonton and Calgary, but at a price and with time restrictions. I was determined to swim. No question. But how to get out of the pool?

In February we returned to the Sundre pool. I said I would fall into the pool and worry about getting out later. This I did and enjoyed a half hour of luxury, stretching and walking in the water. Then it was time to exit. My helpers were so enthusiastic, they pulled me out of the pool and I went down on my knees. With the kind help of five bystanders, I was put upright and teetered embarrassedly off on my walker back to the dressing room.

My husband and I discussed ways and means to assist my exit from the pool. After much discussion, crafting of designs and exploring materials to use, we came, I thought, to a mutual conclusion of just how the apparatus should work, and what it looked like.

The management and staff of the Sundre Pool were considerate, kind and helpful. They were most supportive of the idea, suggesting the appropriate times I could use the pool and agreeing to store the ladder at the complex between swims. My initial embarrassment and clumsy efforts were minimized as the staff assisted my efforts to facilitate the swim.

Several days later my husband proudly brought his creation into the house and I burst into tears. We had extensively discussed the project, and my mind had locked onto my interpretation of the required aid. This ladder he put in front of me was so different from what I had anticipated. My mind had created something smaller and more manageable for me.

Like many handicapped persons, I longed to be independent. To be able to lift the aid in and out of the pool myself. That was what I had imagined. Just a little right angled apparatus allowing me to lift myself out of the pool. This ladder, the real thing, was built to sit on the floor of the pool, and hook over the handrails. It would require someone to set it up in the pool before I could use it. My mind was locked onto my interpretation of what was needed.

This was not what I had envisioned. Not what I wanted! My mind exploded in so many different directions. How could my husband's ideas and mine be so far apart when we had spent so much time exploring the situation? How could he not know what I wanted? This would not make me independent. I would still need an assistant. Giving up my idea of independence was a struggle, although the reality of my present situation is that I need help.

My husband is also growing older, and is some years older than me. He had taken time and effort to achieve the results he perceived were required. I wanted to swim. To swim or not to swim was not the question. How to get out of the pool was. He wanted to help me get out of the pool, and to that end, created the necessary aid. So why was I so distressed?

The older I get, the more stiff and stubborn my thought patterns seem to be. Like the stiff, unworkable joints of my body, my mind refused to work, to give up my idea of what I needed. I could not make a quick shift to

this new reality.

My poor husband was confused, over tired, and completely at a loss to understand my reaction. Slowly I realized that I had to accept this gift as it was given, with the love and attention with which it had been bestowed.

We returned to the pool and set the ladder in place. I was able to climb down into the pool rather than fall in as I had before. Of course the proof of the effectiveness of this ladder lay in my being able to get out of the pool.

At the completion of my swim, two grandsons stood at the ready. With my husband in the pool, behind me, ready to push, lift or steady my efforts, I prepared to leave the pool. I grasped the handrails and reached the first step with the help of the water in which I was still immersed. My mind was still warring with the ladder of fact, upon which I now stood, and the smaller, more compact stairs of my imagination.

With words of encouragement from my grandsons, who had brought my walker up to the edge of the pool, and several helpful foot lifts from my husband, I was once again on deck, able to return to the changing room and dress for the day.

As we drove home, the men discussed the effectiveness of the ladder. I was quiet, for I still warred with my own interpretation of how things should be.

"It will get easier as she gets more exercise," was the conclusion of these learned gentlemen.

They were right, of course. It did get more comfortable. I became accustomed to the reality of the situation, and my body responded to the exercise I was able to enjoy in the pool.

To swim was necessary for my physical and mental health. To adapt to being handicapped is an on going battle. I hope I never give in, but continue to strive for independence and the ability to walk again.

It was easier to recognize the stiffness of my body, than to acknowledge the obstinate nature of my mind. Is it growing old that dulls my ability for versatility, or is it the lack of willingness on my part to accept that which I no longer can control?

I am thankful for a husband who cares, and I pray that I may remain a caring person in return. To swim or not to swim was not the question. When I could no longer walk alone, swimming became necessary to prevent further deterioration of my leg muscles. The question became, "How could I access the swimming pool?"

The answer revealed a hardening of my heart, a handicapped mind with a stubbornness of purpose that needed to give. It needed to be exercised by receiving the gift that was offered, and acknowledging the love that accompanied it.

I have learned that it is easier to recognize the twists and deformities that affect our physical appearance, than to recognize the deformities that twist and turn our hearts. I thank God for a caring family, and am now prepared to exercise my mind and heart as well as my body. □

VIVA MAZATLÁN: A Short Visitor's Guide

Marilee Kosik, Darwell WI
3rd Place, Travel

"*Buenas días señora y señor; bienvenido a Mazatlán.* Good day madam and sir; welcome to Mazatlán." Thus you are greeted at the airport, at the hotel, when you enter any business and by people everywhere and you really do feel welcome. The predictably wonderful weather, beautiful beaches, friendly people and inexpensive prices make it a true vacation paradise.

Although English is commonly spoken in the tourist area, there is still, of course, a very definite cultural difference. Please try not to insult or hurt the feelings of these wonderful people. Common politeness is appreciated and they are pleased if we try to learn at least a few words of Spanish. One ex-pat I know says she has managed quite well with her two key words, *baños* and *cerveza* (bathrooms and beer). People are complimented when we greet them with *hola* (hello), *Buenas días* (good day) or *Buenas tardes* (Good evening) and say *gracias* (thank you), *por favor* (please) and *de nada* (you're welcome). We are guests in their country, let's show our best manners.

Employees are sadly underpaid (approximately \$4 Canadian per 10-12 hour day) so do tip them, as a few dollars goes a long way in helping them support their family. In restaurants and cantinas 15% is minimum. Your main waiter shares the tip with his helpers, the busboy, hostess and drink mixer. I tip taxi drivers only if they give extra service. The little kids who bag and carry my groceries get 2 or 3 pesos; bellboys, 3 pesos per bag; and room service, 10 pesos. The bus driver who brings you from the airport expects 10 pesos and, to tip hotel maids, leave 5 pesos on your bed each morning. Give tour guides whatever seems to be the going rate and give 2-5 pesos to washroom attendants (who keep it clean). Keep small change on you at all times for tipping and bus fare.

Exchange rate is about 6 pesos to the Canadian dollar. You get a good rate at almost any of the little *casas de cambio* along the street but check them out as they vary. If you have travelers cheques go to Banamex and there are bank machines all over the place. Don't change your money at the hotel nor exchange any more money at the airport than what you need to get into town, as the rates in both places are always very low.

When you enter Mexico, a copy of your visitor's pass is stamped and returned to you by customs. It is very important that you don't lose this! You need it to leave the country and it will cost you a whole day (or two) of running around and \$30 Cdn to get a replacement.

The city bus service is wonderful. The fare is three pesos and they run about every fifteen minutes (or so) from 5 am until 11 pm. There are no

schedules (I was told that the people who ride know where they go) but just ask anyone which bus goes to any specific place. Don't be surprised if musicians get on and entertain you enroute and be sure to show your appreciation with a few pesos. You can flag a bus just before any intersection by putting your arm out. Don't throw away your ticket until you get to where you're going as inspectors often board and ask to see them. If every passenger does not have one, the driver can get in trouble as it is assumed he transported those passengers free.

There is good taxi service. Always negotiate price before you get in. There should be a zone map at your hotel to give you an idea of what you should pay. You will see many *Pulmonias*, small open taxis built on a Volkswagen base and peculiar to Mazatlán. The Eco Taxis (regular cars) are cheaper than the open *Pulmonias*, but not as much fun.

If you want to phone or write home there are a couple places to seek out. Check with *Mail Boxes Etc.* They sell stamps and stationery, rent mailboxes and offer fax, photocopy and Email service. There are Internet cafes all over the place. Phones in the hotels are very expensive so, if you want to make a long distance call, go to a little place just a couple doors north of Dairy Queen with *Larga Distancia* on the door. Get the country codes from Telus before you go so you can dial direct and avoid Mexican operators.

Pick up a copy of the *Pacific Pearl* paper from your hotel for news of what's happening, where to find things (maps), restaurants, for rent and sale ads and helpful hints. There is also a paper called *Viejo Mazatlán* with lots of great info. I believe it is available at El Cid Mega Resort or Hotel Pueblo Bonito. They are both published monthly, free and in English.

There are accommodations to fit every taste and budget. The *El Cid* is expensive, but offers everything from movie theaters to golf courses right on the premises. Less expensive, but lovely, is the *Playa Mazatlán* where beach view rooms are higher priced than those overlooking one of the four pools or luscious gardens. We choose a small family run hotel, with kitchenettes, about a half-mile south of the big tourist areas called *Suites Del Real*. All rooms have balconies with a great view of the ocean and the spectacular sunsets. There are, of course, many more choices such as condos, apartments and hotels; too many to mention. Wherever you choose to stay, you can be sure to find great service and friendly people.

When in México, I usually eat Mexican food, but there are great Chinese, Italian and North American places, too. I will mention a few I really like, but don't be afraid to explore. There are many small beach side cantinas, *cochinas* (kitchens) that offer cheap Mexican food only during the day and, of course, some of the chains such as Dairy Queen and (yes) McDonalds!

Las Canoas, offers a floor show of Mexican Folkloric on Mondays and showcase a wonderful *mariachis* band the rest of the week. Ask the band to play *El Niño Perdido* (the lost child), a hauntingly beautiful piece of music written by the local *Banda Sinaloense*. It depicts a lost child (a horn in the distance) and a group searching for him (the rest of the band).

The instruments call back and forth until, when the child is 'found', the music switches to a happy upbeat interlude by the whole band. This is the place for piña coladas and, surprisingly, one of the few restaurants that offers Mexican entertainment.

For the best ribs in North America (really) you must try the *NoName Cafe*. Order the full rack and share because it is large! Read all the great signage painted around the entry and enjoy the fun menu. Watch for Fidel, one of the waiters who can, and usually will, dance. About twenty televisions will assure that you can watch all the big games in this noisy rock and roll sports bar. They serve great strawberry margaritas, but their drinks, especially beer, are expensive.

Sombrero Bay is the prettiest restaurant I've seen in Mazatlán. The menu is written in Spanish but the waiters are very helpful. I tried the *Pollo Verde* (chicken in green sauce) and found it delicious. Prices reflect the classy decor, up to \$75 per couple for dinner and drinks is possible, and I suggest you make reservations. Nice background music is provided by a marimba band.

La Mission is the place to meet any Canadians in town. Dick Damron and his band from Alberta entertain there every Monday night so drop in to say 'hello'.

Some of the following information may be of help when eating out. You will probably have to ask the waiter to bring your bill. They feel that bringing the bill before you ask is insulting and insinuates that they want you to leave, so they wait until you ask. Local drinks; rum, tequila, kahlua, beer, and fruit drinks called *frescos* are very inexpensive but imports, such as scotch and Canadian rye are pricey, and coke and/or coffee is about the same price as beer. Mexicans seldom drink coffee except in the morning so, at many of the smaller more traditional places, you will likely get instant if you order it later. There are two breweries and most restaurants and bars sell just one. I drink Pacifico (made in Mazatlán) if available and Dos X's (pronounced Dose Eckees) in the other places. I don't like Corona, although many people do. Always ask for limes and squeeze one in your beer...nice taste! If you choose to hire wandering musicians to sing to you in a bar or restaurant, try to find a group of at least three and ask for '*Song of Mazatlán*'. They usually charge 20-30 pesos, but negotiate. You can start at 10 am (at *Coral Reef*, for instance) and for the rest of the day travel around finding some place that is selling cheap drinks; the *Happy Hour Stroll*.

Be careful with your health, of course, but don't be paranoid. All restaurants in Mazatlán use bottled water in food, drinks and ice cubes so be comfortable eating or drinking. I suggest you carry waterless hand sanitizer and a few sheets of toilet paper, as bathrooms often have no soap or paper. Wash your hands often as we have little immunity to the different bacteria found in Mexico and treat any injury immediately as the heat and humidity encourages infection. If needed, the very modern and efficient *Sharps Hospital* is just minutes from the tourist zone.

There is so much to do that you will need to be stringent with your time. Check out the many tours; any we have taken were very interesting with good transportation and knowledgeable and friendly guides. Activities around town will satisfy all, from macho to couch potato. Catamarans, kayaks, surfboards, snorkel equipment, beach volleyball, bungi jumping and parasailing are all offered on the beach with instructors, if needed. There are bridge parties organized in most hotels, bingo at *The Place*, aqua exercise in many pools and Mexican pottery painting in the lobby of the Playa Mazatlán. Sport fishing is available in varied time and cost categories. For most of these, register with your hotel, for the rest just go to the beach and negotiate prices with the owners of the equipment.

Fiesta Mexicana is a spectacular evening of Mexican folkloric music, comedy and dance. I suggest the one at the Playa Mazatlán as the best. It costs about \$40 Cdn but a great Mexican buffet and free domestic drinks make it a reasonable deal. Holiday Inn and El Cid also offer Fiesta and there is an open-air venue called *Spectacular* if you wish to investigate

Check to see what is playing at the *Theatro Angela Peralta*, a beautiful old (historical) live theater, downtown in the *Plaza Machado*. Last year I went to Folklorico and one year I saw the Symphony Orchestra. It is dressy but inexpensive (I paid \$10 Cdn.) You can get tickets at the theatre, just before the performance. End your evening with supper at the nearby *Pedro & Lola's*, *El Tunel* or *Cafe Pacifico* after the show. Walking around the *Plaza Machado*, you can see the lovely colonial architecture and some of the reconstruction of the old town area.

Be sure to see the *clavadistas* (cliff divers). You will observe daring divers, many barely into their teens, dive from a tower into waist-deep water below. Your hotel will have information on when and where. About ten pesos are sufficient for the collection afterwards. There are some great little open-air souvenir stalls along this area.

Entrance to the Aquarium is just \$6. Featured are *lobos marinos* (sea lion) performances and a demonstration of deep sea diving two or three times a day. You will view aquariums containing 250 species of marine life from all over the world and a small aviary of tropical birds. Walk through the lovely adjoining botanical gardens where most of the trees are named. Here is the only place you will see a deer, although Mazatlán means *place of the deer*.

Downtown (*Centro*) is wonderful and quite safe. The *Sabalo Centro* bus will take you there and also return you to the tourist area. Take your dictionary, as many here do not speak English well.

Take a look through the spectacular *Basílica de la Inmaculada Concepción*, the Cathedral of Mazatlán. There are always people there who are praying so don't use flash if you are taking pictures. Don't be too risqué in your dress...slacks and blouse are fine but bikini shorts and short cut tops are considered to be an insult to God. Spanish women usually cover their heads but they don't mind if we don't. Men always uncover their heads.

The *Mercado Centro*, or Central Market, must be experienced. Crowded, noisy and smelly, it's still the most exciting place you can imagine! I find prices

on souvenirs to be higher than other places but it is fun to look. Shops around the perimeter sell fake Gucci, Seiko or Rolex watches for cheap prices. If you sew, be sure to check the material shops on the streets around the market, where I bought sheeting material for \$1 per meter. If you are interested in buying shoes or cowboy boots, prices seem to get better as you get farther away from the central market.

Plan a whole day to explore downtown. Sit in the shade at the plaza across from the cathedral and enjoy a cold drink from the restaurant under the bandstand while watching the pigeons. Banamex, across the street, will change Canadian money, and upstairs seating at the Panama Restaurant, across from the Cathedral, is clean and quiet.

There are three malls. Actually there are five, now, but one I don't like and the other is so new I don't know where it is. *La Gran Plaza*, *Plaza Ley del Mar*, and *Gigante* (just one large store) are my choices. The shops in the malls are expensive but their main stores, *Commercial Mexicana*, *Gigante* and *Ley* (combination food, liquor and dry goods), offer good prices. Check the low prices of fruit and veggies and you can understand why I lose weight while in Mexico; I eat them constantly.

There are hundreds of souvenir stores in the tourist area offering traditional silver, turquoise and topaz, pottery, leather goods, stone and wood carving, painting, weaving and, of course, some junk. *Sea Shell Museum* has great prices on all sorts of interesting and innovative seashell crafts. *Designers Bazaar* offers high quality Mexican arts and clothing and *Constantinos Leather Factory* can custom tailor leather goods in a couple days. Any place that has prices posted on the merchandise will not negotiate price, but will sometimes give you a deal if you buy more than one thing. The beach sellers and small shops will often give you the best deal when they are not busy (morning and late afternoon). Don't ever pay what they ask; offer half and then haggle.

If you want to buy a hat, look for 'Henry' on the beach in front of the Playa Mazatlán. Be sure it is Henry, as others will say they are. His hats all have 'Hats by Henry' on the band around the crown. Henry has been on the beach forever (or so it seems). He's a great guy and a wonderful fund of information if you stop and talk.

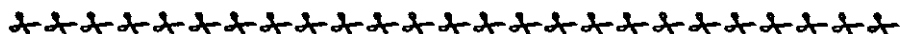
You can buy copies of nearly any perfume at about \$7 for a spray bottle of cologne or \$4 for a small bottle of pure essence. I suggest the *Perfumeria* downtown, on Angel Flores Street. Just walk west from the Banamex: you'll find it by its smell!

A great sightseeing tour is a walk along the *Malecón*. Southward from *Valentino's* (a large, Arabian nights styled building that houses numerous restaurants, bars and dance clubs), this magnificent 5-6 mile boulevard runs atop the raised seawall. You will pass many of Mazatlán's beautiful fountains and monuments, the cliff divers, *Playa Los Pinos* where the local fishermen sell their fresh catch, well known eateries such as *Senor Frogs* and *Shrimp Bucket*, ending at the *Olas Atlas Beach*. If you continue up the hill (*Cerro de Vigía*) and keep to the right, you will come to the bottom of a very long staircase that

takes you up to a lookout. Here you'll get a great view of *Cerro Creston* and *El Faro* (the lighthouse), which is the highest working, natural lighthouse in the world. You will also see much of the harbour, the sport fishing fleet, and *Stone Island*. Looking east, you will view downtown and the steeples of the Cathedral. You may meet and chat with some of the many people who stroll the *Malecón*. At night you see lovers, by 5 am joggers and, during the day and evening, tourists and locals.

Don't miss the famous sunsets, which are conveniently timed at about 5:30 pm! All along the *Malecón*, on hotel balconies, on the beach and in the bars, people stop to watch the sun drop into the ocean. Sometimes, as it disappears, there is a mysterious green flash. It is said that if you see this, you will return.

Mazatlán is the friendliest city I have ever visited. Certainly, they treat tourists well because we are their income, but it is more than that. They welcome us to their country as we would welcome someone into our homes. So dress casual, leave your watch in the hotel and enjoy every minute. Later today, in a small *cantina* with a cold *cerveza*, watch closely and maybe you'll see the green flash. ■



LIFE: *by anonymous*

You have to face the music before you can lead the band.

Life is what happens after you make other plans.

The rain falls on the just and also on the unjust, but chiefly on the just, because the unjust steals the just's umbrella.

Change is a process, not an event.

Have character - don't be one!

Cheer up! Tomorrow will be different...not necessarily better, just different!

I'm not going to worry unless the animals start lining up two-by-two for the next space shuttle.

Humour is the hole that lets the sawdust out of a stuffed shirt.

The Moon

Ruth McCulloch, Darwell W.I.
1st Place, Poetry, 2002

She sleeps by day, yet shines by night,
An iridescent ball of light.
Forged from the fires of space,
With silvery beams of shadowy lace.

Between the clouds and continents,
Reflects her light through the firmament.
And, with magnitude, she gave
Control to seasons, through the wave.

Light of the world, for a billion years,
A global disk to all, appears.
Nocturnal lantern in the sky,
An object to be reasoned by. □

(pen name) *Patricia Williams*

THE OLD TOWN

Mary Maggs, Princess Anne W.I.
2nd Place, Poetry, 2002

Just as the sun was going down,
We drove into the little town.
We stopped to have a bite to eat,
But all was quiet along the street.
The small café bore a sign of wood
Written on it was "closed for good"
As we walked along the street
Dust whirled up around our feet.
A swing moved slowly in the breeze,
Which rustled through the leafy trees.
What happened to this little town?
With all the buildings falling down.
The people who had come before
Farmed the land and built a store.
Then they opened up a school
Where children learned the "golden rule."
The little town was prosperous once
And catered to the people's wants.
Here they gathered, came to meet
The town was filled with busy feet
Friends met here in the small café
And neighbours passed the time of day.
Children played and had such fun
No one knew what was to come.
For the highway passed it by,
And then the town began to die.
The elevators were torn down
So farmers didn't come to town.
To the city they went to shop
And in the town they didn't stop.
Do the ghosts of time gone by
Walk the streets and wonder why
The people all have left the town?
Have they watched it tumble down?
Or does the town deserted lie
Silent under the prairie sky? □



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