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Labonte & Castonguay Family Stories

Eva A. (Castonguay) Labonte

Jean Paul Labonte

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Labonte & Castonguay
Family Stories

Eva A (Castonguay) Labonte 1935 ---- 2009
Jean Paul Labonte 1935 ----

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General Notes

January 2011

To: Mark; Pauline; Joline; Anne; Andre

Your Mother loved life and enjoyed writing about it. Some years ago, she set out to write about her life as a young girl growing up on a farm and the many joys, hardships, experiences and events that she lived during that period of her life. Once done with that era she continued writing about her life after she was married and up to the present, in a sense, a short, if not complete biography.

In addition to her short biography, you will find stories, events and incidents that occurred over her married life mostly concerning one of you.

This binder, amateurishly put together by me, will at least give you and your children and even future generations, a history of her life, thoughts, loves, faith, and many other characteristics of herself.

How many people can say they have a history of their mother or grandmother or great grandmother etc.? I, for one, have no knowledge of the lives of my grandparents or other ancestors. I would have welcomed the opportunity to have such history of my forefathers. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone would write their life story for the benefit of their children and future generations?

For you, it's a souvenir of your Mother as well as a history for your children and future generations.

Enjoy!

Love,

Dad

Note to all who read the content of this binder:

As was often the case, Mother (Eva) often made corrections or otherwise edited her writings but failed to delete or replace earlier versions. Hence, as I go through the various drives on the computer as well as other savings devices (CD's; thumb drives, etc.) I most always come up with numerous copies of the same article or writing. For example, "The Christmas Tree"-three different copies were found with three different dates as to when they were either written or edited.

In such cases, if some of the versions were substantially different, I've printed and saved all copies. In this binder, you will find a copy of each. In most cases however, the copies are very similar with a few minor or insignificant changes here and there, but basically, the same story, in which case only the latest dated version was printed and included in this binder.

Dad

Peter

Peter Castonguay was born May 3rd 1864, in Riviere Du Loup, a small town in the eastern Quebec Province. At the age of thirteen, Peter left home with Clara, an older sister, who had just gotten married and was moving to Vancouver. Peter was supposed to stay for a few months and return home to finish his schooling. He did neither. Still in his teens, he decided to take a train to go visit his parents. He traveled through the states, because connections were better in the United States than in Canada. For some reason, he stopped in the Dakotas, as they were then known. He fell in love with the area, and stayed there for some time before returning east.

Dr. Bourcette, Peter's brother-in-law was given a high position, in the Canadian Government Services for the Indians, out west. He asked Peter to accompany him. Peter did go west with him, but continued on to the Dakotas. He too was appointed as an Indian agent, but by the U.S. government. There he met Chief Sitting Bull. He had the greatest of admiration for the famous chief. Peter respected the Indians and they trusted him. By the time Peter met the chief, he was no longer the fierce warrior, but was traveling with Buffalo Bill Cody, in Wild Bill Hickok's Wild West Show. Peter's work was not with the Sioux, but with the Black Feet Indians, in what is now North Dakota. There was never a chance of mistaking Peter in a Pow Wow circle. The Indians dressed in buckskins, their dark eyes and hair shone like black mica by the camp firelight. Their skin glistened with oil they rubbed over their bodies. Peter's blond hair looked almost as white as his skin. His eyes, like the blue green of glacial ice, could send shivers down your spine. People had to be quiet to hear when he spoke, but his words cut to the matter, like a sword. He spoke with a straight tongue. He could come and go in the Indian encampment without fear.

While Peter was on a trip east, he learned that Chief Sitting Bull had been shot. The US Government was afraid of Sitting Bull and sent agents to arrest him. He was killed at Grand River, along with a few of his Sioux followers, who tried to protect him. Peter grieved the loss of such a great man. He deplored the drastic actions taken by the government.

Periodically, Peter would travel east to visit his family, but would return west to the Dakotas. On one of his trips east Peter met Mary, and fell in love with her. It is a mystery how he landed in Farmington, Maine, when his home was two hundred miles to the north, in Canada. Three of Mary's brothers worked on the railroad, and it is possible that they met, when Peter was traveling by train, and they took this handsome, blond, young man home for a visit. Peter, was a man of many talents, and loved to entertain people with his violin. He had the ability to take things that weren't working, apart, and fix them so they would work better than before. He was a charmer.

Peter and Mary were married March 3rd 1889, he was twenty-four and she was fourteen years old. They settled in Farmington, Maine where Mary gave birth to a daughter. Peter was working at the mill as a boiler engineer. For a man who had only an eighth grade education, it was an unbelievable feat, another testimony to his brilliant mind. Life was good, but Peter couldn't get the west out of his mind.

In 1893 Mary gave birth to a stillborn baby and later that year the government offered Peter a job as an Indian agent in North Dakota. Mary's parents were not happy, it was one thing to have their daughter

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married to a nice young man with a good job, and living near where they could be of help if need. It was altogether another thing to have her go out west living with the "wild savages" Indians. When they learned that she was pregnant again, they doubled their protests, but to no avail. Peter did not argue, but with quiet determination, accepted the job, and planned for the move.

Peter and Mary went to Canada to visit his parents before traveling to this new home. Josephine, their little girl, was ill and so the grandparents prevailed in keeping the baby, so she could get medical attention that was not available in the Dakotas.

Mary gave birth to twins the first autumn that they were there. The living conditions were primitive, and Mary woke up one morning to find snow on one of the baby's forehead. Both infants died within a few days. Mary had five more children in the next five years.

The pay of an agent was not sufficient to raise a family. Peter became a grain farmer, along with his work with the Indians. Life as pioneers was difficult at best, and as much as Peter loved the west, Mary distrusted the Indians, and longed to return home to the east.

They had to grow most of their food and make their own clothing. If they needed yarn to knit, they raised sheep, if they wanted eggs or poultry, they kept chickens. Cows provided milk, cream, butter, cheese and beef. There was no refrigeration, so everything had to be dried, canned, salted, or cured and smoked. During the fall and winter months, Farmers scheduled butchering their beef at regular intervals, sharing their meat with the other neighbors. As each farmer slaughtered his beef, he would give back to the farmers what he had received, providing everyone with fresh meat during the cold part of the year. Potatoes, turnips, carrots, beets, and any other root vegetable, were put in root cellars. Out on the Great Plains, meat was a rare treat in the summer months. Unlike in the eastern states, where in the winter, ice was harvested for use in the summer months. There were no means of storing meat or dairy products. A stew pot was kept simmering at all time to keep bacteria from forming. The only kind of meat they could have in the summer was chicken or small game that could be consumed within a day or so.

Mary's biggest concern was how to keep her babies dry. Mary had to make her diapers from flannel cloth. Rubber pants or plastic liners were not even thought of back then, to say nothing about disposable diapers. When a baby wet, everything got wet, including the person holding the baby. Women would sew thick pads, to prevent these wettings from occurring, but somehow it always got through. When she changed their diapers she had to change all the child's clothes. There was no such thing as a washing machine. Washing those wet clothes, including bedding, meant she had to lug pails of water to be heated on the stove and washed in tubs.

Mattresses were made from straw and pillows from chicken feathers. When they got really bad the "thicking, a thick, canvas like cloth," covers were emptied, washed and filled with fresh straw.

There were no hospitals or doctors for miles around. Antibiotics, vaccines, and preventive medicines were nonexistent, home remedies were used. Some really worked well. Many of them gave birth to the adage, "Old Wives Tales."

It is amazing that children survived such living conditions.

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Peter told of having to go get supplies at a trading post with a buckboard (a four wheel horse drawn cart) and his team of horses. There were no weather forecasts back then, and people had to rely on their ability to read nature's signs. The skies looked menacing, but he was low on supplies and thought he had time to get there and back before the storm broke. It was not uncommon for farm families to be snowbound for weeks. In the winter, people kept enough supplies of food for the family, and feed for the livestock on hand. He reached the trading post and got the wagon loaded. The storm was still holding off, so he started for home. Halfway home, but still a couple of hours away, he found himself in the middle of a blinding blizzard. He could not see any of the landmarks to guide him, and knew that he might be leading the horses far off the trail, he also knew the team would go wherever he was steering them to go. He detached the reins and permitted the team to take the lead. The snow was getting deeper, and it became more difficult for the team to pull the wagon. The team kept moving ever so slowly. After what seemed an eternity they pulled up to his bam. Peter knew that animals have a natural instinct to return home and that is what saved his life.

Winter storms were severe on the plains. Whiteouts were common during blizzards. There were no trees or hills to slow down the wind. Peter would tie a rope from the house to the bam, to be used as a guide wire, so not to lose his way between the two buildings during these fierce snowstorms. The whiteouts were such, that a person could be lost just a few feet from his house, and with the wind-chill temperature far below zero, that person would be dead before anyone could find him. Mary knew that if anyone could survive through a storm like this, it would be her husband. She had tied the rope to the bam when she went out to do the chores, a job that she had to do whenever he was away.

Visiting, was almost more work than it was worth. If Mary wanted to visit a neighbor, she had to harness the horses, hitch them to a wagon, get all the children in the buckboard, and ride over the rough terrain of the prairie. The trip could take anywhere from half an hour to an hour. She and the children had no protection from the weather. She had to bring food and changes of clothes. Then she had to repeat the whole process to be home in time for chores.

Many of the farmers had large pig farms. In the fall they would all get together to drive the pigs to the trains, that took them to the slaughter houses. Peter would of course go with them. The women would be left to tend the homesteads. The crops would all be harvested, so it was a matter of taking care of the animals, and doing the chores. It was no easy task for a young woman with babies to care for. The men were gone for weeks. When they finish the drive, they would be paid in cash according to the number of pigs that made it. That is when Peter started drinking. Mary hated to see him go, because she knew he would spend a good portion of the money, so badly needed for supplies, on booze.

While on such a trip, farmers came to Peter and told him that they were having trouble with the knotting mechanism on their bailer. He looked at it and when he got home worked at figuring what was wrong. He made one that worked. He told Mary he was going to town to have it patented. He showed off what he had done. They got him drunk, and when he woke up the next morning, and went to the patent office, he found that someone had stolen his design while he was out drunk, and had already applied for his patent.

There were times when Peter had to be away on business and Mary was left alone. Peter felt that his family was safe because of his relationship with the Indians. That contradicts what Peter was often heard saying, "Never walk in front of an Indian."

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In the 1800s there was much mistrust on both sides. Peter and Mary's property bordered the Indian reservation, and the Indians would cross their land at will. They had no qualms about walking on the farm, saying that by rights, this was their property that they had never sold or given it away. They claimed the government had simply taken the land, and felt it was stolen from them.

One time, Mary watched as several braves were passing by, stopped, sniffed the air, walked over to the dung heap, picked up a dead calf that had been thrown there, and walked away. Other times she would see the chief with a band of braves dressed in their war regalia and war paint on their faces. They would be in full gallop, with a definite purpose in mind. There were no doubts in Mary's mind that they were on the warpath. The only question was, who and where? After such sighting, she would hear that a settlement or farm family had been attacked. The pioneer families were vulnerable, as many lived miles from one another. The Indians, making the settlers virtually defenseless against an attack, outnumbered the small communities.

Whenever Mary would bake "galettes", these are a cross between a pancake and a cookie; she would make a double batch. She would store what she needed for her family and leave the rest on the table. The Indians would come along, smell the galettes, open the door to the kitchen, come into the house, and sweep all the galettes into their leather tunic and leave as quietly as they had come. It didn't matter if Mary and the children were inside the house, or outside, they just took the galettes as though they belonged to them. Who knows, maybe Peter told them to help themselves.

Although Peter was friendly with the chief, Mary was afraid of the Indians. Mary felt certain that the chief would honor his friendship with Peter but was not comfortable with some of the young braves. Many of them went on war parties as young as thirteen years of age. Mary called them, the hotheaded teenagers. She told Peter that she had no confidence that these young braves would abide by the chief's dictates. She reminded Peter, that Chief Sitting Bull was only fourteen when he went on his first war party, and he was still a teenager when he became chief. An even more disturbing aspect was the half-breeds. Offsprings of Indian women who were kidnapped and raped by white men, some were soliders, others traders, and frontiersmen. The Indians retaliated by raiding homesteads and carrying off young girls to their encampments. The women on both sides were raped and abused. Their babies suffered an even worse fate. They were not accepted by either side but considered trash. Often times the young half-breed men banded together and became the terror of the region.

In one instance, they could see a fire and smoke in the distance. Somehow, the neighbors had established a signaling system to gather the neighbors in a time of need or danger. They went together to investigate. They learned that the Indians had attacked a nearby homestead, and killed everyone there. Upon searching further, a young baby was found in the oven, he was totally charred. Whether the mother had put the baby in a cold oven to hide him from the Indians or the Indians put him in a hot oven, or if the baby burned in the oven because the Indians burned the house down, we will never know.

This horrific event had such a traumatizing effect on Mary that she never felt at ease with the Indians although Peter kept trying to convince Mary they were safe because of his good relationship with the Blackfoot tribe. Whether this incident was the catalyst that changed Peter's mind or if it was an accumulation of events he never said. But Peter sold his farm and moved his family east.

In the peace museum, in North Dakota, there is a picture of Peter taken when at the time he was an

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Indian agent.

Eva Castonguay

Notes to "Gospel According To Eva"

This particular story, including the two "add-on" at the end of the main article, seem to have been typed on a typewriter rather than on the computer. I could not find any of this on any computer storage disc or hard drive etc.

If that's the case, the chances are that it would have been written by Eva (your mother) sometimes around the '90's before she started using a computer.

The addition of two not related items at the end of the primary article about her mother (also named Eva), is typical with Eva, your mother. In most of her writing's I find unrelated items added to the file.

Since I cannot print this story and the two add-on's from a computer storage device, I've photocopied it as-is for this book.

The first add-on, "A quote from a poem I wrote for my daughter, Joline" is puzzling because I don't know of any loss Joline would have had that would have prompted mother to write this poem.

The second add-on, a story about a found medal on the ocean floor, is equally as puzzling-it does not seem to have any bearing on the main story about her mother.

Gospel According to Eva

Before Vatican II, there lived in our town many God-fearing people. They were strong in their faith. They lived by the Ten Commandments and the church laws. They were good people. They did the best they knew how with the knowledge that they had. These people were my ancestors.

It was the late 1930s when Charles, a just, God fearing man, decided to move his family to a farm seven miles from town. He and his wife, Eva, did not like the influence city life had on their children. This meant the children had to leave their friends from their parochial school. It also meant leaving an urban community that was over 80% Catholic to a rural area that was predominately Protestant. It was a period when the Protestants were very anti-Catholic and vice versa. When the children started school, they were prime targets for vocal abuse. The few Catholics that attended their country school had either left their religion or had become lukewarm in their faith. Charles would always say, "Never apologize, never deny, nor try to fluff off your faith. Don't be afraid to stand up for what you believe in".

Both parents forbade their children to poke fun or put down anyone else in retaliation. Revenge was not a word in either parents vocabulary. It was very difficult at times, for the children, to live by those standards. Charles and Eva had the courage of their convictions. They tried to lead their children down the right road leading to the kingdom of God. I, the youngest of the family, have to confess that I have made more than my share of detours.

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To his family, Charles represented the strength of the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, in their eyes, their mother was the beatitudes personified.

An example of Eva's gentle persuasion.

There lived in the same area a large family who suffered the abuse of everyone. The husband, a man of unusually small stature, was married to a woman who tipped the scales at well over 300 pounds. They were the poorest of poor, living in a rundown house with no electricity or indoor plumbing. They were a catholic family, who for some reason had stopped going to church. Not long after Charles and Eva had moved to that area, the poor man's wife had another baby. Although Eva had a large family of her own to care for, she found time to go over to help this unfortunate woman. Eva took from her meager larder to bring food for the children. Not long after, both the man and woman started attending mass, the older children were taking religion classes! When the roads were impassable because of snow in the winter or mud in the spring, they took their lessons from Eva. This had been granted by special permission from the local priest, an unusual privilege at that time. That May half of the children, from family, received one or more sacraments.

Eva, a woman of many talents, was always ready to share or help anyone who needed help. She taught many of the ladies around how to sew, cook, or how to make some of the many crafts she was adept at.

Her gentle manner and genuine love for people soon won her the acceptance of the Protestant community.

Eva, had very little worldly wealth, yet happiness seemed to surround her. She got great satisfaction in doing little thing well. Her motto was no matter what you do... "If anything is worth doing, then it's worth doing right. Even if your just washing a floor, wash it to the best of your ability" She lived her whole life that way.

Eva lived in that community for about 20 years. When she passed away, she received masses, flowers, and tributes, from both the Catholics and Protestants. The church was filled to capacity with people who claimed her for their friend. This gentle woman whose only claim to fame was being a housewife and mother, had captured the affection and respect of all those who lives she had touched.

For their heritage, Charles and Eva have given their children, good morals to live by. They have instilled in them a deep love of God and a sense of responsibility towards their fellow man. They also left their family a treasure of wonderful memories.

A quote from a poem I wrote for my daughter, Joline:

*Those we love we only borrow,
TO share our lives, joys, and sorrow,
So God gives us memories to fill our hearts,
To ease the pain when we have to part.
So when I get lonely, I need only start,
Looking at this memories within my heart,
Turning the pages till I come to a smile,
Then I stop to visit with them awhile.*

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One person found a medal with the image of Mary and Jesus on it when hunting for treasures on the ocean floor. The man said this was probably worn by a priest or sailor as a good luck charm. Laughing, he continued to say, "It didn't work." Little does he know that it might have done its work very well. It is the Soul that it was protecting and not necessarily the body.

My Memories of Life on the Farm

Notes on "My Memories of Life on the Farm"

This file would be considered the Main file - the heart of this whole book.

It is, in essence, an autobiography of Mother. It is seventy-two pages long. It is listed on your thumb drive as "Life on the Farm" and "Life on the Farm (2)". The one printed is (2)-some obvious grammatical corrections were made.

My Memories of Life on the Farm

All but four of my ten siblings have passed away and time seems to march on very quickly. My children have asked me to write about my childhood. The twentieth century has experienced the most technological changes than any other period of time. Being born in the first half of that century, I have witnessed many of these changes first-hand. I was born September twelve, nineteen hundred and thirty five. World War II was just on the horizon.

I was the last of eleven children born to Charles and Eva Castonguay. Three of my siblings had died before I was born. Maurice died at birth; Jeanne D'Arc and Eva died during the 1929 meningitis epidemic. Arthur, Lawrence, and Alfred died very young. Their passing has left a terrible void in our family.

It's been only a few months since I started this family history and this week my brother Henry passed away (Dec. 27, 2004). He and I had made plans to get together to share some family stories. He was twelve years my senior. He knew more about the early years on the farm. With him went a lot of our history. I feel a greater urgency to get more of this history on paper.

The following experiences are not written in chronological order and are triggered by some event occurring in later years. Many of my childhood memories are brought back by something that my children or grandchildren did or say, and this goes on even now.

Peter Goes West

Members of Pepere's family (family of Pierre Castonguay/Mary Fournier) told me many of the stories written here. More than one person affirmed most of the stories, therefore I am relatively sure of their authenticity.

Peter (Pierre) Castonguay was born May 3, 1865. At the age of 15 he went out west to Vancouver, in British Columbia, Canada, with Clara, his oldest sister. Clara was a schoolteacher, and was traveling with her new husband, Joseph Litalian, a house builder. Peter stayed only about a year in Vancouver. We know he went to South Dakota, where he lived among the Indians and there he met Chief Sitting Bull. This happened in the 1880's long after the chief had stopped leading his people in battle and during the time Chief Sitting Bull was part of Wild Bill Hitchcock's Wild West Show. The fact that

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Peter was only twenty five when Chief Sitting Bull was killed in a gun battle, it seems rather unlikely that he had much to do with him. But, just the fact that he was there at that point in history and got to know Chief Sitting Bull is intriguing enough for me. Gramps traveled extensively back and forth to Maine but his heart was always out west. Gramps worked for the government as an Indian agent.

Peter came back to Maine. He fell in love with a young girl nearly half his age. Peter was twenty-four and Mary Fournier was only fourteen when they were married. Her parents, Gilbert and Genevieve Fournier, consented to the marriage because they thought Peter were such a nice boy and a "good catch." It was not uncommon for girls to marry young in those days.

Peter was a French Canadian from St Helen de Kamouraska in the Province of Quebec. Mary was of French decent (Franco American) from Farmington, Maine. Peter and Mary were married March 3, 1889. They had one daughter, Josephine, bom in Maine, before they went west to North Dakota. It would seem that Charles and Delima Castonguay, Peter's parents, thought it would be best for their young daughter-in-law, not to take a small baby on such a long trip to the unsettled west. Josephine was ill and she needed eye surgery, plus the fact that Mary was in her third pregnancy, her second child having been bom January 29 1893, was stillborn. It was decided to leave Josephine with the paternal grandmother Delima and two great aunts.

They left for North Dakota July 17, 1893. We know she had a set of twins while she was in Dunseith, North Dakota. Uncle Pete was not bom until June of 1894. So we know it was not Uncle Pete.

There are no known living children between Aunt Josephine and Uncle Peter. Mary (Grammy) told my mother how she lost twin girls because of the poor living conditions. Grammy woke up one morning to see snow on the head of one of the twin girls. The baby died a few days later and the other twin died not long after. I never knew the names of the twins. She related this incident and many more to her children, as they became adults.

Aunt Marguerite, and my mother spoke of the twins and how it must have been difficult for my grandmother to be so young and alone in such a hard place and hard times. Aunt Odelie, the only remaining living aunt, said that she remembered that same story but did not know the names or dates. When they arrived in North Dakota they lived in what we would consider a shack, with no indoor plumbing and the walls of the shack were not insulated. It is amazing that any of the children stayed alive under those conditions.

Peter Jr. was bom in Dunseith, North Dakota in June of 1894. Charles, my father, was bom on January 10 1896, followed by Marie, Joseph, George (1900) and Anne (1901).

Mary had twenty-two pregnancies. Many died; she had some miscarriages, the set of twins that died and we know of one stillborn. Thirteen lived to adulthood. They all lived to be into their seventy and eighty years of age. They were a tough bunch.

Grandfather Peter's homestead was adjacent to the Blackfoot Indian Reservation. Dad (Charles) remembered seeing the Indians pass by their home and of one incident in particular: Watching a few young braves walk by the bam where a small dead calf had been thrown out on the dung heap, they stood there and sniffed the air for a few moments, went to the dung heap and took the dead calf with them.

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Dad recalled that his father was friendly with the chief, but that his mother was afraid of the Indians, and for good reasons. In one instance, they could see a fire and smoke in the distance. Somehow, the neighbors had established a signaling system to gather the neighbors in a time of need or danger. They went together to investigate. They learned that the Indians had attacked a nearby homestead and killed everyone there. Upon searching further, a young baby was found in the oven, he was totally charred. Weather the mother had put the baby in a cold oven to hide him from the Indians or the Indians put him in a hot oven, or if the baby burned in the oven because the Indians burned the house down, we will never know. This horrific event had such a traumatizing effect on my grandmother that she never felt at ease with the Indians although grandfather had a good relationship with the Blackfoot tribe.

My brother, Lionel, said he remembered Gramps telling him that he was taught never to walk in front of an Indian. We have to remember that this was in the 1800s and there was much mistrust on both sides. He said that whenever Grammy would bake "galettes", these are a cross between a pancake and a cookie, she would make a double batch. She would store what she needed for her family and leave the rest on the table. The Indians would come along, smell the galettes, open the door to the kitchen, come into the house, sweep all the galettes into their leather tunic and leave as quietly as they had come.

Another time, Gramps told of having to go get supplies at a trading post with a buckboard (a four wheel horse drawn cart) and his team of horses. There were no weather forecasts back then and people had to rely on their ability to read nature's signs. The skies looked menacing but he was low on grain and thought he had time to get there and back before the storm broke. It was not uncommon for a farmer to be snowbound for weeks. In the winter, people kept enough supplies of food for the family and feed for the livestock on hand.

He reached the trading post and got the wagon loaded. The storm was still holding off so he started for home. Halfway home and still a couple of hours away, he found himself in the middle of a blinding blizzard. He could not see any of the landmarks to guide him, and knew that he might be leading the horses far off the trail, he also knew the team would go wherever he was steering them to go. He detached the reins and permitted the team to take the lead. The snow was getting deeper and it became more difficult for the team to pull the wagon. The team kept moving ever so slowly. After what seemed an eternity they pulled up to his bam. Gramps knew that animals have a natural instinct to return home and that is what saved his life.

Winter storms were severe on the plains. Whiteouts were common during blizzards. There were no trees or hills to slow down the wind. Pepere would tie a rope from the house to the bam to be used as a guide wire, so not to lose his way between the two buildings during these fierce snowstorms. The whiteouts were such that a person could be lost just a few feet from his house and with the wind-chill temperature far below zero, that person would be dead before anyone could find him.

Dad also recounted how they would have "pig drives". Slaughter houses were far away, so the farmers would gather their pigs and have a pig drive much like the famous cattle drives of the West.

Gramps was an extremely intelligent man. He invented the knotting tool for the International Harvester Baler. But alas, by this time he had become a heavy drinker and gave the design away for a bottle of booze. He would take a business and make it flourish only to leave or go on a binge and lose it all. He bought a farm in Jay, he built it up to a good paying enterprise then left to go west again

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leaving his wife and young children to look after the farm. Grammy was always pregnant by the time he left for the West. He would not come back until she was ready to have the new baby or had just had it. He did this repeatedly. Dad worked on the farm with his older siblings to help them make a living for the family.

One time Gramps took Alfred and Gilbert, two of his sons, west with him. They each bought a homestead from the government, one hundred and sixty acres, for ten dollars. They had five years to develop the land and build a road. Aunt Odelie Brochu Castonguay's parents had bought a homestead close to Gramps and the two boy's land.

The Brochu's developed theirs. Aunt Odelie met Alfred there when she was only twelve years old. It would seem that Gramps and the boys lost their land because they did not develop it.

Aunt Odelie said that Gramps was very friendly with the Indians. They hunted together and drank together. They lived as neighbors for ten years before she came east to marry Alfred. She did clear up one rumor; someone had said Gramps had a young squaw woman with little metisse (half-breed) children running around. She said definitely not. If he had been a womanizer he certainly did not show it when he was in Maine. He never looked at another woman even after his wife had died. He was so handsome I am sure that he could have had a number of women. His sons never hid the fact that he was an alcoholic or that he was neglectful of his family yet they always came to his defense.

Dad did not like gossip and if he came in on such a conversation he would tell us to stop it.

Aunt Josephine

Josephine, the eldest child, was born in Maine, but when Gramps decided to go west again, they went to Ste Helen de Kamouraska to bring her back with the family. She had stayed in Canada with her grandparents up to this point. Josephine was very unhappy in Maine with her family. By then she had grown accustomed to a different lifestyle. Josephine was sixteen when her parents brought her back. She had been raised alone and pampered by her grandparents. She had been educated in parochial schools with plenty of good food and nice clothes.

Josephine had been born with an eye defect; she was crossed eyed. Even though she had had surgery to correct her eyes and wore glasses, her infirmity still showed. When she lived on the farm in Maine with her family, a couple of her brothers teased her. They would take her knife and fork and cross them at her plate. She expressed that that hurt her feelings and made her feel she was not a part of the family. She said that God punished them because they each had a child with crossed eyes. When I was young, I remember thinking I was glad that Dad was not one of them that teased her or else I might have had crossed eyes too. In fact, Auntie told us that Dad always tried to protect her from their teasing. Only later did I find out that it was not "God" that punished them but that they had inherited a flawed gene.

Josephine had been brought up with the nuns and taught proper etiquette in Ste Helen de Kamouraska. On the other hand, none of her brothers and sisters had attended school and were a little on the "wild side." Grammy and Gramps came to the conclusion that, not only was Josephine not happy, she probably would never fit-in with the rest of the family and her being there caused a rift among the rest of the children. It was decided to let her return to her grandparents in Quebec.

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Josephine life was not a happy one. She married her first cousin. She became pregnant eleven times and lost all of them through miscarriages or a few months after they were born. One child lived to the age of four years, but she too died. Her husband left her for another woman, his secretary.

Josephine came every year to visit her parents and siblings. She often stayed with her sister Marguerite. From there she would go visit from one member of the family to another. But even at that late stage of her life there was bickering between the sisters when she came down.

She loved Dad and got along well with Mom, and that made her tops in my book. She was a pretty woman, always well dressed. One time she spent two weeks at our house and on one afternoon, she played tiddlywinks with me. I was in seventh heaven. She told me a story about how someone had stolen her pocketbook in church and had taken all the money she had. She was so upset she never went back to church. We were brought up strict Catholics and the fact that she had left the church put her soul in jeopardy. That made me so sad, I could not fathom anyone taking a chance of not going to heaven.

Somehow, now that I am older, I feel that the loss of her children and the break up of her marriage had more to do with her leaving the church than the loss of money. As I look back I can see that even though she got more material things than the rest of her siblings she was probably the least happy of the lot.

When the family got together at weddings or family reunions, the brothers and sisters would sit in a group, talk and laugh for hours. If she were here on a visit, she would join them but was more reserved. They would tease her. The difference now was that they were adults and it was done in "good jest". She would laugh and say, "You're such a bunch of crazies". It seemed the older the family grew, the more they got closer to one another.

Dad Meets Mom

When Dad was seventeen he had an appendicitis attack. He was in the hospital for six weeks. Charles F. Castonguay and his cousins, Angela and Eva, went to see Dad while he was in the hospital. Eva thought Dad was the most handsome man she had ever seen.

When Dad left the hospital he went back to the farm until he was old enough to go out in the woods as a lumberjack. He earned a dollar a day for ten hours of hard work chopping wood. Dad and Eva met again when she was nineteen and he was twenty. A year later, on May 14, 1917, they were married. Charles F married Angela. He was first cousin to Dad and third cousin to Mom and Angela. They had to get a dispensation from the church to get married.

Dad went to work in the paper mill and was making good money. He and Mom had managed to save five thousand dollars. In 1925 the I. P. Mill went on strike. Dad would not cross the picket line. Cramps had gone on still another of his western trips and Grammy Castonguay was about to lose the farm. Dad went up on the farm with his family and with the five thousand dollars he had saved, put the farm back on its feet. A few months later George told him that he was getting married and he was taking over the farm. Dad moved back to town, but now all his savings were gone. He went back to the mill.

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Uncle Peter asked Dad to help him build his house. It seems that Dad could figure in his head all the sizes of the lumber, the amounts needed, all the material needed, the angles for the dormers and came down to exact measurements from the pitch of the roof, to the placing of the windows and doors.

My Uncle Pete was building an apartment building and every chance my father had he went to help his brother. They were always close and helped each other out. They went up on the farm to plain the wood for the house. It was a cold wet day. It was a holiday and Dad had the day off from work so he went to help Uncle Peter. The planer wasn't working right so Dad went to oil it. His glove got caught in the blades and he cut the four fingers of his right hand. He took out his pocketknife and gave it to his brother Peter and told him to cut the rest of the skin. He held his hat with this left hand and walked all the way home; I would guess about a thousand feet or more. His sister Marguerite was washing the floor with a tub of water. He held his hand over the tub. He passed out. They hitched the horses to go to town to get the doctor. It took well over an hour for the doctor to get there. Dr Croteau pulled the skin from the top of his hand and sewed it to the palm of the hand. Without the painkillers that we have today he suffered for weeks before the nerve endings healed.

He was now out of work with five young children. With the help of my grandfather Litalien, Dad made himself a hand out of steel and leather. The glove part that fit over the hand was leather. On the back part of the hand he had shaped a flat plate that curved at the end where his fingers used to be. Then another thick piece of leather covered the flat part of the steel plate, leaving the curved part like a claw to be used to hold his tools. No one wanted to hire him. We learned many years later that Peter had gone to the local grocery store and had told the owner to give Mom and Dad a line of credit so they could feed their family and he would be good for it if Dad couldn't pay. It was not completely paid off until years later when Mr. Dubord, the storeowner, built a new store. Dad was on the farm by then and had his sawmill. Dad furnished the lumber for the store. He paid off the running debt he had for all those years. It was only then that Mr. Dubord told Dad of Uncle Pete's act of good will.

Dad was a whole year out of work, until one day, the parish priest, Father Pomerleau, came to the house on a parish visit. My mother was in bed having given birth to Jeanne Dare.

He looked at my father and asked why a young man like him was not at work. Dad said no one would hire him because of his hand. He then asked my father if he could work. Dad told him that he had put in the door and widow casings in the rectory for Father Le'Guennec, the pastor before Father Pomerleau. Dad told him he could still do the same quality work and that he was willing to do anything to earn money for his family. The priest hired dad on the spot to do repairs to the rectory. He was never out of work from that day on.

His homemade artificial hand became a part of him. He took it off only to eat and go to bed. He hammered with it and pried with it, and was able to use any tool that he needed. Mom said he had made two or three of them. He improved on them before he settled on the one I always saw him with. Dad and Pepere Litalian and Pepere's brother Alphonse began building houses all over town. They were sought after for the quality of there work. Dad was the finished carpenter and cabinetmaker. In the winter months he worked for Uncle Charlie plowing snow for forty-five cents an hour. At one point Uncle Charlie was given permission to give him a twenty-cent raise. He went home and told Mom that now they could pay all theirs bills.

That was not the end of hardships for my parents. In 1929 my parents lost their two daughters and

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Grammy L'Italien during a meningitis epidemic. Lionel became ill. Mom and Dad were beside themselves with worry. Dad took out the castor oil and gave him a dose of it. A little while later he started to cry and passed what my mother said was "a yellow slimy mess that stunk bad." They had a hard time picking it up. He started to feel better and was ok. The doctors said it had nothing to do with meningitis, but Dad believed that is what saved his little boy. After the death of their second daughter, the department of health came to fumigate their house. Everyone was afraid of catching that dreadful disease. Mom, Dad and their five boys had to stay in their car for forty-eight hours. They ate sandwiches Mom had made, water in jars and a chamber pot for their needs during the fumigating process and waiting period.

Never turn a hungry person away

No matter how poor they were and how little they had in the house, my father and mother had agreed that anyone coming to their door for food would never be turned away. When Dad was in his late teens he had hired out as a lumberjack. He worked sixty hours a week for six dollars a week, or ten cents an hour. One week, he wanted to go home to see how his mother was doing. I imagine he might have had a touch of homesickness too. It was a two-day walk home. He set out with only enough food for lunch. The company would not give him more than that. By nightfall it had begun to snow and sleet intermittingly. He spotted a farmhouse. He was hungry, tired and cold so he went and knocked on the door. He asked if he could please have a piece of bread and could he sleep in their barn. He tried to explain the situation but they slammed the door in his face before he could tell them anything. He said he never remembered being so cold and tired as he was that night. He couldn't keep walking for fear of getting lost in the woods. He made it home the next day completely exhausted. From that day on, no matter how little he had, he shared it with those who had less.

During the depression years, it got known by the hobos, that traveled the trains, that there was a certain house that would give them food. A few times a year, these hobos would knock at the door and mom would give whatever she could spare. The town's people feared these men, as many had been robbed during the night. Of course the hobos were blamed for every crime that happened, whether they were guilty or nor. One day she was baking biscuits when a hobo came to the door. He pleaded with her to let him come in and sit while he ate. She knew that was not prudent, but gave in to his plea. She gave him a couple of hot biscuits and a bowl of meat gravy. He wolfed down his biscuits and asked if he could have another to finish his gravy. Then he asked if he could have more gravy to finish his biscuit. He played this back and forth until he was full. Mom said that he kept thanking her all the time he was eating. Then he asked if he could have a few for his friends. Mom put some in a bag and off he went. She watched him as he went towards the railroad tracks. He crossed the field and as he reached a rise he lifted the bag high up in the air and waved it. Mom said she thank God for keeping her safe as she watched him disappeared over the hill to meet his friends.

Dad moves his family to the farm

In 1939, my father moved his family to a farm in central Maine. It was at the end of the depression and just before World War II. Like most farms of that era, there was no electricity. Everything was done by hand. Farming was a good life, but everyone in the family had to work hard. I was only four and a half years old when we first arrived on the farm, yet some of the things are still vivid in my mind.

The first event that I can recall is the day we moved from the town of Jay to the farm, which was

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located in North Livermore. I remember that first day very well. There was something different about that spring day. People were rushing about and there was a sense of excitement mixed with sadness. My first memory of that day was my sitting on Mrs. Greenlaw's lap, and she was crying. She was talking with mother. We lived upstairs and she lived downstairs. I kept sliding off and she kept pulling me back, holding me with her round arms against full breast and ample belly which left very little lap for me to sit on. There was a platter of freshly fried doughnut on the table. She had given me one dipped in powdered sugar. My sisters kept running in and out of the kitchen.

Then one of them came in saying, "Daddy says it's time to go." I remember running towards my grandfather's car for the ride to our new home. Mrs. Greenlaw called out to me holding a bag in her hand. I looked toward my Dad who said, "Hurry we have to get going." As I took the bag from her she gave me one last tearful hug. The bag was filled with hot doughnut holes. Mrs. Greenlaw reminded me to share them with my brothers and sisters.

The seven miles to our farm might just as well have been half way across the world to a new country. We were leaving a modern house in the city. We had electricity and all the conveniences that went with it. We were moving to a farm where there was no electricity, therefore there wasn't any electric lights, refrigerator, or hot water. An outhouse replaced our modern bathroom; the paved roads and sidewalks were exchanged for dirt roads and fields. My brothers and sisters were taken from a large, catholic parochial school and registered into Payson Smith, a two-room, country school. The houses in Jay were close to one another and we had loads of friends.

The farmhouse we were moving to was almost two hundred years old. It sat on a rise overlooking the southeastern fields. There was an empty house across the yard that the Gordons had built for their elderly parents. Our closest neighbors were my Uncle Alfred and his family, who lived about a half mile to the south at the very base of Haggert Hill.

We could only see the top of the barn roof from our place. The Chicoines lived about a mile north on top of the hill. Our farm was the first of eight situated on that horseshoe road, all about a half mile one from the other.

The move must have been like a cultural shock for me as I remember our arrival to our new home quite clearly, but have no recollection of any part of my life before that day. Almost as though this was the first day of my conscious life. I knew we had the other things because my older siblings spoke of them. But for me, my life started on Mrs. Greenlaw's lap.

On the first Sunday we were there, Aunt Marie, my father's sister, brought us a mixed breed, half Collie and half German-Shepherd puppy. Aunt Marie put the puppy in my arms and said, "he is now your puppy. What are you going to name him?" I answered,

"Puppy". "No, no, he is a puppy, you have to give him a name," she said.

No matter how they tried to explain this to me I insisted that he was to be called, Puppy. And so he was named Puppy. I gave him water in a dish, which he did not drink but proceeded to step in it and spill the water. Then he piddled on the wooden floor of the summer kitchen. I picked him up and he piddled on me. I remember someone taking him from me and telling me he was scared because this was all new to him. I then learned to pet him with his feet on the ground.

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He grew to be a big gentle dog. He became my sister's best friend. At one point we credit him for saving her from drowning. He sat at her feet while she ate and shared her meals.

He slept at the foot of her bed. He was our playmate and guardian when we had to go into the woods or far off fields to get the cows, pick berries or do farm work

School

Small country schools dotted the countryside. There were no busing in those days and children walked to and from school every morning and afternoon. Parents drove the children if they lived too far for the children to walk. There were no sports after school or on weekends. The children all had chores to do to help out at home. Obesity was rare among the young. They ate fresh produces and meat. We never took the car to go anywhere that was a mile or less. We walked to almost everywhere we wanted to go. Fast foods had not yet been invented. All in all the people were much healthier. They were also more respectful of their elders.

One year the school board decided that they were going to offer a hot lunch program. The teacher of the upper grades, along with the eighth grade girls, was in charge of the hot lunches. Most of it was marginal in the taste department. The one I remember as winning the trophy for being the absolute worst was the burned green puree pea soup. My sister Rosalie was one of the girls on cooking duty that day. Fortunately for me, she snuck out a sandwich for me to eat. Fortunately for everyone, the hot food program did not last long.

Before all of the farmers left our road, we would sometimes car pool. The boys built a cap to go over the one-ton truck body and we would all climb in. Each family had five or six kids in school so it took a large vehicle to hold us all. There were benches along the sides and there were two windows in the doors for us to see outside. That was fun riding in the truck with all the neighbors together. One evening when we were taking the Chicoine family kids home we got to their home to see it up in flames. The sparks were flying over our house. It was a cold winter night and most likely an overheated stovepipe was the cause of the fire. They chose not to rebuild their home. They were the first of the families to leave the road.

We had no school buses. After the Chicoine and Drake families moved away we were the only ones left on the road. We had to be driven to school by our parents. In the morning, we would go down with one of the boys as they delivered the fresh milk from the morning chores a mile to the creamery. We would all pile in the cab of the truck. I being the youngest had to sit on someone as we went the two and a half miles to school. School let out at three o'clock in the afternoon. The men were usually in the fields working so we went to a small country store, Tenny's, and waited to be picked up. Sometimes it was four thirty, five o'clock before we got a ride home. Oh how we hated that. The mile and a half on Route 4 was too desolate and dangerous for us to walk. We would have done it in a minute had we been permitted to do so. A few times we went up the back way through the wood and home. One time we got shot at by hunters. That was the last time Mom let us go through the woods

Donat Chicoine had a farm a mile northwest of ours. They had a car with a rumble seat. It was so much fun to sit there. That was a poor man convertible.

Every year the school would have activities for the children and parents. We would put-on suppers.

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The parents would cook and the children would wait on tables. It was a social as well as a fundraiser. The older kids would help wash dishes. After the dishes were done there was a dance for the seven and eight graders. I had a crush on one guy and when he asked me to dance I was on cloud nine. I soon came down to earth like, real quick, because our knees kept hitting. To this day I do not know how we managed that, but that was such a letdown. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers we were not! He asked me out a couple of times, but dating at thirteen was out of the question for me so that ended my first big romance.

I have a lot of good memories of that small school. We played all sorts of games and pickup sports. We played baseball, football, marbles, cops and robbers and many more group games. I was a tomboy and wore slacks under my dress so I could do everything the boys did with carefree abundance. Grades K through 4 played on one side of the school and grades 5 through 8 were on the other side. Sometimes it was back and front of the school. This rule was pretty flexible and enforced only if the older kids got rough. But even then, after a few weeks the two groups were mingling again. The older brothers and sisters looked out for their younger siblings. There were large families and some, like the St. Pierre family had a child in almost every class.

The school sat up on a knoll. In the winter some of the kids who lived near the school would go out in the evening and would pour water on the long path leading up to the front door and let it freeze. We would slide down the path on our feet. At first, we were on our fannies most of the way, but some of us got quite good and could go the whole length without falling down. This went on for weeks. Then a couple of guys brought sleds and bumped some of the younger children or would not or could not stop at the end of the school grounds and slid right across the road. One day when we got to school our slide had been well sanded.

I managed to have good grades in all subjects except spelling and conduct. I was full of fun and always ready to have fun. Many times I was banished to the cloakroom for giggling or laughing in class.

One of my most embarrassing moments in my life happened at school. My mother made and repaired or altered all our clothes. She was quite the seamstress and for the most part we were well dressed. Whenever someone gave a box of used clothes, it was rummaged through to see what fit. The rest of the clothes were taken to a long attic closet under the eaves and stored for future alterations. Mom would buy white cotton fabric by the yard and from that came our underwear, slips, petticoats and, of course, our famous bloomers. Since cotton has no give to it, more fabric was used to permit the person to bend etc. These were gathered at the waste with an elastic. I was standing at the blackboard one day, when the elastic in my bloomers broke. It was a race to the floor with my bloomers winning. I grabbed them as well as I could and made a dash for the toilets. This of course had to happen when everyone in the class was looking at whatever I was writing on the board.

The teacher was fast in coming to my rescue with a couple of safety pins. I have the feeling it was not her first rescue mission in this area. I discovered that day why they were called bloomer. It is said that they were named for a Mrs. Bloomer, the lady who had invented them. I claim it is because when the elastic breaks on one of these ridiculous forms of clothing they can bloom from size small to a full-blown parachute in less than thirty seconds.

My sister Rosalie had a floral sleeveless dress that she wore as an undergarment. When her dress got wet she went into the toilet, flipped off her dress and came out with another dress on. The teacher

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made a double look and said, "How did you do that?"

At the end of the school year, they would gather all the eight graders from the surrounding schools and bring them to Riverside School for a week of testing and fun. I thought I was pretty hot stuff when I finished with the highest score. That was the end of my formal education until long after I was married and John, my husband, persuaded me to get my high school diploma. After which I went on to take some college courses. I managed to get good marks in all of them, thanks to spell check on computers.

Country fields

Ever since I can remember, my greatest moments of feeling complete joy were with nature. To walk in a meadow with the wind blowing in my face, to smell the wild flowers, to hear the birds or the sound of a brook, any or all of these gave me a sense that God must truly love me if he gave these free for me to enjoy. I was always fascinated by the fact that I could walk a whole mile in a straight line and still be on Dad's land. Of course, there were a few cow path curves, but those didn't count.

With the farmers leaving our area for one reason or another our farm got bigger. There were thousands of acres surrounding our farm that were owned by the state or absentee owners. We had fences to keep our cows on our property. Come late summer and fall when the grass was scarce the cows would often break through and enjoy the luscious grass on the other side of the fence. Dad would get all up tight and send my brother to mend the fences. One of my brothers went to the town office and got permission to let the cattle graze there at no cost. Even then my father was not comfortable with that situation. It meant that we had to gather the cows every day to bring them home for milking. This job landed on me, or my sister Laurette, as the men were usually busy with the crops. As soon as we got home from school we would change our clothes and go for the cows. It was such a beautiful walk that I never minded going.

Summers were like living a fairy tale. We were free to wander the farm at will. We had our chores to do but there was a lot of free time. My favorite memories were central to a large bolder that sat on top of Haggert hill. I would climb the hill and sit on that rock; think and day dream for hours. There, in the quiet of the countryside looking out over the valley, everything was possible.

I could see the farm buildings sprawled out below me. They were only about a half a mile away but looked like doll size. The smell of the different seasons was more intense in the country, unaltered by modern man's inventions. Smog, gas fumes, exhaust from countless factories, restaurants, and refineries, were things I never had to deal with. The sun warming the different vegetation emitted the most wonderful potpourri of aromas. Often times, the breeze would bring the most wonderful whiffs of smells that delighted the senses.

Wild roses grew all over stonewalls that outlined the fields, built from rocks picked off the fields. These walls served dual purposes; they were a convenient place to dispose of the rocks, and helped keep the cattle from the crops. All sort of vegetation grew along the walls. From massive trees to, ferns, raspberries, gooseberries, wild roses and other plants too numerous to list. From early June to late fall, they beautified our path to the lower pasture. We knew when and where wild flowers grew. The Lady's Slippers, the Violets, the Mayflowers, Daises and the Black-eyed-Susans grew in abundance. Queen Anne's Lace was one of my mother's favorites. Of course, where you have flowers you have insects. Where you have insects you have animals and birds that feed on them and so on up

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the line.

One day my sister Laurette and I were walking up the dirt road towards the upper pasture. There on a ledge, which was sticking out to the road, was a snake with a partly eaten frog in its mouth. We were both grossed out and hit the snake and pulled the frog out of its mouth. The poor frog was badly hurt and barely able to pull itself into the tall grass. We went home to tell our parents. To our dismay they explained it would have been better for the frog if we had left it alone, or at best, bonked it on the head to take it out of its misery and let the snake eat it. My mind knew this but my heart ached every time I saw an animal being eaten alive, such as this frog that was still struggling to get away even when it was almost all swallowed by a snake. I guess if the snake had killed it before eating it that would have been all right. I could never stand to see any creature suffer.

Here, the most incongruent species live next to one-another in perfect harmony. The meadows were full of insects each species intent on its survival which is dependent on the survival of the other forms of life. As youngsters we had a fascination for moss. It grew abundantly in numerous colors, shapes, and textures. It was a haven for bugs and insects as varied as the moss. It didn't grow thick on the ledges. When the hot summer sun dried it out it looked almost like coral. When it was dry it got crunchy and would crackle underfoot. The moss that grew under trees was thick and soft. A deep reddish brown near the roots, then moss green closer to the surface with stamens with yellow spores on the very tip end. Walking barefoot on moss such as this was like walking on the most luxurious carpet in the world.

The path leading to "my rock" was full of interesting things. There were the teaberry leaves that were a pale green in the spring, which would turn reddish green and then dark green as the season progressed. The many bell-shaped flowers promised much fruit.

There was the brook that supplied the cattle with drinking water. It started from a spring that bubbles out of the ground at the bottom of the hill on the northwestern side. From there, it meandered southward getting wider and deeper as it went along. I imagine that more springs fed it along the way. As you got to the deep side we could see brown brook trout swimming in the shallow pools. I would lay on the large rocks bordering the brook and lay very quietly waiting for them to come out of their hiding places. I learned that I could not let my shadow cast itself on the water because that would scare them away and it would take a long time for them to come out again. The water from the main spring was always icy cold even in the warmest summer days. It never froze over even in the coldest winter days.

At one point my father had the spring dug out so that when the cows went to drink more than one cow could drink at the same time. This was important, especially in the wintertime when the cows were thirsty because they were taken out to drink only twice a day. They would push each other to get to the water. When it was icy they would slip, fall and hurt themselves. When it was really cold they would not drink to their fill but would turn around and head back to the warmth of the bam. This of course would lower their milk output.

A small pond formed behind the mud dam, it was only about three or four feet deep. In the summertime, I went skinny dipping a few times when it was really hot, but it was too cold to stay in very long. It cooled you off in a hurry!

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Rarely did we see a stranger in our fields, with the exception of hunting season. It was such a good time to grow up in. We felt safe and secure on the farm.

In the summer months, I mostly wore plain tops and cotton shorts or simple dresses made out of flour sacs. I wore shoes to go to Sunday Mass. The rest of the time I went barefooted. I loved the feel of the grass and moss under my feet. The first few days of going barefooted, we would jump with a yelp whenever we stepped on a sharp rock. By the end of the season we could walk on gravel. We had a very conservative father when it came to our health and I don't think we were ever the first ones to go barefooted. We were also the last ones to be able to go swimming in the pond. He lost three children in their infancy, two to meningitis and he was not about to lose more. I'm sixty-eight at this writing and on a warm day I still love to kick off my shoes so I can feel the soft grass under my feet or the warm earth in the garden.

There was a stand of pine trees at the end of the lower pasture. What is neat about walking in a pine forest is that the pine needles keep the ground free of underbrush. You can see some distance between the trees. As you walk, the needles crinkle underfoot and you are surrounded with the smell of pine. It is like walking in a giant potpourri.

Life in a large family

Being the last of eleven children, I was used to hand-me-down clothes. I learned from an early age how to sew and to alter whatever clothes came my way. I didn't wear any of my sister Laurette's clothes, as I soon outgrew her in height. She was five foot two and I zoomed to five six. My older sister Rosalie, was five four but much stouter and much more "well endowed" than I was. We could not borrow each other's clothes. We soon learned to make do with what we had.

Mom loved flowers. She had a long row of Peony bushes and a few flowering shrubs. She so loved these plants. As she got older, I would care for her plants. Nothing made her happier than when I was all done weeding, she would walk among them and enjoy the flowers. My Aunt Marguerite gave Mom a shoot of Great Grammy's yellow roses. She was so happy to get those. I was up on the farm a few days ago and it is now two huge shrubs. My brother Lionel asked if I wanted a slip. One of these days, I have to go up and get it.

Mom kept scrapbooks. She made recipe books, and picture albums. In the winter when there was not much we could do outside, we would do lap work; knitting socks, mittens, embroidery etc. Some evenings we would look at the albums and she would tell us interesting stories about the people in the pictures. One picture was of uncle Charles F. Castonguay in an army uniform. We were surprised to learn that he had been in the Army. He was drafted and reported to Fort Dix. A few weeks later, the war ended and he was sent home, not having been there more than a few weeks, but long enough to have his picture taken in full uniform. Every year on Memorial Day he marched with the veterans in the parade. When he died he had a military funeral.

Mom had never taken art lessons, yet she could paint beautifully. She was artistic in every thing she did. She was not a well person. Whenever she was suffering from severe back and leg pains, she would sit on the couch with pillows pushed tightly around her back and legs to numb the pain and she would paint. She would hum all the time. We could tell when she got a spasm she would stop humming and bend her head. She was like frozen in mid sentence. When the pain subsided, she would resume

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painting.

Lawrence was able to carve. He carved a pair of horses out of wood. They stood about eight to ten inches high. They were gray and he had made a harness out of fine leather. Everything was made to scale. The sleigh, the logs and even the teamster with a pipe in his mouth fit perfectly with the rest. He had entered it in a fair and had won the blue ribbon. When he got married he left the carving at the homestead. Shortly thereafter, Mom gave it to him to bring to his home. A few years ago, I asked his kids if they still had the carvings, but only the oldest ones vaguely remembered them. It is sad that such beauty is now lost.

Henry made an ink drawing of covered wagons, the type that you would find when people went west. That drawing hung on our walls for a long time. I would sit in front of it and was fascinated by the depth of the picture. We could see the weariness in the faces of the pioneers, the minute details of the horse drawn wagons, the people walking along the wagons leading the cattle and even the pets looked tired. The end of the wagon train disappeared around a bend way down behind a hill.

Without television and video games, or other such electronic entertainment devices to waste our time, we developed our talents by getting into hobbies that interested us and filled the long winter evenings. We girls all did some form of needlework, such as crocheting, sewing, knitting and embroidery. We made much of our clothes and sometimes added some fancy stitching.

Mom was talented in many areas. She was a whiz at cooking, painting, sewing, embroidery, knitting and crocheting, decorating, flower arranging and the like. We all have some of her talents but none of us has all of them as she did.

Never say no to Mom

All the time I was growing up with my older brothers and sisters on the farm, I never once heard my mother raise her voice. I never got a spanking. My father's big voice was all we needed; we had "crossed the line" and we had better straighten out or else.

One day, the family was sitting at the table eating supper. Although I had not finished eating my meal, I left the table and went into my parent's bedroom, which, at that time, was right off the kitchen, for a comb. I went up to my mother with the comb and asked her to braid my hair. She looked at me and said, "As soon as I finish eating I will do your hair." I started to whine and Rosalie told me to come over, she would do it for me. I ignored her and leaning against my mother said, "I want you to do it." My mother said, "Go see Rosalie she will braid your hair." I replied in a very whiney voice, "NO! I want you to do it." My father pushed back his chair and said in a voice that could rattle window, "Did you say no to your mother?" He got up from his chair, grabbed his shaving strap that always hung on the end of the kitchen cabinet, his six foot frame grew to at least ten feet in thirty seconds. He raised his arm and slapped the strap on the floor. By the time the sound of the crack had reached my ears I was under the bed. "He said come out here and apologize to your mother." I just cried. Then he said, "Are you going to say no to your mother again?" "No" I squeaked. "Well, see that you don't. Now come hear and finish your supper." Rosalie braided my hair without any further fuss from me.

After working in the hot hay fields or hoeing long rows of com, we would go to Round Pond for a swim. This was not only refreshing and fun but a way to bathe. We didn't have indoor plumbing, and

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therefore no bathtub or shower. Although the pond's shore was within a few hundred feet from the lower end of the farm's boundary, we did not own any frontage on the small lake. In Maine, ponds are often the size of lakes out west. The owner of the shoreline had given us permission to use it any time that they were not there. On the rare times that they were there we used the public area. That was not as nice, there was no beach and the water was deep just a few feet from the shore. One day my sister Laurette, a fair swimmer, jumped off the pier, realized she was over her head and she panicked. She went under a couple of times yelling for help. I could not swim, ran to get dad. Puppy jumped in, she grabbed on to him. With my sister in tow, he swam to the end of the pier where my father pulled her out. Our "hero" became a celebrity in the family.

My mother had been born into a genteel family. She was educated in a parochial school run by Ursuline nuns. She was slight of built but strong of character. She weighed all of ninety-eight pounds and her waist measured only seventeen inches when she got married. She had large brown eyes and long brown hair that she wore in a bun. She loved to laugh and had a way of bringing out the best in people. Every time there was a family or neighborhood party, you could rest assured that they would ask my mother to sing.

Although all of the children could sing, none of us inherited her beautiful voice. Dad was the third child in a family of thirteen children. His parents had twenty-two babies, but nine died in infancy or at birth. My Father never went to school. He could, however, count and figure numbers faster in his head than most people could using paper or an adding machine. He tried many times to learn to read, but just could not do so. I believe that he was so intelligent in all manners of doing things that he had to have suffered from some sort of dyslexia, or learning disability. He was a carpenter by trade and he made blueprints for his customers and for many other builders. He was slightly over six feet tall, his neck size was seventeen and a half and his ring size twenty. In my eyes he always stood head-and-shoulders above anyone else, no matter how tall or intelligent they might be.

Arthur (1917-1964)

Arthur was the oldest of the family and eighteen years my senior. He was also my Godfather and a very special person in my life. He was born December 10, 1917. He was two months premature. In those days, the odds of a premature child surviving were not great. My mother and father had gone up to the homestead to visit Dad's mother for the holidays. There had been a bad snowstorm and the roads were not plowed, they were rolled to pack the snow. The snow was high enough to cover the fence posts. The horse went off the road and the sleigh flipped over. Mom was thrown against the front of the sleigh. They managed to get her to the farmhouse but during the next day she gave birth to my brother. It took five days before the doctor was able to see her and the baby.

My grandmother cared for them the first few weeks. Before giving him a bath, they would stoke the wood stove and when the oven was hot enough they would open the oven door and bathe him in front of the open oven to be sure he did not get a chill. They rubbed him with olive oil and slipped Arthur into a cut-off sleeve of one of Dad's winter long johns. For the first few weeks he slept in one of Dad's shoeboxes on the oven door. He was the first grandchild on both sides. You can imagine everyone was praying for his life to be spared. As a child, he attended parochial school. He went to work in the paper mill after the eighth grade.

He met Marieange Judd at a party. She was just fifteen years old and he was twenty-one. Dad tried to

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tell him that she was too young, but they were in love and nothing anyone would say would change their minds. They were married a year later, on August 26 1940, and moved up on the farm. They lived in what was known as the "little house", across the driveway from the main house, for about two years. Arthur was not earning big wages at the mill and this was a rent free house. The Godings', the original owners, had built that house for their parents. Marieange fixed it up really nice.

Marieange miscarried their first child. She was far along enough to know that it was a boy. When she got pregnant again, they moved to Chisholm to be closer to the doctors as it was a high-risk pregnancy, and she was due in March when the dirt roads up to the farm were often impassable. Their Second child, Marie, was stillborn. Dad went over to console them and found Arthur sobbing, holding and rocking the dead child. Everyone was heartbroken at losing the first grandchild. Sometime after that, Arthur got a job in Lewiston, a city twenty-six miles away. When he got lonesome he would call and tell Dad to pick him up at the bus stop. Or he would get off at the end of the road and walk the mile up to the farm.

About a year later Rita was born. She soon became the center of attention. I was proud to be an aunt at such a young age. Rita was a happy child, "naughty" and just dam right loveable. We never tired of having her on the farm. Marieange was so good about letting her come up for extended holidays. Claire was born a little over a year after Rita. It was wartime and Arthur was drafted into the Army Infantry. Marieange was pregnant. The day she went into labor he was boarding the ship for overseas duty. He begged them to let him stay until after the baby was born but to no avail. It was six whole months before he found out if it was a boy or girl and that both mother and child were doing well.

During wartime, all orders were classified secret and therefore, she had no knowledge of where he was. We could write to him and he was able to write to us but it went through channels. Some parts of his letters were censored to make sure that he did not inadvertently write something that could give information as to where they were or how many troops there were etc. There was a long period of time when we did not hear from him and, one day, got a telegram that he was injured in action. Mom and Dad gathered us in the family room and we prayed the rosary for his safety. Later that evening, we heard from the Red Cross that he had been found in a field hospital suffering from battle fatigue. We learned later that he had been buried alive from a bomb explosion and when they pulled him out, he was out of his mind. He was transferred to a London hospital.

Some dirt had been blown into his eyes from the explosion and it blinded him. Another GI in the same hospital wrote to Marieange to keep her informed of his progress. When his eyes got better, they sent him out to the front line again.

He was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. He was completely buried three times by the fallout of the bombs during the course of that battle. His buddies pulled him out, and, of course, sometimes he pulled his buddies out. The last time was more than he could take. A sniper killed one of his best friends while standing behind him in chow line.

At one point in the battle, he was sent to scout ahead of his troop and got stranded behind enemy lines. He spoke of how he lived in a cave on the side of a cliff with the enemy troops walking overhead, living on green apples and water for a week, while suffering from dysentery.

It took him years after he was back home to be able to talk about the war, and then, only to Dad. He

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and Dad would go for long walks on the farm and Dad would get him to talk.

Very much like what councilors do today. Back then, families looked after their own. It was their support that carried most of these wounded soldiers back to health, both physically and mentally, once they returned home. Religion played a big part in our family life. It gave us a purpose for living and an understanding of suffering. It gave us the courage and strength to accept what we were dealt out in life. That's what helped Arthur and that has stayed with me to the present day.

Soon, Claire was spending vacations on the farm also. When they got older, Mom started to give them my dolls, and toy dishes to play with. I was not really playing with them anymore but had not yet divorced myself from them emotionally either. Oh, many times my nose was out of joint. I loved being their aunt but at same time I looked at them as though they were my kid sisters, more like "spoiled rotten siblings". Mom and Dad were firm in my having to share with them.

When Cecile came along, Marieange, who knew that she could not have more children, wanted to keep Cecile close to her. Cecile came with her parents for long visit but never spent her vacations on the farm like her sisters Rita and Claire did. Marieange made all of her girl's clothes. She was also a terrific cook and has passed this talent to them.

Rita was a bridesmaid at my wedding.

At age thirty-eight, Arthur had his first heart attack and never really enjoyed good health after that. He died, and was buried the day before his forty-seventh birthday.

Lawrence (1921-1960)

Lawrence was bom January 31,1921. Whereas Arthur was gentle, Lawrence had a quick temper. He married Joicey Crosby August 17, 1946, just three months after Alfred and Irene's wedding. In fact, Irene and Joicey were good friends and Irene introduced her to Lawrence. They had a whirlwind courtship. Joicey converted to the Catholic faith before their marriage. They, in turn, moved into the little house up on the farm. All seven of their children were bom there.

Henry and Lawrence both wanted to stay on the farm. Dad gave them five cows for income. The deal was that they worked the farm together and the milk from their cows was theirs as income. This arrangement worked out nicely in the beginning, but when children stared to arrive, the income was not sufficient to support a family, especially when one or two of the cows went dry. There came a time when the farm could no longer support the family, plus the extended family.

Henry, and then Lawrence, sold their shares and went on to other places. Henry went to work in Lewiston as a mechanic for Ben Turner. Lawrence went to work for the Additon Farm in Leeds as a dairy hand for six months. He loved it there and the people treated him well, but times were hard and farm labor did not pay much. This was the first time my brother Lawrence and his wife had indoor plumbing, and also the first time the children took a bath in a bathtub.

One incidence that is worth recounting about this newly found luxury is; while Joicey was bathing her two oldest sons, their little sister came toddling into the bathroom. One of the boys looked at her and decided he did not want to share the bathtub with his little sister.

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He looked at the flush and said, "Mom there is no room for Germaine in the tub with us, put her in the flush".

After the job at the Additon Farm, he went to work for Oscar Turner in Livermore as a hand on a farm for six months. Then he went to work for Ben Turner. He then went to work at the International Paper Mill in Chisholm and soon became a millwright.

For the first time in his life he was doing well financially. While still working at the IP, he bought himself a farm and got a few Ayrshire cows. His boys were interested in the animals and he loved working with his boys, all was going well. He had an accident at the mill. He fell fifteen feet off scaffolding and broke his neck. He died a week later from internal bleeding. He was only thirty-nine.

Joicey was left with seven young children. Thomas, the oldest, was eleven and Joe, the baby, was three. Joe is my Godchild. Some time later, Joicey met Lucien Gosselin. He had a special needs child. Joicey has taken care of her like her own and when Lucien died, Joicey kept her. Joicey is in good health but she is concerned as to who will care for Lucien's girl when she passes away. Joicey has brought up seven beautiful children. They are all grown and married.

Alfred ("Fats'") (1922-1974)

Alfred (bom July 24, 1922) was a "prankster" in school and was tough to control. My father, who had known farming all his life, decided to buy a farm and teach the boys how to be responsible and good working ethics. Lawrence had finished high school and Alfred was a sophomore when Dad bought a farm in North Livermore.

When the war broke out, Alfred went to work for my Uncle George as a farmhand. Alfred married Irene St, Pierre, one of Uncle George's daughters. They were a large family from North Livermore. Rosalie, my oldest sister, would eventually marry Rene, Irene's brother. Four more of the St. Pierre family married our cousins from Uncle George's family. Talk about mass confusion!

Alfred went to work for Berry Hill Orchards and became one of their foremen. On January 30th 1974, Alfred died from a stroke at the young age of forty-nine, just a few months after Dad died. Alfred and Irene had eight children. She went to work and put all her kids through school. She refused welfare, saying that others needed it more than she did. She received the "Maine Mother of the Year" award. I have always admired her for who she was as a person.

Henry (1923-2004)

Henry was bom September 29, 1923 and passed away on Dec. 27, 2004. He married Germaine Veilleux on June 29, 1953. They had five Children; Dennis, Paul, Anne, Peter, and Andre. Germaine died March 8, 1982. Henry then met a widow, Rita Miliard, and they were married on Sept.3, 1993.

Henry quit high school as a sophomore to work at his Uncle Joseph's garage. He had a natural knack for understanding engines and became a "whiz" at fixing them. He was drafted into the U. S. Army in World War II. He was discharged as a diesel engineer.

After he was discharge he stayed on the farm for a while and then went to work for Roberts and

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Turner as a mechanic.

In researching and writing this family history, Henry had told me that he would like to contribute some of his memories on life on the farm in his early years. He had many fond memories and we were to sit and chat about them. That will not happen because he passed away before we could meet. My heart aches for this big gentle man.

A flood of memories of Henry has overwhelmed me. I remember when I was a teen and he would go out with his best friend, John Timberlake. John's sister, Shirley, and I, had gone to school together and we had become good friends. Henry would say to me, "Go ask Mom if you can come with me." They lived about five miles away. There is no way I could have visited with her unless her brother or mine took us with them. He was so good to me those growing-up years.

Henry has always had an inventive mind. Lionel was reminiscing about how Henry would always find ways to improve on their projects or toys. The guys his age all made go-carts and raced them down the main roads of town. There was so little traffic then, that this was possible, not without some risk however, but that made it all the more exciting.

The boys put wooden wheels on an axel and a tongue attached to the front axel for steering. Henry used an "A" frame from an old car, used heavy-duty chair spring coils on each wheel so that each wheel lifted independently one from the other and used a car steering wheel. His go-cart became the model for all the other carts. By the time they had copied his "invention" he had invented new and better ways to make his cart go even faster.

During the Fourth of July week, kids all had sparklers and small firecrackers. For a few cents, they could buy roles of shots that fit in a cap gun. Henry's gun was misfiring, so he asked Mom to look at it. She looked at it, adjusted the roll, gave it back to him and told him, in French, to fire it. However, the word for firing a gun and to "throw" something sounds the same in French (tir). Henry looked at Mom and threw it across the room smashing his gun. But that did not stop him for very long. There was, at that time, one- inch long firecrackers, that, when lit, made a small "pop". These were cheap and safe for kids. Henry rigged a pipe with a handle that made his newly invented gun sound like the five-inch firecrackers that were banned for children.

Some of his escapades landed him into trouble. Henry had gone to the movies and had seen superman flying off tall buildings. Thinking he could do the same, he took my fathers brand-new umbrella and jumped off the second story porch of our apartment building.

The umbrella turned inside out and he landed on the cement sidewalk below. After he had gotten his wind back he put the umbrella back in its stand and never breathed a word of this to anyone. Only when the next rainy day came and Dad looked for his umbrella did the details of the story come out.

One day, Henry wanted to go swimming and did not have a bathing suit. Back in those days, the boys wore a one-piece suit with straps and holes under the arms. He pestered my mother to make him a bathing suit until she found a piece of knit material and quickly sewed him up one. He tried it on and it fit him like a glove. He was so happy. He ran out to go swimming with his friends. He dove in and when he came out of the water, the holes under the arm were now on his thighs and the seat of his suit was dragging on the ground.

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Being very poor, Dad could not afford to buy a tractor. Henry put his talents and knowledge of mechanical engineering to work. He found a used Massey Ferguson tractor and bought it for twenty-five dollars and fixed it up._ Later on, he put a Ford motor in a Moline tractor, and got that to work too.

It the early 1960's when John and I were living in Wilton, Pierrette Holt, a friend of mine, and I, decided to go shopping in Lewiston. There was one little problem; Pierrette's car would sometimes emit a "whistling" sound after running for a while. Pierrette was a slender, chic, always proper, young French girl with a heavy Parisian French accent. She kept her car impeccably clean and took care that it was always timely serviced. Her many trips to the garage to have it fixed, proved futile. No one seemed to find the cause of the whistling. This caused her much embarrassment and anguish.

I called Henry and asked him if he could take a look at her car while we were in Lewiston. He said to come over. So off we went. Pierrette's car was small even by today's standards but back in the sixties it was unusually small. At first, the car made a low, barely audible whistle. It grew louder as we drove. Just before we reached Lewiston, the intensity of the whistle kept getting louder and louder. By the time we hit Main St. it had reached the crescendo of a fire truck siren. Cars and trucks took to the side of the road to let this tiny car putt-putt its way through. I was in hysterics laughing while poor Pierrette was moaning and groaning about how the police were going to stop her and put her in jail.

We crossed the bridge, went by the hospital and drove the whole length of Main Street. Finally, we reached Henry's house on the other side of town. He came out of his house wondering, "what the heck is that?" He burst into laughter when he saw us turn into his driveway. In less time that it took to open the hood of the car he had solved the problem.

It was a small hole in a hose. He explained that as the pressure build up the whistling got louder. He taped it and told Pierrette to go to a garage to have it changed.

It seems that whenever anyone talks about Henry they have their own favorite story to tell about how he found out what was wrong with some engine, motor, or tool that no one else could fix.

Lionel (1927-)

Lionel was born on January 16, 1927. He quit school when he was only sixteen years old to work on the farm. It is unfortunate that Dad, like many Franco-American parents of that time, did not believe in higher education. Lionel would have done a lot better with a greater understanding of business and husbandry. He subscribed to many farm magazines and became quite knowledgeable in farming. Lionel was a hard worker and a very gentle man. He and my sister Laurette, were close and both enjoyed animals, particularly farm animals. Lionel was to inherit the farm after dad died. He earned every bit of it, he worked hard and he took good care of both our parents. Rosalie worked hard in doing outside work with Lionel. They chopped wood all winter together. Rene St. Pierre, Rosalie's husband, moved on the farm after they were married. Rene and Lionel worked well together and really did wonders with the farm. They were close friends from childhood.

Lionel got married and things changed. Rene and Rosalie bought a farm of their own and moved away. Louise must have had a hard time as a young bride living in Dad's house, having this huge family come over every Sunday to see Dad. Dad on the other hand, kept telling us that she was living with him in his

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house and wanted us to keep coming to see him. It had to be hard for both of them.

Shortly after they were married John and I moved to Canada. Louise took very good care of Dad and I never heard her complain. Dad on the other hand, was a "built-in babysitter" for Louise. He got very close to Lionel and Louise's kids. It was a good situation for all of them. By the time we moved back from Canada in 1976, Dad had passed away, so we did not go up as often.

When Dad passed away, it took Louise months before she could bring herself to move into his bedroom. In her mind, that was "Pepere's room". It was only after Lionel told her that she was not being disrespectful and that Dad would want them to do so that she moved into the master bedroom.

Lionel is our son Mark's Godfather and Mark always thought the world of his Uncle Leo, as we called him. When we came down from Canada to visit, Mark always asked if he could spend some time on the farm. One time after such a visit, John noticed that Mark was eating funny and he was holding his arm in an odd way. John became quite concerned and asked me to watch Mark eat. The minute I saw him I started to laugh. When Lionel was a little boy he had broken his elbow. It never healed properly. Thereafter, he could not bend his arm fully nor could he extend his arm straight. When he ate he would twist his head to reach his food. I immediately recognized that Mark was mimicking his uncle Leo whom he idolized.

Arthur's girls are all grandmothers now and they still love their Uncle Lionel. They remember how he brought them candy when they stayed on the farm. Every so often, when he brought the milk to town, he would come back with a few treats for them.

Children do not forget those things.

All the cousins from the various family members get along well. Andre, our youngest son, Maurice, Laurette's son and the two Leos, Lionel and Rosalie's boys, Raymond, Alfred's son, all became good friends and still are.

Rosalie (1931-)

Rosalie was born October 3, 1931. She is four years my senior but was always a mother figure to me. She was mature for her age. I was the baby of the family and she always looked out for me. She worked hard on the farm. She milked cows and cut trees in the woods with Lionel. It would have taken a "good man" to keep up with her. Rosalie was adept at sewing, embroidery, crocheting, canning, cooking and just about anything she set her mind to. She loved the farm.

Rosalie had a "secret crush" on Rene St. Pierre. When he asked her out for a date she was on cloud nine. She decided to work at the shoe shop to make money for her upcoming marriage to Rene. However, seeing the need for insulation on the house of our parents at home and knowing they could not afford to do this, she used her earnings to pay to have the insulation and siding put on the back of the house. In addition, she paid for some of the grain for the animals, which brought the grain bill down considerable.

After she and Rene got married, Rene and Lionel decided to make a partnership on the farm. She was very pleased with that arrangement. All was going well and the farm prospered. After Lionel got

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married, things changed and Rene thought it best to move away. They bought a farm and he and Rosalie worked like "Trojans" making a go of it.

They had seven children. They were a close-knit family and still are. In 1997 Rene had four discs removed in his back and neck and a plate was put in. It was the largest plate that the surgeon had ever put in anyone. The surgeon said Rene had such strong muscles in his neck that he was able to function where most others would have been completely immobilized. He went back to work on the farm that he loved, driving the trucks or tractors for his son Leo. In the last week of May 1999, he was diagnosed with cancer and two and a half weeks later, on June 13th 1999, Rene passed away. Rosalie has had three triple heart bypasses. But she is strong mentally and though she misses Rene like crazy, her moral is good.

Laurette (1933-)

Laurette was born on February 1, 1933. She is two and a half years older than me. She had a close relationship with Rosalie much more so than with me. Laurette loved animals and working outdoors. She enjoyed baking, to the delight of my brothers.

John introduced Laurette to Gerald Bilodeau shortly after we were married. One day while we were waiting on Lisbon Street and Gerry was coming towards us, John said to Laurette, "That's him. That's him. That's the guy I want you to meet". By the time she caught-on Gerry was almost in front of us. He nodded hello to John and was gone. Laurette flipped. She thought he was so handsome.

After John and I were married, Laurette came to spend some weekends with us. One Sunday, we were coming out of Church and Gerry was at the door waiting for his family. We introduced them. Later that morning, he showed up at our apartment saying that he had come to see our baby. But when he got up to leave he had not even seen Mark, our firstborn. When I pointed this out to him, Laurette gave me a swift kick in the shins. It took a lot to get those two together.

One day when we went to John's parents house, we had seen Gerry outside washing his car in his driveway. He lived only a few houses away. Mrs. Labonte and I connived to send Laurette to the store for strawberries so she would have to go past him. When she was not returning, we were having a good laugh at our ingenious plan. She had come out of the store without the strawberries. Gerry saw her and asked her what she was shopping for.

She told him "strawberries" and that Bourque's Market did not have any. He said, "Hop in, I will take you to a fruit stand downtown. I know they have some there." I don't remember all the details but they started dating and eventually got married. They had three children.

Poor

We were poor, but as a child, I never thought we were poor. We always had plenty to eat. My mother was a "magician" when it came to cooking and came out with a scrumptious meal with practically nothing. Everyone around us was poor, so we never felt poor. In fact, I maintain that one of the best gifts God has ever given me was poverty. Through it, I learned to appreciate the fact that the finest joys of life need not cost money. Only a poor person would stoop to pick up wild field strawberries for hours on end in the hot sun. Each tiny berry is an explosion of flavor that tickled the palate with pure

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ambrosia. I remember my sisters and I placing a bowl of these fresh wild strawberries in front of our parents. The look of pleasure on their faces was worth all the hard work. A dozen long stemmed red roses, grown by a professional gardener, delivered by a florist in a cardboard box, tied up with a pure silk ribbon, cannot measure up to even one small strawberry picked with loving hands.

We all loved popcorn. When we were young, popcorn was a favorite snack. It was good, filling and inexpensive. Sometimes in the evening, Alfred would come in and give Laurette a dime to make him some. That was like a couple of dollars today. Then she would make some for everyone.

To this day when there is a family reunion I usually make popcorn. I have this big sixteen- quart mixing bowl that I fill over the brim with fresh popped corn. The family knows that I bring it to every reunion. It the first dish to be emptied.

Speaking of Alfred's antics, it brings to memory another incident of his pranks. Alfred would come in and ask us to pull off his boots. He would curl up his toes and we would pull like crazy to try to get them off. Then he would uncurl his toes and we would go flying with a boot in hand. Then we scrambled for the loose change he had slipped in his boots.

Laurette was the only one who had a sled. Her Godmother, dad's sister, Delina, had given it to her one Christmas. After the road was plowed we would get on Laurette's sled, start at the end of the driveway and slide all the way down to the town farm. A few times we slid down, what we called, "the big hill". It started at the town farm, and it was very steep. We didn't often go down that hill on the sled for a number of reasons: it was a narrow country dirt road; there was a small mound that curved to the left, right after the bottom and the cars coming up the road could not see you nor could you see them until it was too late; the sun does not melt the snow off dirt roads like it does on macadam, but rather turns the packed snow to the consistency of ice; people who knew the road picked up speed to make the hill, there would be no place for the person sliding to go, the snow banks on either side were so steep that if you tried to go up one of them, you were immediately flipped over into the middle of the road, and lastly, it was difficult to climb up that icy hill on foot.

Laurette's sled sure got used a lot, that is, until it got run over by a car and got smashed.

A mist or rain after a snowstorm would form a crust on the snow. Sundays, when there was such a crust, a bunch of cousins would come and we would go sliding down Uncle Freddy's field. We had to be careful, as there was a barbwire fence at the bottom of the hill and on the other side of the fence was a brook. If the fence didn't get you the brook did. The idea was to stop before either one of these obstacles.

The wood stove and black slate sink

The wood stove and the black slate sink were an essential part of farm family living. In the winter, the stove was lit before dad and the boys went out to the bam to do chores. A pitcher of water was always left on the counter to prime the pump. If luck was with you, it hadn't frozen during the night and we had plenty of water from the pump for the day's work. The huge teakettle was filled and set on the stove. In no time the combination of the heat and steam had the kitchen toasty warm.

If the temperature went down really low during the night, the pipes would often freeze. Many a night

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my mother would get up to open the cabinet doors under the sink to let the heat from the kitchen get to the pipes and to draw water to prevent such a mishap, she did not always succeed. When that happened the men would roll the linoleum away from the wall, open a trap door that went to the crawl space under the kitchen and poured hot water over the pipes to thaw them out. If that did not work, they would try with a blowtorch. Running the flame all along the pipes would sometimes melt the ice and get the water running. Mom did not like to see them use a torch as the house was so old and dry it could have gone up in flames like a tinderbox.

If that did not work, the men would fill the milk cans with water in town before returning from delivering the milk to the local creamery. On washday, they had to make a run to the pond for extra water. Back then, most ponds and lakes could boast of pure, drinkable, water. If the pipes could not be thawed during the day, we would go out after chores at night to get water for the next day. We automatically rationed ourselves to the amount of water we used without being told. The most difficult part was having enough water for the laundry and bathing.

There was a built-in tank on the back end of the stove, which we would try to keep full. The heat from the oven would heat the water in the tank, and that was our source of hot water to wash dishes, and do our chores. The last one to empty the tank had to refill it. That was hard work, because we had to fill a bucket, lug it over to the stove, lift the tank cover and pour the water into a rather small opening. Water would splash over the stove onto the floor, and we had to wipe up. As children we would make sure we always left a couple of inches of water in the bottom of the tank. The next person to take hot water would surly empty the tank and would be responsible for filling it. We did not make allowances for evaporation and therefore it seemed the tank was always bone dry. Mom's question as to who emptied the tank was always met with, "It wasn't me, there was still some water in the tank when I finished taking some," was the standard reply. And of course, we were not lying.

The morning meal

Breakfast was served when the men came in from doing the chores. On the farm, life revolved around the welfare of the cattle, they came first. If we took care of the animals, they would take care of us. So, after they had been fed, we had our breakfast.

Slabs of bacon or ham were sliced thick for dad and thin for the rest of the family. He like his bacon fatty, we liked ours crispy. Potatoes were fried in the bacon fat with fresh eggs, sunny side up. My favorite was what we called, "German Fries". Instead of sunny side eggs, we would toss the eggs onto the fried potatoes and they would stick to them as they cooked. Hot coffee and ice-cold whole milk was set on the table. We pan fried slices of homemade bread spread thick with butter. What could be better than that? Cholesterol heaven!

During the school year we were off to school right after breakfast and returned to our share of duties right after school. Supper was served early, because the men had to milk the cows right after. Those of us who stayed in the house would clean up the dishes and get things lined up for the next day. You could tell the seasons by what was done after supper. There was never a shortage of work to be done.

When I was old enough, I took over baking the bread for the family. A chore that I enjoyed back then and even to this day. Every other day I would take an enameled tub, pour water into it until it was about two inches deep in the bottom of the pan. Then I would add two quarter-pound fresh yeast

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cakes, a handful of salt, two scoops of lard, and one scoop of sugar. I would let that sit until the yeast would start to bubble. Then I would add flour, beat the batter until it was smooth, add more flour and beat until it was smooth again. I would place a couple of scoops of flour on the table and knead the dough until it was no longer sticky. I used twenty-five lbs of flour a week. I never used measures; it was all done by sight and touch. The warmth of the stove made the dough rise and then it was put into loaf pans to rise again. The oven held twelve loafs.

If we were expecting company over the weekend I would make fifteen or twenty loaves. If by chance anyone came in the house when I was taking the bread out of the oven, I was sure they would slice into a loaf and most of it would disappear. Some nights I would make fried dough and we would eat it with molasses. That was always a treat.

Outhouse

Jokes centered on people's need of bathroom facilities abound. Outhouses have a category of their own. Humor permitted people to cope with inconveniences and hardship. I remember as a youngster, that no matter what ailed you, it could be cured with a dose of castor oil. If you suffered from cramps, headaches, the flues, or nausea, and I think maybe even hangnails, you were sure to get a glass of orange juice with the famous castor oil floating on top. I believe the way it cured colds is that after it started to take affect, you did not dare cough for fear of soiling your pants.

One such day, I was about six or seven years old at the time, I was kept home from school because I fell into one of those categories. I got the trusted dose of castor oil. It was cold outside so I decided to use the chamber pot. Oh No! They were all outside being cleaned.

A quick look around the kitchen produced an empty gallon can. I grabbed it and raced for my bedroom upstairs. To my horror I could not stop going and the rim of the can was becoming more and more imbedded into my flesh. After what seemed an eternity I was able to extract myself from the can. Just then, I heard my cousin's voice telling my mother that she had brought my homework from school. We met halfway on the stairs. To this day I do not know if it was the look of pain on my face or the smell that followed me out of the room, which sent her scurrying for the door. The first thing I did when I got old enough to go to work was save money for a bathroom.

We had a washing machine that was powered with a small gas motor. There was a pedal that Mom would pump and start up the motor and we would wash all the clothes. This was done in the kitchen. We closed the doors to the other rooms so that the smell of gas stayed in the kitchen. Mom had two huge copper boilers that sat on the stove and she would fill them with water. Then with the same pails filled her washing machine. She burned herself more than once transferring the hot water from boiler to the washing machine. When the washing was finished she had to empty the water into the pails and pour the dirty water in the sink. It is unbelievable how hard these women worked.

In the winter months my mother hung her clothes out on the lines in freezing weather. Sometimes the wind would be so strong, the clothesline would snap, and we had to go chasing our clothes all over the yard. Clothes racks were placed near an old potbellied furnace in the family room. We would bring the clothes frozen like boards and wait for them to go limp to place them on the racks to finish drying. If we bent the clothes when they were frozen they would break like glass and they would have big slits wherever they broke.

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One winter, my mother suffered a heart attack. While she was recuperating, Lionel, the youngest of the boys, and older than us three girls, had to do the washing. He told our older brothers to bring down their dirty clothes if they wanted them washed. He told them he was not going to go from room to room to collect them. Lawrence, another of my brothers, did not do it and therefore his clothes did not get washed.

Come Saturday night, he would take his bath and he wanted his clean clothes to go into town. This was the boy's big night out. When Lawrence was told that his long johns were not washed he went upstairs, and sure enough, found them under his bed. He took them down, washed them in the kitchen sink and hung them out to dry. Well, you know that they became frozen solid in no time at all. He never realized that it took days for clothes to dry in the winter. When he went to get them to take his bath, his long johns were as stiff as boards. The memory of the look on Lawrence's face and the comments that flew around the house for the next few hours still has the power, after over fifty years, to send Lionel into tears of laughter.

Lionel was sixteen when my Mother had her heart attack. He had decided he did not want to finish high school; he wanted to stay and work on the farm. When Mom became ill, Dad asked him to stay in the house to care for her, and the three of us girls. I was seven at the time. My two sisters Laurette and Rosalie were nine and eleven years old.

The first day Lionel stayed at home, Dad told him, "As soon as the girls leave for school, go see what your mother would like for breakfast". He did as he was told and Mom told him she was not very hungry, and would like just a toast and a cup of tea. In no time at all he returned with a slice of toasted homemade bread in his hand. He asked her where she wanted it and she said, "Why don't you put it on the chair." He walked up to the chair near her bed and plopped the toast right on the chair. Mom did not say a word but started to laugh. He picked up the toast and headed back to the kitchen and returned with it on a plate. Mom said that from that point on all the meals were served on a well arranged tray with silverware and napkins.

There always was a special bond between the two of them. He took care of our parents until they died. He is still living on the farm. He brought his bride there, when they were married, and that is where they raised their eight children.

With oil lamps for lights, the winter evenings were spent doing things that did not need bright lights. We made sure all the lamps were full of kerosene before nightfall. The lamp chimneys were washed and the wicks trimmed, almost every day. We would gather in the kitchen, around the stove, and make popcorn, or sliced potatoes about an eighth of an inch thick and cook them right on the top of the woodstove. First we would wipe the stove with a wad of waxed paper, then, when the stove was nice and hot, we would place the slices one next to the other on the hot stovetop. When they were ready we would salt and butter them. Mmmmmmm mmmmm, were they ever good.

Ice House

Every farm had an icehouse. It was a square building with ten-inch thick walls. The walls were insulated with sawdust. There was sawdust on the earthen floor as well. Each layer of ice was insulated with sawdust. I don't remember ever running out of ice. Each morning two blocks of ice were dug out and washed clean. They were cut into smaller pieces and one piece was brought into the house for the

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icebox where we kept our food.

The rest of the ice was put in the water cooler that kept the milk ice cold, even in the hot July heat. In the winter, my brother would shovel snow in the cooler to save on ice. I remember when the boys would chip the ice to size, we would grab any slivers and suck on them as though they were great delicacies. If Dad was the one cutting the ice we were sure to have nice big chips.

In January, when the ice on the lakes was about three feet thick, the farmers would harvest the ice. Sometimes it was cut by hand, other times, if a farmer had a gas powered saw, he would cut the ice for other farmers in return for their help to haul the ice to his storage building. The saw was adjusted to cut to about three or four inches from the bottom, then the men would take a wide chisel on a pole and finish the cut one block at a time.

They would bring the blocks to a channel cut out of the ice far enough away from the open water where it was safe for the team and sled to move around. It would fascinate me to watch the men work so close to the water's edge. With grapple irons on long poles they would bring the floating blocks of ice to the channel where two men would grab the bobbing blocks with ice thongs and slide them up to the sled. They would adjust the upright boards to whatever level they were working on. As the load got higher, someone on top of the load would place them as the two men below pushed the blocks up to him.

I would beg my father to let me pull the floating ice blocks to the channel until he would let me do a few just to get rid of me. I could feel his big hand holding on to the back of my coat lest I should slip and fall into the icy water.

As we got older, we helped with the ice harvest. We started at home with the spreading of the sawdust. As we got older we were permitted to go to the pond. It was such hard work, with a lot of heavy lifting that, mostly the men did it. Once one sled was loaded, the teamster would go off with a helper to one of the farms. It was picturesque to see the horse drawn sled, heavily laden with the ice blocks, glide over the lake's smooth surface.

The farmers would haul load after load until the ice sheds were full. So much depended on people helping people. My father had a sawmill and whatever sawdust he had leftover he shared with the other farmers. Nothing went to waste. Whatever sawdust was not needed for insulation in the icehouse was used as bedding for the cattle. Farmers took turns loading their trucks at the sawmill. Dad always gave it away. People would come to get truckloads of slabs, the first cutting of a log, for kindling wood. Today everything is sold, even the sawdust.

Wood for the Stove and furnace

Dad or Lionel would go to the wood shed everyday to chop the firewood into useable size for either the wood stove or furnace. I loved using the axe, but my father thought I was too young, so, when the men were not around, I would go to the woodshed and chop to my hearts content. One evening, I missed and cut a gash in the top of my foot near my ankle. I was scared my father would scold me. I went to the bathroom and bandaged it up, never telling anyone about my mishap. I still have a scar to remind me of the cost of not listening to my parents.

Chicken on Sunday

We raised chickens for eggs and meat. In the winter, the chickens would occupy the chicken coop or if we were down to just a few, they stayed on the bam floor. In the summer, they were permitted to feed in the fields. Some of the laying hens would hide to nest. It was always a thrill to see them come out with their brood of young chicks. The dog would keep foxes and other predators away. However, once in a while, if the nests were away from the farm buildings a fox would find them and devour them during the night. That made us both very anger and sad. We understood that farm animals were killed for food, but we hated to see an animal scared or tortured.

Killing chickens for Sunday dinner soon became my job. At first, I held the chicken while one of my brothers would put the chicken's neck on the chopping block and cut off its head. Mom did not want us to let it run around with its neck off because she said it bruised the meat. So, I held it for a little while but even then it would jump around without its head.

I remember one time, I asked my brother Henry to help me kill the chickens. He said, "Go get the gun and shoot it." I thought he was serious, so off I went into the house to get a gun. They kept the guns in a small bedroom off the dinning room. I choose a 30 odd 6 rifle. I didn't know one gun from another. At that time, to me a gun was a gun, the size or kind made do difference. Off I went in search of a couple of chickens. In the summer time, the chickens had the run of the farm. I had spotted two large chickens in the back yard. The chickens were tame, so I got close to it and pulled the trigger. Well, that caused a bit of excitement. The shot brought my parents out of the house to see what was going on. At the same time, my brother came running out of the horse stable. There on the ground was what was left of the chicken. My father was upset that I, at my age, had used a gun. Mom was upset that I had destroyed a perfectly good chicken. Henry was in a state of shock that I had taken his joke seriously. Lionel was bent in two howling with laughter at the sight of me with a rifle in my hands that was almost as tall and as wide as I was with a very dead chicken at my feet. When Mom and Dad saw that I was all right, they too laugh at the ridicules tableau of me standing over my big game trophy. When the excitement died down, Lionel helped me kill two chickens for our Sunday meal.

I got tired of asking my brothers to help me every Saturday. When I was ready to get the chickens, they were busy with other things and kept putting me off. It was not their favorite sport. It would be late in the day before I could finally get the chickens pluck, drawn and cooled.

Finally I decided to do it by myself. I would place the chicken between my legs and manage to pull the chicken head on the block and cut it off. A dunking in a bucket of hot water made the plucking a whole lot easier. When drawing them, I was always relieved when the bile sac was removed. I would keep the heart, liver, gizzard, and neck aside for my mother. She said these were her favorite parts. Looking back, I wonder if she really did like them best or if this was her way of leaving the best for us. All of this may sound cold and hardhearted, but animals are slaughtered every day. Most people do not have to do it nor see it and therefore do not give it a second thought. On a farm you live with reality.

Learning to Cook

Mom was an excellent cook. She rarely used cookbooks. Many of the farmer's wives used what they had in the house or garden. That does not lend itself to recipes. Most of their meals were basic; meat, potatoes and fresh vegetables in the summer, canned in the winter. Variations of the basic yellow cake

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were used for; upside down cakes, pudding cakes, torts and a whole variety of concoctions with berries, fruits, and cream.

Girls learned to cook by helping their mothers. Mom would say when to add a bit more flour or milk. Tasting, feeling, and sight took the place of measures. We added sugar until it was sweet enough. Salt and pepper, taste-add a bit more. We knew if the cake was not moist we had either added too much flour or not enough lard. And so it went.

Rosalie helped Mom in the kitchen until Laurette was able to take over, then she went outside to work with her brothers. Laurette did the same. Although Laurette loved to bake and liked to try new things, she especially liked to bake on weekends. Rosalie knew how to cook but preferred to work outside. Being the baby of the family I had no one to hand down the job too. That was O.K., as I preferred indoor work. I enjoyed the gardens but not milking cows. I did it when I had to but got out of it anytime I could. On the other hand Rosalie and Laurette thrived on it.

I will always remember my first attempt at baking a cake. Mom gave me a recipe and told me to follow the instructions carefully. I used half the dishes in the cupboards, measuring and mixing. Then I placed it in the oven. After some time, I opened the oven just a crack to peek in. I will never forget the look on Mom's face when I asked her, "How long does a cake have to boil before it begins to rise?" She was trying not to laugh, but it was more than she could do to hold off laughing. She was sitting in her favorite rocking chair in the kitchen, mending. I could see the basket of mending jumping up and down on her belly. She never scolded me. She simply got up and showed me how to make a pudding out of it.

In the last few years that I was home, I did most of the cooking. Laurette and Rosalie worked outside. When I got home from work, I would get supper ready for the family. Before going to work in the morning, I would get breakfast started and Mom would finish off. Since I was not home at lunchtime, one of the girls would come in and help Mom if she was not feeling well.

Mom was famous for her "feather light" biscuits. Like most of her cooking it was done by touch and sight. I cannot say how many times I watched Mom make biscuits and I even made them myself.

I got married in 1958, at the age of twenty-two. Mom passed away the following year. I had not made biscuits for some time and forgot how to make them. I knew the basic recipe but somehow they were not like Mom's. Mom's recipes went something like this; a pinch of this and a handful of that with just enough flour. Pour milk until the texture looks right. Needless to say none of us had any of her recipes written down. I often would wish I had been more attentive to what she was trying to teach me. But like most children, I believed there was always time to learn these things-"tomorrow". But Mom's "tomorrows" were numbered. She died when I was only twenty-four years old.

One night, I was talking with my sister and saying how I missed not having her recipes and she admitted having the same sentiments. That night, I dreamed of Mom and she taught me how to make biscuits. When I awoke the next morning it all came back to me. I know it was my subconscious mind at work but it was just about the nicest dream I ever had. I tried out what I saw in my dream and yup, it worked!

Here is her biscuit recipe: She started with a few scoops of flour, a couple scoops of pure lard, and a

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pinch of salt. She worked the ingredients with her hands until they became a fine granular mixture. Then she would add her baking powder, folding it in. She then folded buttermilk until the mixture was moist, then turn the dough onto a floured board. Using a drinking glass she cut then into three rounds and about an inch and a half high. They were placed on a greased cookie sheet and then she patted milk on them. They were then baked in a hot oven until golden brown.

Groundhogs

As time went by, my brothers taught me how to shoot a gun and I got pretty good at disposing of groundhogs. They destroyed the crops and were a real bad nuisance. I would go out with Puppy (our dog) and he would find them and flush them out of the stone walls. If he got hold of them he would kill them but if they came out of another hole I would shoot them. We got to be quite good at it.

Turkeys

One fall, we went to visit my Uncle Leo Tessier, aunt Marguerite's husband. He showed us his flock of turkeys. The following spring, I asked Dad to let me raise a few. What an exciting day it was when I came home from school to learn that the mailman had delivered five beautiful baby turkey chicks. Dad made me a small room over the garage and it had fresh shavings, a bag of chick feed and a water-drinking bottle. We had a large light bulb to keep them warm. The first weeks are crucial as they can drown if the watering can lets out too much water. So we used a smaller bottle to start with. We had to be sure all was tight in that room so rats couldn't get in. The temperature had to be warm enough so they wouldn't catch cold but we had to be careful that they were protected from the hot light bulb. All went well and all five grew very quickly. Come summer, I let them out during the day. They followed me around like pets.

As the Thanksgiving holiday approached, I knew I had to kill them but, on a farm, you learn from an early age that each thing has a purpose. I selected the largest tom and asked my brother Lionel to help me. Turkeys have sharp tendons on the inside of their legs that can really hurt you if you are jabbed with them, so I tied the turkey's legs together and its wings to his body. Like a lamb, he permitted me to carry him to the chopping block.

I had my arms around him to hold him down so that the meat would not get bruised. I soon learned that a fifty- pound turkey is a lot harder to control than a five to eight pound chicken. No sooner had Lionel chopped off its head, than its feet hit the ground and we, the turkey and I, leaped up in the air only to land and leap again. The headless turkey hopped in this manner around the barnyard with me holding on for dear life. Its long headless neck kept spinning around spraying me with blood. My brother's howls of laughter brought the rest of the family outside in time to see the spectacle of a headless turkey hopping around the yard with me trying to hold on.

Mom and Dad kept yelling for me to let go but in my mind I could not see a bruised turkey on the Thanksgiving dinner table, so I held on until the nerves quieted down and only then did I let him go.

It weighed fifty-four pounds before I dressed it. When I plucked the feathers, the turkey's flesh was a nice golden color with not a hint of bruising. I, on the other hand, did not fare quite as well. My arms and knees were black and blue from my "turkey dance". I have to believe that this had to be the start of "the barnyard hop".

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When my uncle Leo heard of my escapade, he came over and showed me how to properly slaughter them in a wooden funnel. The next year I got twenty-five chicks and the following four years I raised fifty turkeys. We kept four or five for the family and sold the others. This brought in enough money for my school clothes and for three years it paid the taxes on the farm. How proud I was to be able to help in this manner.

Clothes

Clothes for a family of eight is a major item on the budget. Work clothes and farm needs came first. There was little or no money for dress clothes. Fortunately, we had family and friends that would send us boxes of used clothes. We would rummage through the boxes taking what fit us and stored the rest in a closet in the eaves. You could not stand in that closet. It was a great storage place for stuff like used clothes. When we needed something, we would go to the closet and rummaged some more. With a bit of alteration, we always managed to have clothes that were decent for school and church.

Mom would go to the rummage sales and buy the men big black overcoats and would take them apart make jackets and ski pants out of the big pieces. She would pay only a few cents for them and the cloth was really nice and heavy. The cloth was all wool so they could not be easily washed. When we did wash them it would take forever to dry and if they were washed in the washing machine they would shrink. Often times, when they got soiled, Mom had us put them on and we would go roll in the snow and they would come out just like new. Then, while they were still damp, we would press them using a thin cloth over them so the cloth would not get singed or shinny. It was our way of dry-cleaning them. I remember a mother of one of the school kids asking us how we kept our slacks always so neat and pressed.

First New Dress

People have always seen me as a hard worker. I see myself as a basically a lazy person, who has learned that to have time to do the things I enjoyed doing I had to get rid of my obligations first. I also knew there was a price to pay for what you wanted and when I wanted something bad enough I was willing to pay the price. If that meant work, so be it.

One year, we got the Sears catalog in the mail. I saw all kinds of clothes I wanted for school. I knew my parents could not afford any of them. I asked my brothers if they knew of some way I could make money. Alfred, Fats, as we called him, was working as a foreman for Berry Hill Orchards, said that Bessy Orchards were buying "drops", second rate apples, for cider.

In one of our pastures there was an abandoned orchard. Dad hated that because when the apples dropped, the cows would eat the slightly fermented fruit, get drunk and their milk would dry up. This was a big loss to the farm income. Rosalie, Laurette and I decided to harvest those apple trees by shaking the trees and bagging the dropped apples in burlap grain bags. We gathered apples from the time we got home from school until dusk. Many of the trees were on a hillside. The terrain was rough and no vehicle could possibly go there. Carrying them to the road was out of the question. What to do? We figured if we crammed the bags as full as we could, we could then roll them down to the old town road. The full bags weight between seventy to a hundred pounds. If we worked fast we could pick fifteen to twenty bags in one evening. On Saturday's we really got a lot done.

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Bessy Mills was paying thirty-five dollars a ton. With every bag we could hear the cash register ring up the money for our efforts. My brother loaded them on the truck and took them to the pressing mill. They paid cash and with each load we got more enthusiastic about what we could buy the harder we worked.

I remember thumbing through the Sears catalog until it was frayed. Finally came the day when I placed my order! Every day I waited for the mailman to come by. It seemed like months before the prized merchandise came in. At Last! I received my long coveted beige dress. This was my first "bought dress." I ever owned. I wore that dress until I had outgrown it, it was old and threadbare, but I still could not bear to part with it. I kept it hung on a peg in our closet. This dress served as a reminder that if I wanted something bad enough and worked hard, I could get it.

Teddy Bear Coat

That reminds me of my Teddy Bear coat. Teddy Bear coats were made of fake fur, trimmed with colorful woolen collars and a matching strip down the front where the buttons and buttonholes were.

Uncle Peter's girls lived in town and they all had after school jobs. When they had outgrown or had tired of their clothes, Aunt Carmel would send it up on the farm. Their cast offs became our Sunday best. One of the older girls sent a Teddy Bear coat. From the time it came into the house no one could take it away from me. It came down to my ankles and the sleeves dropped far below my fingertips. My brother Henry told my mother he did not want me to ride to church with him if I insisted on wearing that oversized coat. My father said he had no choice in the matter, "If he wanted to use the car, he had to take me along." He made dam sure I did not sit with him.

They laughed at me, but nothing would dissuade me from wearing my Teddy Bear coat.

The last year that I wore my Teddy bear coat, the sleeves were two or three inches above my wrist. That is when Dad took matters into his hand and made me give up my beloved Teddy.

Ah! But things have a way of taking care of themselves. We had just been given a green woolen coat that was faded. Good enough to work on the farm. I looked at the inside of the coat and it was a beautiful green. I painfully took it apart and re-sewed it with the inside out. I wore that coat all that winter both to school and to church.

The following year, I had bought myself a remnant of bright red wool fabric. My mother cut and sewed me a beautiful coat, it was fitted at the top, it had two deep pleats in the back and it flared out from the waist. I felt like a princess in that coat. To this day, I cannot throw away good used clothes. I give them away in hopes that they will help others, as the kindness of my Aunt Carmel did years ago.

I was reminiscing with a friend about my Teddy Bear coat. She has a picture of herself and her cousin in their Teddy Bear coats. Hers had been shortened so much that the last buttonhole was at the hem. She had hers for four years. That is just about the length of time I had mine.

Quilt

My mother was very adept at sewing and had started to teach me how to sew simple things. I was an

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impatient student. I wanted everything done before I even got started.

It was very cold in our bedroom and so I decided I wanted to make myself a quilt. My mother took out the boxes of scrap and showed me how to sew odd pieces right on to a backing to make a crazy work quilt. The first day, my pieces were small and coordinated. My mother praised my work. The second day the pieces were a little bit bigger, the third day they were bigger still. By the end of the week I wasn't cutting the scraps anymore but sewing the large pieces as is. If they were faded or torn, I would simply sew another piece of scrap over the inferior spots. By the time I got through I had just about used up all of my mother's scraps and the quilt weighed a ton.

The rest of the family had a good laugh over my "work of art". Picasso had nothing on me! I was doing abstracts well before the world knew what the word meant. Imagine the kick I got when, years after I was married, I went on the farm for a visit, I went out to the shop to see Dad and there under the tractor was my brother Lionel laying on my quilt. He laughed and said, that my old quilt was the only thing that stopped the cold from the ground when he had to work on his back.

Baked beans

Every Saturday evening, we had baked beans for supper. We grew our own dry beans and stored them in large burlap bags in the attic where they remained dry. We would get a measure, four to six pounds, depending how many people were going to be there for the Saturday evening meal.

First, we would stand in a drafty area, place a wide pan on the floor and raise the bucket of beans up high and slowly poured them into the flat pan. The wind or draft would blow away all the chaff and dried dirt. Then we would sit at the kitchen table and remove all other "debris" such as stones, clumps of hard clay etc. We washed them and then let them soaked or par boiled before putting the beans in the cast iron kettle.

Salt pork, bacon fat, molasses and onions, and water were added. The heavy lid was placed to keep the beans from browning or drying on top. If I was baking bread, which I almost always did on Saturday, I would have to remove the pot of beans to bake the bread, the thick cast iron would continue the baking process on the stove and the beans were ready for supper.

There was always plenty left for "refried beans" with onions for Sunday morning breakfast. The married children would come up with their families and out came the big cast iron skillets, two or three onions diced fine and the beans were added and fried. Man, that was good. Every so often I have refried beans but somehow they are never as good as they were when I lived on the farm.

Maple sugar

Spring always brought a rush of activities. The first sign of melting snow sent the men to tap the sugar maples. Morning and evening, someone would hitch the horses to the sled with two huge wooden barrels to go collect the sap from the pails hanging on the Maple trees. It was then poured into large pans over a stove made of bricks for the evaporation process through boiling. Boiling started early in the morning and lasted late into the night. The sweet smell of maple syrup filled the cool spring air. It takes forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. The perfect time for the sap to flow was warm days and freezing nights. That is why the northeast is the biggest suppliers of this wonderful mouth

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watering delicacy.

Lionel was usually the one to do the boiling. Laurette and Rosalie would go out to keep him company. I would go out on occasion but I got cold easily and didn't stay long. We would chat by the fire. It is one of those wonderful experiences that never leave your book of memories.

The syrup at the beginning of the season was light amber and very delicate in taste. As the season came to an end, the color became a deep, dark, amber with a more distinct maple taste. This was, and to this day, my personal favorite. Some of the sap was boiled down to make thick taffy, which we would pour on large vats of clean snow. With a spoon, we would roll it up and chew on it like a soft lollipop. Some maple syrup was made into maple sugar by pouring the sap into molds. The syrup would harden as it cooled in the mold. This was grated on pancakes, ice cream or hot cake.

We also made molasses taffy. Laurette would boil the recipe and when it was ready we would take big globs of it and pull until it was a golden brown. The pulling part was the most fun. We would then cut it in pieces and wrap them in wax paper. Yum!

Life on the farm

As a youngster, I was expected to fetch the cows in the field for milking. I never minded this chore as it meant long walks in the grassy fields, something I truly enjoyed. I loved these long walks, plus it excused me from other chores, that to me were less agreeable. There were a few favorite spots, which are still vivid in my memory. One was a huge boulder that sat on top of Haggert Hill, near the old stagecoach road. I cannot count the many times I climbed that rock to dream of what the future would hold for me, ponder problems, or just for the sheer pleasure I got from viewing the beautiful landscape that could be seen from there, and of course, to look for the cows.

When it was dark, we could see the lights of Lewiston, about thirty miles away, reflected in the sky. My oldest brother Arthur, and his family lived there. Once a month, he would take the Blue Line Bus from Lewiston and get dropped-off at the end of our road and walk the mile to the house to spend the weekend with the family. If he had the chance to call from a bus stop in Livermore, my father would go pick him up with the car. My parents always looked forward to his visits.

During the summer months, Arthur's three girls, Rita, Claire and Cecile, would spend most of their school vacation on the farm. Rita was only eight years my junior, therefore more like a kid sister than a niece. Being the oldest grandchild there was not much that was not permitted her. Rita adored her grandparents especially her grandfather. She was a happy child and still loves to laugh. Claire was more on the quiet side and she and memere were best of friends. Cecile, the youngest of the three girls, was a soft gentle child. We all "babied" her.

They inherited all my dolls, toys and books. I had been given three small wooden dressers, with drawers that had little ceramic knobs, a stove that we could bum twigs in and the smoke came out the chimney. Mom or dad stayed with us whenever we asked to have a fire in my stove. I had a mini meat grinder that would grind crackers. The crackers would come out like black mouse dropping, but I loved my little meat grinder. The rest of the stuff was run-of-the-mill toys and can still be bought in stores today. Some time ago I asked the girls if they remembered those toys but they were too young at the time and did not remember them. After I had girls of my own I often wished I had kept a few of

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these precious toys, but then, it was fun to see my nieces play with them and I have no regrets.

Washing the milk machines

Every evening, after the milking was done, all the milking pails and milking machines were rinsed. After the morning milking, everything had to be washed. Before the new bam was built, the milk room was only large enough to hold the water tank used to cool the milk. As soon as a five or ten gallon can was filled with milk it was immersed in the ice water to cool as soon as possible. After the milk was all in, the warm milk had melted most of the ice and a trip to the icehouse was needed. Two or three, two foot cubes of ice were added to the tank to keep that water as cold as possible.

Roland Fournier, owner of the creamery, would tell dad how much milk he could bring down. In the summer months when the cows were out to pasture and were producing more milk, every farmer was allotted so many pounds of milk. Bigger milk companies sometimes bought the surplus, for a smaller price per pound. The rest of the surplus was put through a cream separator, a machine that extracted the cream from the milk. The resulting skim milk was fed to the pigs and the cream was set aside to make butter.

Sometimes, some of the cream was used to make homemade ice cream or used on berries. Those occasions were some of the "extras" we would enjoy.

The cream separator had about seventy discs in the shape of cones piled one on top on the other, going from very small at the top to quite large at the bottom. One person would pour the milk into a tank at the top and another would turn the crank. The milk was thrust through the discs, sending the cream to the top spout and the skim milk to a lower, larger milk spout. The cream was returned to the cooling tank until there was enough to make a batch of butter.

When we were all done with the cream separator machine, it was taken apart and all the parts were taken into the house to be washed. Everyone of those million and one discs, (slight exaggeration) had to be separated, washed and dried by hand, then had to be put together again in a very specific order. A slot made it easier for re-assembling. Actually, I believe there were about seventy discs in all. The milking machines were also taken completely apart, washed, checked to make sure the rubber liners were not cracked and the hoses were perfectly clean. The milk cans were washed at the creamery.

Many farmers would bring their milk cans to the end of their driveway and the creamery trucks would pick them up. The dust from the road and the heat from the sun all had its affect on the milk. They could sit there anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of hours. Dad would look at them and shake his head. He always took his milk to the creamery early each morning to avoid any bacteria or foreign matter to infiltrate his milk.

After the new bam was built, a larger milk room was added. We now sold our milk to Hoods in bulk form. They guaranteed that they would take all we could produce. In the summertime, the surplus was bought at a lower price and melded into the overall price per pound. We no longer had to carry those five and ten gallon cans anymore. The milk went from the machine to a pumping station in the bam, right into the bulk tank. Hoods took a bacteria test at every pick-up. They paid a premium for low bacteria count. We always got the premium price. Like all dairy farms, our bams and equipment were state inspected at regular intervals. We never worried about them because Dad was so strict about

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cleanliness. Our bam was brushed down and white washed with lime every year to keep it clean and germ free.

I was still quite young when they passed a law that all milk had to be pasteurized. That was a good law as some of the farmers were not as concerned about cleanliness in the milk room as Dad was. He was more finicky than the state inspectors. Then they went to homogenized milk. That keeps the cream and the milk from separating.

Making butter

I loved making butter. It was usually done on Saturday mornings because we girls were home from school and could help Mom do the work. Like all the other chores, Rosalie, being the oldest, learned first from my mother and then later on, Laurette did and I, "Johnny come lately", was always the last to learn. Once we all knew how to make the butter, anyone of us could be assigned to make the butter on any particular Saturday.

The cream was taken out of the cooler the night before and left in the kitchen to warm up and sour. Raw (un-pasteurized) cream will sour quickly and if left out too long would turn rancid. That would make very strong tasting butter.

In the middle of the summer, when it was very hot, we would take the cream out of the cooler early in the morning of the day we were to chum the butter. We liked our butter sweet. We would hang a thermometer from the rim of the can and when it was the right temperature, we would pour the cream into the butter chum and we would start cranking the handle. If the cream had not soured, we would take a bit of sour cream that we always had on hand and add it to the sweet cream. We would take turns turning the crank on the butter chum. If conditions were perfect it would take about fifteen to twenty minutes to chum a vat of butter. The buttermilk (whey) was drained and ice water was added to harden the butter and wash out all the milk from the butter.

Once the butter was made, we would cover our hair with a bandana, don on a large cover- up apron and take the next step, that of taking the water out of the butter, outside. Then we salted the butter and "pat it" to take out more water. That was a messy job. As we patted the water out of the butter, it would spatter all over you and everything around you. That was one aspect of butter making I did not like. The resulting butter (balls of butter at this point in the process) then was molded into one-pound blocks in special butter molds.

Before we had refrigeration, we would keep the butterballs in a crock filled with a salt brim. After we got electricity, we froze enough butter for our winter supply and sold the rest. Chocolate cake and biscuits made with buttermilk are out of this world. With the coming of the bulk tank our butter making days were over.

Apple pies

There were two Baldwin apple trees in one of our fields. These had the shape of a Macintosh apple but were slightly smaller. Before they ripened they were very hard and sour. When they were ripe they were sweet and tart at the same time, but still hard. We would pick them from the tree and take a bite, the skin would snap and the flavor would explode in your mouth. They were the best apples for pies. They

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stayed firm but tender and kept their firmness when we cooked them for applesauce and did not turn into mush.

I cannot count the many times I went to pick fresh apples to make pies. A few years ago, I asked the owner of a large orchard if he had ever heard of a Baldwin apple and to my surprise, he had. He said they were what they called "a natural fruit". "They were not a good marketable apple," he said. However, he also remembered them as being a good cooking apple.

House cleaning

Saturday was housecleaning day. Laurette and I would start with the kitchen and go through the house washing, cleaning, and dusting. Everything was taken off the counters in the kitchen and washed. The lower shelves in the cupboards were emptied and cleaned and placed back in neatly. Drawers were emptied and things were sorted and re-arranged neatly. The floor was scrubbed and waxed. Laurette was like a whirlwind; she had a time table and things had to be done by that time. Laurette liked everything to shine. She would clean our woodstove until it did shine.

Cleaning a wood stove is not an easy task. First, the ashes had to be emptied. In the winter, that was tricky as the stove was always hot. We would put a cookie sheet on the floor under the ash pail to catch any hot cinders that might fall. Occasionally, a hot cinder would fly on to the linoleum. A searing black blemish would mark the spot. When the linoleum was old we would just shrug it off and not really care but when the linoleum was brand new we made dam sure it was protected. The farmhouse had large plank flooring with different patterned linoleum in the kitchen, dinning room and bedrooms. The linoleum in the kitchen was changed every spring while the others lasted four or five years and the ones upstairs in the bedrooms were there forever. These had to be washed every week.

The bedroom floors upstairs were given a light rinsing while the kitchen was scrubbed on our hands and knees.

I remember doing the dusting with cleaning wood oils. Mom had told me to wash the furniture and then give a light oiling. I love the effect of applying the oil, so the following week I oiled again and the next week and the next week. Mom rarely went upstairs because her bedroom was downstairs and we did the cleaning. One day she had to go up and noticed the oil glistening on the dressers. Needless to say in no time, I was back up there with soap and water.

Once a year we stripped each room of all picture, curtains, bedspreads, and knick-knacks. Old wallpaper was peeled off and new one put up. Sometimes the new one was put over the old one. The windows were washed and the woodwork painted. Everything was washed and put back in its place. The house smelled so good when all was done. When we put up the lace curtains we knew that the spring-cleaning was over.

Lightning

Summer always brought thunderstorms. I loved to watch them. As a matter of fact, I still do. Where we live now (2004) we can see them coming over the mountains. Sometimes we see two or three storms around us. That is so amazing to see. Until recently, I though lightning came down from the sky instead of it coming up from the ground. Laurette was so afraid of the storms. Uncle Freddy had told

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her once that our house would bum down because we did not have lighting rods on our house like he did on his. No matter how mom tried to reassure her she would tremble in fear at the first sound of thunder.

Living in the country you can see them coming from a long ways off. You can actually smell the rain as it approaches. After most severe storms we could see where lightning had struck the ledges on top of the hill.

One day, I was washing dishes and watching a storm out of the window above the sink.

My father kept telling me to stop and get away from the sink. Finally, I lifted my hands to my shoulders and as I was saying, "OK, OK!" a bolt of lightning came out of the sink, ran the whole length of the aluminum strapping that held the linoleum on the counter and went out the receptacle at the end of the counter. When Dad saw my hands go up he thought I had been hit. But, my sarcastic response to his nagging me to get away from the sink, was what saved my life.

One of my cousins and his grandson were out on the lake fishing one day, when a sudden storm came up. He started for shore when lightning hit their motorboat. The grandmother, mother, and father all were watching them coming in and witnessed them literally being blown right out of the water. Their son was as black as ink. I could never understand why they left the casket open. With a turban to hide the more severe bums on his head he looked like a little Indian boy.

Years later, when John and I were living in Montreal, we were sitting at the dinner table eating supper. We could hear the rain beating against the windows. We were commenting on how quickly the storm had come up. Suddenly there was a tremendous clap of thunder. We all jumped up from our seats. We raced to the front door thinking the house had been struck by lighting. Across the street was a stand of pine trees. They stood at about one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty feet tall. The one closest to us had been hit by lighting and it had split the tree completely in half. Much of the bark had been blown off and the white wood was exposed. The heat had been so intent that the bark had dyed the sap red, which was running down the whole length of the tree. The red sap running on the white wood was dramatic. It looked like this majestic tree had been wounded and it was bleeding. The next day we found large pieces of bark two hundred feet away in our back yard.

Uncle Freddy

My uncle Alfred had a farm adjacent to ours. He had only one large field that sloped upward from the brook half way up Haggert Hill. He had a few cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and horses. Uncle Freddy reminded me of the old western farmers, he was small and "wiry" and walked with a limp. When he was young he had fallen off a horse and had broken his leg and it had always bothered him. When I was eleven years old, he had to have his leg amputated above the knee. I was asked to baby-sit my cousins while Uncle Freddy's wife, Aunt Odellie, stayed with him at the hospital.

David was the oldest and just a few years younger than I was. Noella, Gerard, Richard, Jean, Robert and Alice, the baby at that time, followed about a year apart. Simone and Marie were bom later. David and I did not get along too well. He did not like the idea of my being the baby sitter. He stayed outside and kept to himself most of the time I was babysitting. Gerard and I were best buddies. He would help me out with the younger children.

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When Aunt Odellie came home a week later, she brought me a pair of ballerina shoes. She must have used up very precious money to get those for me. They were poor. I walked on air all the way home. My joy was short-lived; my parents were upset with me for accepting payment for an act of charity.

Uncle Freddy moved not too long after that. He sold all of his possessions at auction to pay some of his bills.

While he lived on his farm, he would kill deer year round and on occasions he would kill a moose. He shot an eagle saying it was after his chickens. My father was always afraid he would get caught and sent to jail. I remember them arguing about it. Uncle Freddy drank heavily while Dad drank only on special occasions, which were few and far between. I never saw my father drunk. Dad would forbid us to say anything to anyone about Uncle Freddy's lawless escapades. But then, Dad never permitted gossip about anyone.

David had suffered some kind of sickness as a young child, which had left him sickly and he could not straighten his neck. At a family picnic, he and his younger brother, Robert, were in a rowboat a short distance from the shore. Suddenly, David stood up and fell backwards overboard. His father started yelling to the people in the water to go to his help. They were so intent on David they never saw Robert go overboard. In the short space of half an hour, Uncle Freddy lost his oldest and youngest sons.

Years later, Gerard was convicted for robbing a bank. He has the reputation of having one foot outside of the law. He is still kind and loving with children. He has a reputation for being the strongest man around. At this writing November 17, 2005, Aunt Odellie is the only remaining person of that generation in our family. She is in her eighties and still works hard.

Strong Men

Generally, the Castonguay men were known for their strength. They never competed in contests but events that took place attested to their great physical capacity.

When Dad was working at the I. P. Mill, he would climb a ladder and hang a block and tackle at the end of his arm that most men could not even lift. The mill manager said he had never seen anyone that strong.

One day, Dad and the boys were putting in a lawn in front of the farmhouse. The hydraulic on the dump truck was malfunctioning. The hydraulic systems were fairly new at that time. The dump bed was stuck in the up position. They were looking to see what could be causing it. Alfred went in the truck to see if he could make it come down and pulled on the lever, when suddenly the dump came crashing down. He was unaware that Dad had leaned under the edge of the dump bed. The edge of the dump bed nearly severed Dad's ear off and landed on his shoulder pinning him there. But with his strength he braced himself and held it until they were able to get the truck started. It was one of the early models that had a crank in front of the truck. One person would crank while the other stepped on the gas to get it started. It had a battery but they were not always the best and when the battery was low, the crank would turn the motor over enough to get the motor started. Once they got the truck started they were able to get the hydraulic to work. All of this took time and all this time, my father was pinned under the dump. Apparently my mother went ballistic. There was a big hole in his shoulder when the dump lifted from the truck body. My Mother fixed his ear and shoulder. He never went to the hospital.

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Alfred was working for Berry Hill Orchards. While at work, the owner's son was working under a 1000-pound machine that was jacked up. The jack slipped and the whole thing came down on him crushing him. Alfred heard his screams and getting into a squatting position lifted the machine just enough for others pull the owner's son out. This caused Alfred some physical problems, but as he said, "when you are faced with an emergency you do what you have to do and deal with the rest after". He worked for that same company until he died at a young age of a stroke.

Our neighbor, Abe Additon, said he saw my cousin Gerard, get on all fours, take a chair leg in one hand and lift it up with his friend sitting in it.

My sisters and I all handled one hundred pound bags of grain when we were on the farm. I remember my father scolding me for putting a hundred pound bag of grain on my shoulder and carrying it up the ladder, for my turkeys. I guess that when you do these things on a regular basis your body builds up muscles. These sound far fetched but, more than one person witnessed all these events.

When we lived in Canada the people there nicknamed me "The Strong Woman of the Bible". It was not so much for my physical capacity, but for my mental and spiritual strength. It was how we were brought up. You did what you had to do and did not complain about it. If we had to work long days, we did it. If we had to move to help our husbands, we did it. If we got pregnant we had the babies and loved them. We faced life and met it head on. It built character. As I look back, we were much happier than most. Complaining can become a habit. Being negative does not help the situation but makes it harder to bear. Being positive helped us get through the hard times and gave us a sense of accomplishment. The more we overcame little obstacles the more strength we got for the bigger ones. It became a way of life.

Three years ago John and I moved to Greene and our new neighbors are amazed at the amount of work that John and I do considering our ages. I am sixty-nine (born in 1935) and John will soon be seventy (born in 1935). Until a few months ago when Andre got married, I was taking care of his two children, cooking for both families, helping with the care of his house and laundry as well as our own. My day started at five in the morning and ended about nine-thirty at night. If John and I had never faced our "trials" all through our married life, we would not have been able to help our children when they needed us. The good thing that came out of all this is that we had our grandchildren with us. What fun we had with them.

Today's high divorce rate, drugs use, and suicide are caused by people not able to face life, unwilling to sacrifice and are trying to escape to something better. What they are running to is most often worse than what they are escaping from, plus they are left with a sense of failure.

Religion

Both my parents were devout Catholics. My mother prayed a lot. She taught us to love God and to go to him with all our needs. We prayed the rosary as a family until the boys were older and they did not want too anymore. Rosalie, Laurette and I shared a room. We had a novena to the Blessed Mother and one to the Sacred Heart of Jesus taped to the back of our door. We were taught not to ask God for silly things but to pray for what we needed.

When we got a call saying that Arthur was missing in action, we recited the rosary as a family, for him,

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that he would be found alive. We celebrated when we got that wonderful telephone call to inform us he was in a London hospital with what they called "battle fatigued". After being partially buried by the fallout of bombs for the third time, he went out of his mind for about a month. After a month's stay in the hospital they sent him back to the front lines.

Henry was also in WWII but never left the states. He got a job as a chauffeur for some general for most of his stay. His ability as a mechanic soon landed him a job in vehicle maintenance. He was discharged with an engineer degree. I would hear my mother ask him if he attended Mass every Sunday. He assured her that he did.

We went through many hard times, but somehow we always managed to come out on top.

I maintain that being poor was the best gift God gave to us. We knew we needed him in our lives. There were many incidences that happened concerning religion. Going to Mass every Sunday was not always possible for a large family such as ours, especially in the winter months. Mother would lead us in devotions and prayers. If the roads were open we would go to the novena held at two o'clock in the afternoon at church.

One Sunday, at our church, the holy water was frozen in the fonts, which were situated in the entry ways of the church. Laurette said, "Hey Eva, look! Zeeet"; she made signs on the ice in the holy water font. We laughed and went into the church. Later that afternoon when we went to the novena, it was much warmer and the water had melted. I had on light beige gloves. I said to Laurette, "Hey look at this." I slapped what I thought would still be ice and to my surprise my hand came out soaking wet. The fingers of the gloves were now brown and dripping. Of course, you know that we laughed throughout the novena.

Ice Storm

One time, we had an early season ice storm and the yearling heifers were not in for the winter yet. At first, it was just a few flurries and we didn't think it would amount to too much. But then, the sleet and wind started increasing at nightfall indicating it might become a full fledge "northeaster". Dad began to worry about the young heifers being out in this nasty weather. The boys were in the bam doing chores.

Dad got dressed to go looking for the heifers. My sister and I left the dishes and got dressed to help Dad. Lionel came in from the bam and they struck out for the north pasture. We were told to look closer to the buildings. It was Dad's way of keeping us safe * by making us look close to the farm building. Laurette and I were avid readers and we had read in a western that cattle always went with the wind so we decided to go with the wind. Sure enough we found them huddled in a wooded area at the edge of the field below the bam. As we were herding them back to the bam we heard a screech of what we assumed was a bobcat. Trying to head the heifers into the wind was not an easy task but when they heard that sound they were as eager to leave the area as we were, making our job a mite easier. Mom was so happy to hear we had found them.

Fields in the summer

In the musical, "The Sound Of Music", Julie Andrews sang about how the mountains were alive with the sound of music. How truthful those words are. One only has to walk in the forests, fields of wild

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flowers, or a meadow covered with pristine snow to understand the "symphony" of nature. It is truly teeming with the magic of life. It is exhilarating to feel the sun and wind on your face, to know that there is a God who put all this together for the people he loves so much. I never cease to be filled with wonder when I am surrounded by nature.

Long before that musical was written and when I was but a little girl, I would dance to an imaginary symphony. I would twirl like a ballerina in the most graceful flowing movements. The violins would follow the flow of the breeze. My golden slippers would never touch the ground. The music in my head was beyond comparison. My dress was like iridescent gossamer flowing about me. The cows were my audience. Their applause was thunderous. ... "The Cows! Oh my gosh!" I was late in taking them home to be milked. Barefooted, in my wrinkled cotton sheath dress, I rounded-up the cows and led them to the bam.

Television had not been invented and we never went to movies, so this was all pure imagination on my part. How often did I dance in those fields? A child's mind before it is taught the meaning of the words "impossible, silly or stupid" can comfortably enter into the enchanting world of make-believe and enjoy pretending to be whatever he or she wants to be. It is there that adult goals are spawned. I still love the breeze in my face and if my old arthritic knees would hold out a little longer, I might just try a spin or two in our backfields. I will never be too old to dream.

I loved to walk the fields and woods in the summer. The forest is so alive with creatures of all kinds. The aroma of the vegetation varies constantly. Even in the same areas the smells will change with the time of day, the weather and the seasons. In the wetlands, the morning dew will bring up the pungent smell of decaying vegetation, but as the sun dries the earth the smell of pine needles or dried grass come into play. A breeze will carry an array of scents from flowers and trees making the air a giant bowl of potpourri. I often would find a secluded spot, sit and watch nature at work. Small chipmunks would scurry as though they were being chased by a mighty foe, only to stop suddenly and scold an invisible alien invading his arena. He would nibble on the meaty parts of a pinecone or stuff an acorn in his cheeks and run off to bury it. I wondered how many oak trees grew from acorns stashed away by squirrels for the long winter months and then forgotten. It's difficult to believe that a small acorn will grow to such a huge tree.

If I was real quiet and lucky, a deer might pop into view. That was a rare treat. They are even more beautiful close-up. When they got wind of an intruder, they would spring off in graceful leaps and bounds. They seemed to barely touch the ground as they bounced along in their escape. We saw a lot of deer on the farm but mostly at a distance. I always felt close to God when I was surrounded by nature. I marveled at its beauty and the intricacies of the tiny microbes and the giant trees, the wispy ferns growing in the middle of a prickly juniper bush, the humming birds that seemed oblivious to the hawks soaring overhead.

Spring on the Town Farm

There is a spring in a gully at the edge of the town farm. After Dad had bought the farm, he fenced much of it for pasture. In the suffocating heat of July and August, the cows would go down there to drink and cool off. The spring bubbled out of the ground and since the area surrounding it was flat, the ground around it was saturated before the excess drained to a brook not too far away. The cows' trampling soon turned the earth into a giant bog. The forest is dense from years of leaves falling from

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the trees. The earth had become a deep rich black.

It felt good to enter into the shadows of the woods and leave the searing heat of the sun drenched fields behind. As you neared the spring it was like entering into a cool room.

The cows never wanted to leave the area and you literally had to drive them out. They soon learned that if they got close to the spring I would just yell at them to move. They ignored my attempts to make them leave and I would have to take off my shoes and wade into the bog, it was like walking in ice water. My legs would turn numb from the cold.

The deep mud made it difficult to make progress. When I would finally get them out and onto solid ground my legs would be coated with black mud. It was futile to try scarping it off and to get to water meant having to cross the bog again. I had to carry my shoes and walk barefooted in the underbrush. Ouch! When I got back to the field, I could feel the mud caking up and dropping off in chunks. There was another small brook on the way home and I would stop, wash off the remaining mud and put my shoes on before going on the rocky gravel road.

Harvesting

Autumn was my favorite time of year. The air was crisp and exhilarating. The wind, acting as God's special delivery, swayed the trees and bushes until they relinquished their seeds and while they were still air-bom, carried them to new grounds where they would become food for the winter for birds and others would find rich ground and come spring would begin a new cycle of life.

Harvest time was always exciting. If the harvest was good, it meant a good winter and the bills got paid. The farmers helped each other with the crops. The men worked in the fields and the women cooked. After the meals were served I would go out in the silo or go watch the men unload. As I grew older I was permitted to do more. When we were small we went into the silo to keep the com level and tramp it down. Dad or one of the bigger boys was always with us. We would wear cardboard boxes on our heads because the com would sting when it came down from above. When a chunk of cob hit you, it would smart. As we got older we would feed the bales of com into the com chopper. Wow! That was a thrill.

The guys would tease us if we were not fast enough to keep them going as they unloaded the trucks. There were always two men to a truck, the driver and the man in the back that placed bunches in the truck bed. When the truck arrived at the chopper, the driver would feed the chopper while the other man unloaded. The man unloading would lay the bunch or bale stocks first on the conveyor belt. If the bales were small the bales would feed right into the chopper but if they were too big, the feeder would cut the twine and pullback a few stocks to get it started. If I or one of my sisters was manning the feeder, that meant the two men could unload faster and return to the fields faster. When the fields were far away, that saved a lot of time when multiplied by the number of trucks coming in and out during a day.

The height of the com was important to the yield of ensilage. Com averaging anywhere from eight to twelve feet was considered good. One year we had com measuring eighteen feet tall. We were so excited because the farm extension service said that that was a record. We took pictures of the men standing by the com in the cornfield.

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Harvest time was always so much fun. The family where the crops were being harvested would feed the crew. Mom was considered a wonderful cook. The men raved about Mom's Molasses cake. Mrs. St. Pierre made the best doughnuts, etc. It seems every family had their specialty. The men loved it. They ate very well year round but during the harvest season they had a feast everyday.

Crops were essential for the survival of farm families. A good crop meant the family could afford the bare necessities for daily living. A bad year sent the farmer into debt or even bankruptcy. When the family moved to the farm, there were nine farmers on the horseshoe road that went up over Hackett Hill and down the other side to North Livermore. When I left eighteen years later there were only two farms left. Most farms had been abandoned because of the farmer's not making enough money to pay the taxes. Others sold their land for a fraction of what the farms were originally worth.

Crops

People who live on farms become in-tune with nature. There's a lot of truth to the old adage, "You have to make hay when the sun shines." The weather vane told the farmer more than which way the wind was blowing; it told him if there was a storm coming. The farmers learned to read nature's signs and lived by them. If they thought a storm was coming they would hurry to bring in whatever hay had been mowed and none was cut for the next day. They did not spray if there was a strong wind. They planted according to the moon in the spring. If they planted too early, a frost would hit the seedling and die or the seeds would rot and not germinate; if too late, they might not benefit by the spring rains. They had to rotate their crops not to deplete the nutrients in the soil. They had to know the pH testing of the soil. They worked hard and one bad storm could wipe them out.

Nature also provided the farmers with natural fruits and berries. We knew just when the strawberries would be ripe and in what fields. Just when they were done, we knew the raspberries would start, the blueberries, gooseberries, elderberries, chokecherries, currants and the blackberries. We knew where the best patches were and when to pick them. These wild fruits were ever so sweet.

Rosalie, Laurette and I would each take an empty two and a half quart lard pail and set off for the town farm. Even though our father had bought that parcel of land it still went by the name of the town farm. There, in a backfield, we would find large patches of field strawberries. We would pick mostly in silence, unless someone found a patch of really nice ones, then we would call the others over to share the wealth.

The first week, they were fewer but as the season went on they grew more plentiful. A wet spring meant the strawberries would plump up and we had good picking. Lack of rain would mean the berries would dry up and we had little or no berries. It would take us about two hours to fill our pails. We felt safe there in the fields surrounded by woods. Puppy was always with us. If there were any one or any animal anywhere near, he would stand up and growl only to find that it might have been a ground hog or another small animal. In all the time we picked in the fields we never had a bad incident. However, just the fact that puppy was there we knew we were safe. When we got home, we had the long tedious job of hulling the berries. Mom would help us. We would eat some fresh, but most of them went into jams and jellies for the winter months.

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Uncle Pete Fournier

Uncle Pete was my father's uncle, therefore my great uncle. My father was one of the oldest of his family and uncle Pete was one of the youngest of his family, so they were closer in age than they were to some of their siblings. He often would visit us on the farm. Everyone loved him. He could hold us entranced for hours with his fascinating stories about his life working on the railroad. He also told jokes that kept us in stitches. He would rock me on his lap and sing little ditties. He taught me a phrase made up of no word words, sort of just word sounds that meant nothing, but had all the kids trying to master it. He got the biggest kick out of it when I finally did so. It went like this: "Me stick and stick and stara bobbet, me stara bobbet and wish toug toug"

Uncle Pete bought the Chicoine farm on top of the hill. He wanted to use it as a summer home. He would have loved to have Aunt Celestine, his wife, move there with him but she found it too primitive. I can't say that I blame her but at that point in time I was elated to have him live so close to us. In the summertime, he moved to his "Eden" house without his wife. Aunt Celestine would periodically visit him there. He kept that house immaculate. He made his own meals and even baked his own bread.

Raspberries will grow where trees have been chopped down and their branches left in the woods. It is a part of nature that I never understood. I love picking raspberries. Uncle Pete loved to pick berries also and I especially loved to go picking raspberries with him. Dad owned a twenty-acre woodlot adjoining his farm. My brothers had harvested the woods in the winter months. Mom would call Uncle Pete and asked him when he was going out to pick and if it was ok for me to go with him. He and I had made plans the day before but Mom checked to be sure it was all right. He would tell her yes and off I would go to join him. "MY" Uncle Pete Fournier. I loved that man! He was my favorite uncle, my confidant and best buddy all rolled into one. He would be waiting for me with his two empty lard pails and I with my two, off we'd go on our adventures.

When we were through filling our pails, he would take me further into the woods and show me all sorts of things. Once, we came to a patch of poison ivy. He asked me if I was allergic to it. I said no, but nevertheless, he made me walk on a couple of fallen tree trunks just in case, until we had crossed the patch and were safely on the other side. Once he showed me an old log cabin. A porcupine had adopted it, but uncle Pete shooed him out and we explored it. It was a small one-room structure, but to hear me tell the family it was huge! It sent me into an imaginary time zone of when the first settlers came. Suddenly, I was one of the first pioneers. I cooked over an open fireplace, fished the brook and gathered wild berries and fruits, until my uncle's voice brought me back to reality.

We would sit on a log and munch on bread and cheese that he had brought for a snack. It was delicious. He would let me pick apricots from his trees and gooseberries from vines that grew all over his stone wall. He would tell me stories. He would send me home with my treasures, but not before we had made plans for our next outing. It was always two or three days apart to let the berries ripen. But now that I look back at those pleasant times, I think it was to give him a break from me.

When his family came from the city to visit him, his youngest daughter Juliette, would stay at our house. We were born one month apart and became good friends. We had very few toys, no designer clothes or electronic games back in those days, but we never had a dull moment. When her siblings came to visit her father, the two families would often get together. We played in the hay and cooled off at the water trough, had water fights, played ball and just had good clean fun. Once, while we were

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playing there, Henry, my brother, threw Juliette, clothes and all, into the water trough. We talk about that whenever we get together. Those were good times.

Blueberry picking

We use to go pick blueberries in Donat Chicoine's cow pasture. The place was full of blueberry bushes. Mrs. Chicoine let us pick to our hearts content. We girls would go with big kettles and fill them up in no time.

We never knew whom we would meet there as many people came there to pick, some came up the back road from Canton. We would stay within sight of each other at all times. One day, a woman came up from the lower pasture and said she saw a bear eating the berries. We high-tailed it to the top part of the pasture so we could go into the field if we spotted him. When we told our parents, they were concerned, but not overly so. They told us to sing or talk loud and the bear would avoid us. They told us to stay in the top of the pasture, close to where the farm buildings were. For the rest of that season, Dad would drive us up and stay close by as we picked. There were so many blueberries in that field that in just a few pickings we would have enough for the winter.

No meat on Fridays

I come from a large catholic family. We took our faith seriously and followed the rules and commandments of God and the church. After I was married, my husband and I kept our faith and brought our children up in the faith also.

When I was a child we could not eat meat on Friday, this was a church commandment.

This often posed a challenge for the person cooking for the family. Fish was not always available so we would substitute eggs, cheese, pancakes, pasta, or meatless casseroles. My father was not too keen with these meals but the rest of us enjoyed them. Mom could be pretty creative when it came to food. One of my favorites was fried, sliced potatoes with fried eggs. I was thin as a rail so could afford to eat that. Another treat was elbow macaroni very well cooked, drained and a can of tomato sauce poured over it, with fresh butter and salt and pepper. My two sisters and I could polish off a few bowls of that in a hurry. My father's favorite was dried salted cod, "desalted, of course", in a white sauce.

To me that was about as bad a meal as you could get.

Alfred loved to fish and would often come home, late into the evening, with pails of hompout. He would come home long after we had gone to bed. He would leave the pail of fish in the kitchen sink. The next morning, we had to kill and clean the fish. I remember my sister hitting the dam thing on the head with a hammer and nothing would kill those things. Catfish don't die easily. They have sharp fins on their heads and they really stung if you were not careful. They were extremely slippery and almost impossible to hold. We learned that by taking a pair of large pliers and holding them by the fin, we could chop off the head with a meat cleaver. The fight was well worth the trouble. They were so good to eat.

One time, Alfred came home with a freshwater eel. No one wanted to touch it, not even my father. My uncle Freddy came to get it and was thrilled to death to have it. Not as thrilled as we were to see it go.

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When it was smelting time, the boys would come back with buckets full. We would clean them one by one, roll them in seasoned corn meal and % them. Now that too, was a treat.

Horses

We had a matched pair of Dapple Gray draft horses. In the summer, they were used to plow the fields, rake the hay, and pull the machinery and wagons for all the farm chores. In the winter months, they pulled the sleds and skidders used for pulp and heating wood.

Mr. Landry, our teamster, spent hours, in his spare time, training them for the drag races at the state fair. Dad did not mind too much at first but when he saw how they were pushed almost beyond their endurance, he stopped this practice, and not long after that, he sold them. He got a thousand dollars for the team. It was an unheard of amount of money for us at that time. But, the men turned around and bought another team of horses. Mom, who never said much about what went on outside was upset and told them we needed the money to pay bills.

A few weeks after we sold the Dapple Grays, one died and we had to give back most of the money. That was such a blow to our finances. Not only did we lose some of the money we had for the sale of the Dapple Grays but now we had to pay for the new team as well. Dad decided we could not afford Mr. Landry as a teamster anymore and so he left shortly thereafter.

Forge

People think horses are beautiful and romantic creatures. They, in truth, are majestic animals that need a lot of care and attention. Unlike cows that can eat almost any kind of feed, horses must have good hay or will get sick. If they are working, they must have grain. They need to be shod for winter and wear different shoes for summer. Each horse has a different size shoe and must be fitted individually. Dad had inherited grandfather L'tailian's forge and all the tools that went with it. Dad would make all the horses shoes, shaping the red-hot iron on the anvil. At one end, the anvil started at a point and enlarged as it got to the center, permitting Dad to form the proper size shoe for the horse he was fitting.

I loved to watch him as he worked at the forge. Not only did he make horseshoes, but would form all sorts of parts needed to fix machinery. First, he would light up the coals and, if I were lucky, he would let me pump the billows to get the fire started and to flare up the fire so it could get hotter. Once the fire was hot, we were not permitted anywhere around it.

He would place a piece of iron into the center of the hot coals. When the metal was red hot, he would take a pair of thongs and carry the metal over to the anvil when, with the full swing of his muscular arms, start to shape it into whatever he needed. Sometimes, he would dip the piece into a pail of water to cool it off. He would take measurements and if it were not quite right, he would return it to the hot coals and continue the process.

When he was doing a set of horseshoes, the horse was brought to the outside of the forge so he could be fitted and shod right there. When the shape was right, he would make holes in the shoes for the nails. The shoes were nailed to the horse's hoofs. The excess horn of the hoof was rasped away with a file much like we do with our fingernails. Sometimes a horse would have a broken hoof and Dad

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would have to make a temporary shoe to permit the hoof to heal.

As time went on, he would buy horseshoes already made and would only have to adjust them. On one side of the shop was a wooden bar that Dad had put-up to store the many spare sets of horseshoes. Dad would let us have the old ones to play the game of "pitching horseshoes."

Maud and Gerry

In the beginning I was afraid of the bigger horses. We had a mare, Maud, who was gentle and would permit me to lead her anywhere. Her teammate, Gerry, would follow wherever I lead Maud. However, when I was leading Gerry, she did not always follow where I was leading him. If she was tired or hungry she would lift her head up high and lift me off the ground until I would let go of her halter and then nonchalantly go back to feeding. Other times, I would call them by name, "Come Maud, come Gerry" and they would follow me to the stable.

Planting time

In the spring, the fields were plowed as soon as they were dry enough for a team of horses to walk on, and could pull the single blade plow without sinking. From dawn to dusk, the teams turned the long furrows of dark rich soil. I can still see my father with the reins over his shoulders, holding on to the plow, furrow, after furrow, after furrow. He was so tired when the day was done. What a blessing it was when they got a plow with a seat and two blades on each side. That made the plowing so much easier.

We were out of school for the summer by planting time. Sometimes I would ride one of the horses pulling the seeder, to guide it back and forth in rows as my father handled the seeder. I would sit close to the necks of the horses, as the backs of these draft horses were too large for a saddle, which we did not own anyways, so I rode them bareback. Girls wore dresses most of the time. The sweat from the horses left me chaffed for weeks.

As soon as the seedlings appeared we spent hours pulling out weeds. We had to know what each type of seedling looked like and had to be very careful not to pull out the young plants. To a child the seedlings often looked like weeds and vice versa. It was our job to weed close to the plants because our small finger could get in between the tiny seedlings and the weeds. The grownups would do the heavy hoeing. We did not spray our gardens. Natural products, like pepper were used on cabbage plants to prevent worms. We would walk down the rows of potatoes with cans and sticks and knocked off the bugs into the cans. Tomato worms were picked off the plants the same way. How I hated doing that.

We used Rotatone, made of natural ingredients on the adult plants. Fungicides were not needed. As I remember it, there did not seem to have the same amount of insects and diseases as we do now. The fruits were more juicy and tasty also. The high-bred varieties of today produce larger, more uniform fruits. They are also more pulpy, drier and less tasty. As production grew, the need for insect and fungus control became necessary. The younger generation, thought it was wonderful and a big leap for progress. My Father said that this would cause mutation of both the species of plants and insects, and that it would alter the world forever. He was uncomfortable about using any of these products, but gave in to my brother's arguments, whose thoughts were more modern, therefore contrary to Dad's.

Every morning from the time the corn were a few inches high until it got to be about two feet or better

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we had to hoe in the cornfields. The rows went on forever. It was hot and hard work. When a spray came out that would kill the weeds but not the corn we were in seventh heaven.

Harvesting and canning

Rhubarb, field strawberries, peas, and onions, were some of the first to ripen and that sent the canning season into full swing. Green beans, carrots, corn, and tomatoes, were main staples. Assorted pickles, jams, jelly, and relishes were fun things that the farmer women loved to make. Each year, old favorite recipes and new recipes were exchanged, made and tested. Some fruits, such as pears and peaches were canned, while apples were kept fresh in barrels, dried and sometimes canned. Potatoes were in big dark, cool bins. Cabbage, turnips and squash were put in root cellars.

We would start our day by picking whatever was ready to be canned. As soon as we had enough to start a batch we would bring that in to Mom who would start the canning process right away. Each batch of corn or beans had to boil for three hours. While the first batches were boiling we would be getting more ready for the next batch. Sometimes the last batch of the day would finish boiling as late as ten o'clock in the evening. Often, to get an early start in the morning, we would wash the jars at night that would be needed for the next day. The canning season started in mid to late June and lasted until late fall. Fifteen hundred to two thousand quarts of canned food were needed to supply our family food for one year.

Curing and salting food was an art. Salt pork was a staple in our house. The fresh pork was brought in and scraped clean. It was then scrubbed with coarse salt. A thick layer of salt was placed on the bottom of the crocks or barrels, and then a row of pork was tightly layered on top of the salt. This process was repeated until the crocks or barrels were full.

A thick layer of salt was added to the top. A brim solution that could float an egg was poured in until it covered the pork. This was brought down to the cellar where it was cool. Salt pork was added to many French Canadian dishes. When fried the fat was used much as we use vegetable oil today.

Hundreds of pounds of cabbage were shredded fine and salted to make sauerkraut. Cabbage and salt were layered in stone ware crocks. Then it was placed near the wood-burning stove. It would have to be close enough to keep it warm so it could ferment, but not too close, because then the cabbage would cook, and the sauerkraut would be spoiled. A large ironstone plate was placed on top of the cabbage and a weight was placed on top of that to keep the mixture packed tightly. As the fermenting process began, the juice released from the cabbage rose to the top. The smell was much like old sweaty stockings that had not been washed for months. Fortunately, the process did not take long and the sauerkraut was canned. Amazing how something that smelled so bad could taste so good!

Nothing was wasted. If one family had too much of one thing, it was sent on to another family. There was no refrigeration, so even meat had to be canned. Beef was always slaughtered during the winter months. We kept as much fresh meat as the family could consume while it could be kept just at the freezing point, and the rest was canned. Pork was cured, and smoked or salted. Blood sausage, headcheese, and pickle hocks were made on the same day the pigs were slaughtered. Next came the curing, salting and fat rendering. Meat pies and pork crotons were made and frozen. The hustling to get everything done in its proper time was fun and exciting. My mother used to say she always felt wealthy after a beef or pork had been stashed away for the winter months.

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To have fresh meat longer, Families would stagger the time of butchering. If my Dad butchered his beef during the first part of November, he would send a portion of it to his brother for his family. His brother would not kill his beef until the middle of December, and we would receive a portion of his beef. Thus the families enjoyed fresh meat longer.

Whatever we had, either in the garden or when butchering a beef or pork, my father would bring some down to his Brother Pete and his family of thirteen children. Aunt Carmel was so grateful. When her older children started to work and had clothes they no longer wanted to wear, she would send them up to us. We cousins still share fond memories of our parents sharing.

The war years

My five brothers were the older children in the family. Bom in 1935, I was still quite young when World War II started. Arthur, the oldest, and Henry, were drafted. Lawrence was deferred because he was needed at home to help Dad on the farm and Alfred went to help my Uncle George on his farm. Lionel was still too young for the draft. When he turned eighteen, he was classified 4F because he was crippled in his right arm.

Just about everything that was sold in stores during the war was rationed. We had coupon books for anything from shoes to butter, sugar, gas or tires. We would pass our butter, eggs etc. coupons to Uncle Pete. When he got low on milk coupons, we would bring him fresh milk from the farm. Rations were harder for people in the city than those on the farms; we were pretty self-sufficient. Farmers were allotted more gas for crop growing. We grew most of our food and we made out ok

After the war, Lawrence and Henry came back to the farm to live and work. However, as Lawrence's family grew he could not earn enough money to support his family adequately. Both Henry and Lawrence moved out to be on their own. Even after Lawrence and his family had moved away they would come and spend long weekends back at our house. Rosalie sewed for Lawrence's kids and mom sent them home with food as well.

Laurette and I were still quite young and a couple of time grumbled at the inconveniences of doing things for him and his family. We were told in no uncertain term to stop it. We were told to be more charitable towards our brother and warned not to say anything to him or his family. It was not until we were older that we realized how hard a time he was having.

When Lawrence was living in what we call, the little house across the yard, his children were in and out of our house like it was their own. We got attached to those kids. They were well brought up and fun to have around. I was particularly fond of Eddie. He was naughty and full of fun and that was right up my alley. Later in years when I started to go out with John, I paid less attention to Eddie. One Sunday, when John had come up to see me, Dad happened to be looking out the window and called me over. Eddie was kicking John's car. He was so cute I just wanted to run out there and hug him

Winter

Winters were long and could be harsh. The men would chop wood, both for the fuel the family needed, but also for the IP mill. This gave us a source of much needed income to pay for supplies during the winter months. Winter nights were long, but they were also a time for relaxing and having

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fun. On weekends, family members, spouses and their children would gather at the farm and we would play music, cards or just visit. All my brothers could play one or more instruments. Laurette played the guitar, and she and Rosalie sang.

Snow in the country stays white, unlike that in the city, where it turns a dirty gray from soot and sand plowed into dirty snow banks and on the lawns. In the country, the wind blows the snow into huge drifts in perfect swirling patterns. Strong winds can create white outs and make traveling dangerous, if not impossible. Or sometimes a breeze will whip the snow into small spiraling puffs that race across the fields as though playing tag. The snow stays white and pristine from the first snowfall to the spring thaw.

Deer

From where our house was situated, we had a good view of our neighbor's fields; Uncle Freddy, the Saunder's and Norton's all lived across a valley to the south of us. Their land sloped down the hill in a semi-circle to the brook that ran the whole length of Haggert Hill. It was not uncommon for us to see deer in their fields eating their crops. Mostly, they traveled in small groups, but a few times we counted up to as many as thirty deer. They could eat large areas of new com in one night.

Sometimes in the spring, before the crops started to come in, the winter food supply had been depleted to almost nothing. Buying meat was expensive. Henry or Lionel would kill a deer. The law allowed farmers to kill deer when they were destroying crops. Porcupines and ground hogs were also destructive. Dad had no problems hunting them but he would be beside himself when they killed a deer. He would say, "It's against the law and I don't want you to do that. We'll be caught and have to pay a fine etc." The boys made sure that the deer were in the cornfield when they shot them. They knew that they were well within the law. It was such a relief to Mom to have meat to feed such a large family.

My Uncle, on the other hand, had no qualms about eating deer meat year round, whether they were in the crops or not. He had nine children to feed and only a small farm to produce the necessary food. He had a wooden leg with not much hope of getting a better job. I can sometimes understand him "stretching the law".

One year, he killed a moose. They were on the endangered list and were protected by law. My uncle called it a "mouton de bois" (wood sheep). He sent a large roast to Dad. I thought Dad was going to have a heart attack. He didn't even want to eat any of it. My brothers teased him all the while they were feasting on the roast. My father had mom call and tell Uncle Freddy not to send any more such meat.

My uncle, who had little respect or fear of the law, thought it was the greatest joke and regaled with laughter as he told his siblings, who were all aware of how Dad was scrupulous of the law. They all more or less said to Uncle Freddy something to the effect, "You didn't do that to Charles! Oh my gosh, he must have had a bird."

Those two brothers could not have been more different; Uncle Freddy was small and wiry without fear of anything or anyone. Dad, on the other hand, was tall and muscular, weighing slightly over two hundred pounds. He was gentle and honest to a fault. He was always afraid of hurting someone or doing something wrong and never approved of doing something that would be illegal.

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Recreation

Farm families worked hard. They also knew how to have a good time. Saturday night was family night. We got together to play cards, sing and dance. Weddings, May Day, anniversaries, birthdays, or any holiday was an excuse to have a family gathering. We would get together at each other's homes or rent a hall for larger gathering.

We found ways to have a good time. Corn husking bees were really fun. They would pile all the corn in a long row on the barn floor. People would come from all over to help husk the corn. If anyone found a colored ear he or she got to kiss someone. Girls and guys tried to sit next to someone they liked. Colored ears were hidden throughout the pile. There was a lot of teasing and laughter. Sometimes a red ear was planted where a shy or cute girl was sitting and the guys would watch, if it showed a bit of red when she started to husk and she tried to hide it before others could see it, there was always someone who would squeal on her and the guys would all gang up on her and tease her until she picked someone to kiss. Brothers and cousins did not count. The quick kiss sent everyone yelling and shouting and the poor girl would turn beet red. Then of course, there were those who wanted to be kissed and coyly showed their colored corn. When the husking was done there was refreshment and often times a hoedown, a barn dance.

There were always people who played musical instruments. Lionel, Alfred, Romeo St. Pierre and a few of their friends would play for parties, weddings etc.

There was a music gathering in Jay, a small town adjoining Livermore falls, every other Saturday evening in the summer months. We would go there and listen to a group play country music. I was so proud of Lionel because he was one of the stars. He was the only one who could play six instruments, the accordion, guitar, mandolin, piano, banjo and harmonica. In the course of the evening they had a mystery box. Whoever guessed what was in the box won a prize. As the evening went on they gave more clues until someone guessed what was in the box. One such Saturday evening, I guessed it was safety pins after the first clue. All the kids my age laughed and my sister shushed me up. After several more clues. I yelled safety pins again and the same thing happened. Near the end of the evening, a cute young lady called out safety pins and they made a big deal of her winning.

I was so mad at being ignored, just because I was a kid.

The manure pile

When you live on a farm with a lot of cattle, the manure pile plays a role in your life. First, you must clean out the gutters along the animal stalls and the stalls to keep the cows clean and comfortable. The manure, in the olden days, was scraped into the gutters and then large planks, about six to eight inches wide was flipped on their side and the waste was pushed down the gutter and fell through an opening in the floor and accumulated under the barn. In the spring, large doors on the lower part of the barn were opened and the manure was loaded in spreaders to fertilize the fields. In time, the machinery improved and conveyor belts were installed in the gutters and all the waste was brought outside with the push of a button. Every farmer has had a mishap or funny story concerning the infamous manure piles.

My brother Lawrence was fastidious about everything he did and especially about his clothes. One day,

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he was "mucking" the stalls when a cow swung her tail and knocked my brother's brand new white hat into the gutter. Lawrence took a pitchfork and with the tip of the tine tried to pick it up without getting it soiled. Well, the hat kept moving along the gutter. Every time he thought he had it, it would drop in again. This continued the whole length of the bam. Needless to say, by this time, the hat was pretty gross. He looked at it, opened the door to the scuttle hole and scraped it down onto the manure pile. That evening, the telling and retelling of Lawrence's expressions, including some of his choice words kept the family in fits of laughter.

One of our neighbors would wheelbarrow his manure out to the end of his bam. As the pile got bigger, planks were laid at an angle towards the top permitting them to dump further and higher. By the end of winter the pile was huge.

After a couple of snowstorms and some very cold weather the pile would freeze. In the course of the winter, the kids realized they could use a sled or wagon to slide down from the roof into the frozen manure pile and have a nice long ride. Come spring, they had a couple of warm days. The kids went up onto the roof as usual, for their rides. The sun had thawed the muck. The wagon wheels sank in and one of the boys landed headfirst into the manure. From down below, his Father said to his son still in the wagon, "Aren't you going to help him out?" The kid replied, "Heck no, he's better off dead." The unfortunate brother was stripped and hosed down before being permitted into the house to take a bath.

Lionel got a good deal on a conveyor belt for the gutter and had one installed. With the push of a button the belt, made of a series of lags, brought the cow dung to another conveyer that brought it up a ramp, through a hole in the side of the bam to a pile outside. One day, the motor that sits in the middle of the top of the ramp broke down. Lionel went up the ramp and was working on it when he lost his balance and went up to his armpits in cow poop. He yelled to his son Leo and my Son Andre to throw him a rope, which they did, but forgot to hold on to one end of it. My brother who will not be outdone when it comes to cussing gave them all new names. Finally, Leo brought the tractor with a pay loader (shovel) to the side of the manure pile and extended the shovel out to Lionel. They pulled him out amidst howls of laughter.

This next story involved one of Moms "pet ducks." When they open the lower bam doors in the spring to spread the manure, some urine/manure-liquefied "composition" comes out in a flood and most of it drains out in the field. Then they would back up the spreader and load up. There was a slight dip in the lay of the land and some of the liquid collected there. One of Mom's ducks wandered out over the top and then got stuck in the muck. The more it struggled to get free the more its feathers got imbued with the muck. The men laid planks, tried to lasso it but to no avail. Nobody was going to go in there after that duck! Mom kept coming out there and could not bear to see it suffer and would go back into the house. The last time she came out she was crying. That did it! When she went back into the house, I put on old rags and waded in after the stupid duck. The muck came up over my knees. The worse was when I got near the duck, it started to flap its wings and I got sprayed from head to toe with muck. I finally got that dumb duck out. What a way to become a hero. I washed a dozen times, at least, before I could get all the smell off of me. Whenever someone tells about one of these things happening to them, everyone has a few such memories to share.

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Bull

Every farm had to have a bull or access to one to breed the cows. On our farm, when we were growing up, the men never used the word breeding in front of the women. If they were discussing a certain cow that needed breeding they would use the term, "service the cow."

Holstein bulls can become quite large. They also have a mean disposition. Lionel was usually the one to handle our bulls. A bull's nose is very sensitive so a brass ring is placed in its nose and when a handler wants to move him from one spot to another they snap a staff onto the ring. These long staffs have another rod inside. There is a handle with a lever at one end, that when pulled, opens a clip at the other end. They would clamp this on the ring in the bull's nose. With this staff, they would keep the bull's head up at all times. If you permitted a bull to lower his head, he could charge and that would put the handler in danger.

Lionel had a close call with one bull. He noticed that when he took the bull out to service a cow the bull was more interested in trying to push Lionel around. After the bull had dismounted the cow he would not come forward, but kept backing up pulling Lionel with him. Lionel managed to keep the bull's head up, but the bull being eight feet long and six feet high and weighing at about twenty three hundred pounds, just kept backing up. They were about one hundred and fifty feet down the field when Lionel spotted a huge rock and turned his head ever so slightly as to veer the bull toward the rock. Then Lionel got the rock between himself and the bull. Lying against the side of the rock Lionel was able to keep the bull's head up and the bull's neck was tiring while Lionel was resting. They stayed there for a good period of time. Finally, Lionel tried to lead him up towards the bam and the bull followed. Step by slow antagonizing step he managed to get him into the bam and tied him up in his stall. Exhausted, Lionel went to the house and called the cattle dealer to come and get him. Once a bull has challenged you, it will only get meaner. And it is only a matter of time before someone gets hurt.

Farmers are always looking to improve on production and quality of their livestock and the way to do it is by selective breeding. They look for a line that has good feet, udders, strong backs, and high production. Wishing to improve his herd, Lionel purchased a bull from Bill Briggs in Turner. The bull's sire and dame were both from good stock. He was from the Dunloggen breed.

In the summer time, Lionel kept the bull in a pen next to the bam. The men had dug post holes four feet deep and lowered five to six inch diameter hardwood post into the ground. The cross railing were also hardwood and four to five inches in diameter. Next to the pen was a breeding stall. They would bring the cow that was in heat to the stall, and then swing open the gate to the stall entrance. The bull would mount the cow and breed. When he dismounted he was right back into his pen and all that the men had to do was push the gate shut and the bull was secure. This eliminated much of the danger of handling the bull.

Someone threw a tire in the pen. To this day, we don't know who did that. This angered the bull and he pushed it around with his massive head. He too had to be put down because he became too dangerous. It is sad and expensive to have to do that but the safety of the farmers must come first. Every so often we would hear of a farmer getting mauled or killed by their bulls.

I had a hair-raising experience with one of our bulls. We kept our small calves in a pen near the bam. They were given warm milk every morning and evening. Every so often they would break through

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their flimsy fence and roam around the barnyard. At night, when it was feeding time, my brother would call them by yelling "Ti-Kie" and they would come running to their pen for warm milk. He would mend their fence, which would hold them for a few days, and they would break out again. They were so cute; we would pet them when we were outside.

One day, I was outside reading under a large birch tree in the back of the house. I heard footsteps and figured the calves were loose again. I called their names without taking my eyes from my book. I could hear them coming closer. I reached out to pat them, again without taking my eyes from my book. I felt something hard, I looked up and there was our big bull looking right at me. I let out a screamed and jumped to my feet. He reeled in surprised and in ten steps I was in the front door of the house. Thank goodness it was unlocked. Sometimes we kept that door locked so the kids would not come through the front entrance hall and living room. I pushed the door shut and turned to see the bull's face in the door window. My mother yelled, "Get down, lock the door and get away from there." He had climbed the two stone steps and his face was right at the door. It is doubtful he could have fit his 2000 pounds through a regular door, but provoked, he could have easily pushed that door in and it is possible he might have taken the doorframe in with him. In any case I wasn't ready or willing to find out.

We suddenly realized that the other kids were outside and we all started to yell, "Where are the kids." The kids were our nieces, Rita and Claire. They were visiting us on the farm for the summer vacation. They were just outside the kitchen door so we pulled them in and kept an eye out for the bull until the men came home. We could see the bull wandering around the barnyard. Then after a while he disappeared. The men found him on the bottom of the hay pit in the bam. Part of the barn's basement was used for hay and the other half was where the manure was dropped in the winter. He was so heavy; he had fallen through the floorboards to the basement below. With the bull staff they were able to walk him out through the basement of the bam.

Mr. St. Pierre, our neighbor, sometime let his bull out in the pasture with the cows. One day, when we were visiting them, we went for a walk in the fields. Not knowing the bull was out; we took a short cut through the pasture. He saw us and was coming full gallop towards us. In very few seconds we were like deer sailing over the fence.

Artificial Insemination

Dad was skeptical of artificial insemination. He mistrusted this method because it was not natural and it was too costly. Would the heifers be normal? He had a million and one questions about this procedure. Lionel had done his research and proved to dad that it was safe in all ways, and certainly safer for him physically.

Many farms now do not keep bulls because they are so dangerous; now they use artificial insemination. At first, "AI", as it was called, was inconvenient and expensive. The cow has to be bred on the right day for it to take effect. Many times the technician got there too late and a whole month was lost. It has come to the point when a farmer has to learn to be a nursemaid and an equivalent of an OBGYN to his cows. He has to learn the anatomy of the cow so that he knows when she is in heat and how to "AI" her without causing her harm with the instruments used to do it.

After a cow has given birth and is sixty to ninety days into her lactation she will ovulate. She will discharge a clear, sometimes slightly bloody, mucus from her vulva. That is when she should be bred.

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This will insure the farmer of only a short period of rest between lactations. A dry cow continues to eat, but does not produce and this is very costly if it extends beyond the two month dry period. Therefore you try to keep the dry period to a minimum.

Lionel's son, Leo, went for training to perform the "AI" to save time, money and for the connivance of serving the cow when Leo first noticed she was in heat. Every morning after milking the cows he would look at the charts to see which cow might be due, then he would check these cows. Those ready to be bred were kept in the bam while the others were released to pasture. The AI procedure is not pleasant but still quite delicate and can damage a cow if not done right. He chooses semen from a number of breeding bulls available and keeps them in a special tank at 300-400 degrees below zero.

Six weeks to two months before giving birth, the cow is permitted to go dry. Her feed is lessened accordingly. When the time gets near for her to drop her calf she is watched closely in case she needs help. Although these cows are huge, they have big calves and it can cause her to tear or not be able to calf without someone helping by pulling on the calf's front feet. Heifers are kept as replacement stock, but bull calves are either sent to the dealers right away or raised as veal. Now that the cow has started a new lactation her feed will be changed to include grain, vitamins etc.

Running a dairy farm is a complex business. It is also the only business I know that someone else regulates what you can sell your product for. The farmer has to have the cattle, the bams, tools, machinery, feed etc, yet he only gets about ten percent of the retail price of the milk. You really have to love farming to stay in the business.

Visits to the farm

We often had unannounced company on Sunday. People would say, "It's a nice day, lets go for a ride in the country." That was fine, but sometimes they would be two or three cars full of people who had planned together to come and visit the farm and then they would stay for supper. Laurette and I would scurry around trying to find enough food for everyone. No sooner had they eaten that they would go outside for a walk or go visit the animals in the bam. Laurette and I were left to wash the dishes and clean up in the kitchen. My father and mother never turned anyone away from the table. They were such gracious hosts.

Whenever there was a family reunion, it was held either at my uncle George's farm or ours. Everyone would bring food and share in the work. Those get-togethers were fun. On one particular reunion, we were all at Uncle George's place and the younger generation were all playing baseball, horseshoes or some other pick-up sport. My parents were sitting on the porch talking with the other adults. At my tender young age, I felt so sad because they were, in my eyes, "old and could not enjoy themselves anymore." At that time, they would have been in their early fifties. That evening, my mother asked me why I was sad. When I told her what I was thinking she laughed, she thought it was so funny. During that week I heard her telling one of my aunts about it and they were laughing. I could not understand how a person so "close to death" could find that funny. Today, as I am writing this I am sixty-eight years old and feel I'm in the prime of life.

My father's brother, Joseph, and his wife, Blanche, lived in Springfield Mass. Every summer they would come to Maine to visit their family. Joseph, with very little formal education, became one of the chief engineers for a large manufacturer of helicopters, making engines for them. Like his father, he

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understood engines and went up the ranks through hard work. Back then, when that industry was young, people could do that, but today everything is so complicated a person needs years of schooling to even get in the door.

Whenever Uncle Joe and Aunt Blanche would come they always had treats for all the children. They treated us as adults. We thought they were neat people. When my brother Henry was a teenager he had worked at Uncle Joe's car repair shop in Chisholm. It is a coincidence that both of them got engineering certification from the government for their work and without having gone to school. They were both very proud of their certificates. They always had much to talk about when they got together.

My mother got along with all her in-laws. Dad's sisters loved each other but fought among themselves. Strangely enough they didn't fight with their brother's wives. More than one of the cousins has told me that they admired my parents and that Dad was their idol. He would not tolerate any gossip.

At a gathering of the "clan" at Aunt Marguerite's farm one day, there was quite an argument going on. When somebody shouted, "Hey you had better stop it Charles just drove up." The atmosphere change completely and suddenly.

All the men, save Dad and George, could hit the bottle pretty hard at times. Once, when the clan came up to the farm, we, the young people, had a water fight. I knew where the bam faucets were and they had more pressure than the others. Before the night was over just about everybody but the older generation got a good soaking. Then someone took out a guitar and a sing-a-long began with everyone joining in.

One of our favorite games when we were a lot of kids together was "Kick the Can". We would all pile our cans one on top of the other. The "It" person had to pick up all the cans before someone would sneak up and kick the cans again. If the "It" person sighted anyone, that person became "It". When all the cans were stacked the first one to have sighted was now the "It" person.

Haying

Haying took up a good part of the summer. The hay crop determined how many heads of cattle you could winter over. The quality of the hay had a bearing on the milk production too. Farmers tended to feed the less good hay to the heifers that were not producing milk. A heavy milk producer needed to be fed extra grain. Ensilage, vitamins and molasses were added to their feed. A cow has four stomachs. They gobble down just about anything they get to. Then they lie down and chew their cud. Some farmers would put a magnet in the cow mmen, or first stomach, to catch any metal objects the cow might ingest. If metal got into the cows other stomachs it could make them very sick and a farmer could not afford to lose a good milking cow.

A working horse will eat anywhere from fifty to seventy pounds of hay a day plus grain when working hard. A horse will get sick if the hay is not good quality.

When we first got to the farm, the hay was stored loose. The grass was cut on days the men were relatively certain that there would be no rain. Rain on mowed hay ruins it as far as nutrients go. Then a tedder would fluff up the hay to make it dry faster. As soon as it was dried, it was raked into windrows. We would then make mounds to be pitched onto the hay wagons. As you pitched the hay

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with long pitchforks bit of broken hay known as chaff, rained down on you, in your hair, shirt and pants. The sweat made it stick to every part of your body. You could not be afraid of bugs as they went along with the territory.

A person on a rake went over the field once more to gleam every bit of hay. On a dairy farm, hay was "gold."

Before they had a baler the hay wagon was driven onto the bam floor. There, it was unloaded with a huge hayfork that was attached with big ropes to a series of pulleys at the top of the bam. It was then lifted to the top of the barn and the hayfork would snap into a carrier. A horse was attached to one of the ropes and he would pull the rope until the fork was over the location where they wanted the hay and they would release the brake. A series of, "OK's" rang through the air as a signal to the horse driver to stop, slack the rope and then back the horse back to the bam door. The person in the loft would then push the hay into the bins. The process was repeated until the wagon was empty. At least three people were needed to unload a wagon. With the men out in the field, the younger children were called to ride the horse and as he/she got older, man the fork or push the hay into the bins. Safety was of prime importance. The older members of the family were responsible for the younger ones. We worked in the hay bam under supervision, but playing in the hayloft, when the hayloft was full was not permitted.

Baling machines were invented which replaced the "loose" haying we were doing. After farmers started to bale, the hay conveyer belts replaced the forks. The baling machines compacted the hay into bales and much more hay could be stored in the same space. Bales have to be stacked in the proper way or they could shift and a person could slide in- between the rows of bales and suffocate. This was always a serious concern. When we were stacking them we were told to alternate the direction of the bales every row.

One evening, we had company with their kids and they wanted to go up in the hayloft. The hay smelled so good and we could slide down the side all the way down to the board floor. This was after Dad had started to bale the hay. I remember following the bigger kids up the ladder. Parts of what happened after that is fuzzy in my mind. I remember trying to catch up with them when I fell headfirst between bales. I was sure I was going to die there. I could not scream for help because it was difficult to breath. Then I heard Rosalie calling my name. I couldn't even answer her. I remember worrying that she would not find me. Then I felt her pulling at my legs. I can assure you that Dad never had to tell me not to play on the bales again.

Wheat threshing machine

There was an old one-room schoolhouse on our farm. It was in the northwestern pasture. There was a spring next to it. I imagine it must have supplied the school with water at one time. A little further, there was a dug well but if I remember correctly, Mr. Gordon, the previous farmer was the one who had that well dug. It was still our main water supply.

The well was over a quarter of a mile from the house. It was gravity fed to the house.

Once or twice, it went dry during a severe drought period in the summer. When they installed watering cups for the cows and other animals in the bam, the output from the well was inadequate for both the

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house and bam uses. We had another spring in the southwestern pasture, at the foot of Haggert Hill, where Uncle Freddy used to live and that now belonged to Dad. Dad pumped our water from that spring whose output was sufficient to supply the whole farm.

I used to love to go to the old school house and imagine what life would have been like when it was in use. It now housed Dad's wheat threshing machine. Dad would pull the machine out of the school when using it. That gave us kids the opportunity to explore the old building. We found two lead spoons on one of the beams. Can you imagine eating with a lead spoon? Then I would visit the spring. It had become the neatest frog pond. Laurette and I spent hours catching the frogs, petting them, before letting them go. We took jars of fish eggs home only to be told to bring them back least we would be the cause of their demise. If we had to kill an animal for food or a bug because it was a hindrance to the gardens, we had to do it as painlessly as possible. We were taught from an early age never to let any living creature suffer. So, we watched them hatch into pollywogs and followed their growth into adult frogs at the pond. They got so accustomed to our being there that they ignored our presence. There were some that we could pick up at will. We even gave them names. That spring would dry up every summer and the frogs would migrate to other wet ground nearby. But the following spring they were back at the pond and so were we.

Cattle rustling

Some people thought farmers backwards and stupid. They thought they could do anything they wanted on the farms. They could pick our apples or ask for whatever they wanted in the gardens and we were to give it to them free because it didn't cost us anything or so they thought. They never gave a second thought to the cost of seeds, fertilizer, the machinery needed to cultivate the crops, to say nothing about the hard work. During hunting season some hunters would walk or drive all over our land without asking permission.

During the war, meat was rationed as were a lot of other commodities. Farmers suffered a rash of thefts. Men in large box vans would drive up to a pasture, pick up two or three cows and drive off. Some had the audacity to slaughter them in the field, leave the head, skin, and entrails in the pasture and take off with the meat. This brought a high price in the cities black markets. We were lucky in the fact that the only road to our cattle went right in front of our house. The back road was nearly impassable and increased the chances of being caught. From our house we had a good view of the neighboring farms up to over a mile away. One evening just about dusk, we saw neighboring farmer's cows running in different directions. Then we saw flashlights flickering in the nearby shrubs. Mom called the farmers homes and asked if they knew what was going on. They replied that it wasn't any of them out there in the fields, but would investigate. My brothers and friends that were visiting us took their guns and went in pursuit of the rustlers. Mom and Dad were worried that they might get hurt and warned them to be careful. But in the country, neighbors help neighbors, so off they went. They returned hours later. They saw tire marks where there should not have been any vehicles. The next morning at first light, the Saunders and close neighbors found there cattle scattered all over the place but none were missing. They called to thank the boys for their help.

Lover's lane

One summer, we had problems with people driving through our hayfields to go "parking." Lionel put up gates, and no trespassing signs, but all to no avail. One day, he brought a huge load of dry chicken

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manure and dumped it in piles in the paths they took to go into the fields. Now, this stuff is like very fine powder and when the parkers drove through it, it entered into every nook and cranny of their cars. And when this stuff gets wet, it sticks like glue and the stench is so bad it makes you sick. That was the end of our fields being used as lover's lane.

Stray Dogs and Cats

Every fall, the people who owned the cottages at the two ponds just about a half mile from our house, would close their cottages for the season and leave their pets to fend for themselves. Some of these dogs would form packs and hunt deer or any wild animals to survive. The game wardens would have to destroy these dogs. Some of the dogs and many of the cats would find their way to the farms, mostly ours, because we were the closest. By the time they got to the farm they were on the brink of starvation. My brothers would dig a pit and destroy them and bury them. It was the most humane thing to do. Every year the newspaper would ask the people to bring their pet to animal shelters, and please not to leave their pets behind.

One year, we had so many that Lionel put them all in the station wagon and took them to the edge of our woods to dispose of them. One of the dogs turned just as Lionel pulled the trigger. The bullet grazed the dog's head but did not kill him. The dog ran back to the farm and one of my little nieces saw it and came into the house to tell us. We told them to stay in the house for fear that the pain might make the dog ugly and attack them. I took a gun and found the dog in the top of the hayloft cowering in pain. I shot it to put it out of its misery. When I went back into the house Mom asked me where I had shot it. When I told her she said are you sure the bullet didn't go through to the bull down in the bam? That was about the worst moment in my life. That was my brother's prize bull! Oh my gosh! What if I had killed it or wounded it? I ran back to the bam and there, standing in his stall, was the BULL with no visible injury and very much alive. What a relief that was.

Feeding the Pigs

It was Lionel's job to feed the pigs. Every morning and evening he made a mush of commeal with hot water. He added any scraps or food leftovers, potato peels etc. that we had saved for him during the day. He would take his measure of grain put it in a bucket, then bring it into the shed, then come into the kitchen for the hot water. After we had finished the dishes we would put the kettle on the stove to heat the water for Lionel. If we had a lot of dishes or we were late, this meant Lionel would have to wait for his hot water. One evening he had to wait so he went to play the piano. Lionel loved music and would play any chance he got. He played when he came in for lunch, while waiting for his meals and every evening when he was through chores. He played many instruments but mostly he played the piano. We called to him that his water was boiling. He came to stir the mush but couldn't find the paddle. He went back to the bam, the pig's sty and through the shed. All the time he was moaning and groaning about why had someone taken his swill paddle.

He had us all looking. Mom, in jest, said, "Why don't you go look in the parlor." He said that was not funny and went out to get a stick to stir his swills and mush. He fed his pigs and came in for the evening still grumbling about wishing people would leave his things alone. After cleaning up, he went into the parlor to play the piano and there, leaning against the piano, was the swill paddle.

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Learning to drive a car

One Saturday morning, I was in the middle of baking bread when Lionel came in and asked if I could drive the tractor to the lower field for him and he would follow in the truck. I told him "you know that I have never driven before. I can't do that." He replied, "It's easy, I have the tractor started, all you have to do is steer it in the middle of the road. It's in low gear and goes very slow. It would really help me out." How could I say no?

I got on the tractor and he put it in gear and showed me where the clutch was and off I went. I was doing very well until I started thinking he had not told me how to stop the dam thing. I knew he was following me in the truck; I turned around to ask him how to stop.

Not having any experience at all in driving I didn't realize that I had turned the steering wheel at the same time that I turned to look back. Lionel yelled, "watch out", but it was too late, I was climbing a stonewall that followed along the side of the road. The tractor reared back and fell on its back. I managed to jump clear. In his desire to save the half hour it would have taken him to walk back to get his tractor, he lost a whole day to upright the tractor and to fix all the parts that had been damaged.

As a result of this accident, I was "labeled" a person that couldn't drive. Nobody wanted to teach me. One day, Rosalie asked me if I wanted to learn how to drive. Wow! I jumped at the chance. Again I was put behind the wheel with the same line that I had heard before, "It's very easy, all you have to do is step on the clutch, shift the gear and step on the accelerator, all at the same time". I drove the car down the road one mile, turned around, and was doing very well until I had to turn into the driveway. This was before cars had power steering. I didn't quite make the turn, and, hit the only tree on the lawn. Well, forget it. I now was banned from driving any kind of vehicle.

It was not until we had been married for a couple of years that John said it was time for me to learn to drive and he taught me how. First, he had me read the manual, he showed me what every gadget and button did. Then he had me start the car, go forward and backwards until I was comfortable with that before we took off on the road. I got my license the first time I went for my state driving test. I had a good teacher.

Sawmill

Dad was always trying to make extra money to make ends meet. He learned that there was a used sawmill machinery for sale. He bought it and set it up at the end of a field. Soon, people were bringing their logs to be sawed by Dad. He was good with numbers and was able to tell the customers what they could get out of their logs. He had a reputation for being honest, and people knew they would get the most for their money from their logs.

If the log runway was full, the people would bring their log to a pasture across the road. I would take a can dog and help roll the logs onto the carriage. At least, I thought I was helping. The fact that my big brothers were on the other end had nothing to do with it. I was pulling my weight at my end, all of about eighty pounds of me. The first time I was able to roll a log all by myself was a great day for my memory book.

Nothing was wasted. Occasionally, when Dad had a lot of sawing to do, we would go down into the pit

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below the saw to keep it clear. We were kept at a safe distance but it was not efficient for us to be there all the time. Henry set us a blower to keep the saw clear.

The sawdust was blown onto a pile away from the saw. The sawdust was used as bedding for the cows, insulation for the icehouse, and many houses were insulated with sawdust in those days

The first cut off the log was called a slab. This was mostly bark. This was sawed in pieces and used for kindling. The next cut was often too small for boards, was set aside for slats, dividers, or striping. When the log had been cleared on all sides, lumber was cut, into boards, planks, or two by fours, whatever the order from the customer dictated. It took at least three people to run the sawmill. If it was a big order then more people were needed. Growing up with a sawmill on the farm, we went from playing in the hot sawdust to helping roll the logs and clearing the saw. Dad was usually the one who did the actual sawing, but sometimes the boys would take over.

Building the barn

Lionel had built up the herd to the point that the old bam just could not hold all the cows anymore. Dad and Lionel took out a loan at the bank and built a new bam. They decided to build it perpendicular to the old one and at the level of the basement of the old one. The new bam would house the cows and the old bam would be a storage place for hay. Dad designed and made the blueprints for the bam. The men chopped the logs from our wood lots, sawed the lumber at our sawmill, made the forms for the concrete slab floor, poured the cement and made the shingles. The only things that were bought were the windows and the roof. Everyone worked on the bam.

Uncle Pete Castonguay, Dad's older brother by about a year, came up to help on his days off and on weekends. They were brothers and the best of friends. They chattered and laughed all the time they were working together. Dad was a quiet man, while Uncle Pete was a prankster and just full of fun. He loved to tease us kids. We loved to see him come up to help Dad. He would tell stories of how he and Uncle Joe pulled pranks on their brothers, sisters, friends, and just about anyone they knew. No one was safe from their practical jokes.

One day, at the dinner table, Uncle Pete was telling how he had put salt in one of his sister's boyfriend coffee at a dinner party. The poor man nearly choked but didn't dare say anything. Just the thought of it had him laughing so hard he had tears in his eyes. Every one was listening and laughing. I was serving the meal and when he asked for sugar for his coffee I gave him the sugar bowl full of salt. He put in two heaping teaspoons of salt and took a big gulp. The results were hilarious. He nearly choked. He got up to chase me. It took a few seconds for everyone to figure out what I had done. My siblings were appalled that I would do such a thing to my Uncle Pete. Dad was speechless that his darling little girl would dare do such a thing. The two who enjoyed the joke the most was Uncle Pete and I. He could dish it out but was a good sport when he got caught.

Later in the week I was bringing them cold drinks. They were working on the rafters.

Their shirts were wet with perspiration. While I was there, Uncle Pete hit his head on a brace. He turned around to get something and hit his head on the same brace again. I took off and came back with an old pair of glasses. I said, "Here, you apparently need these." I took off in a hurry after he saw them. He started to chase me across the top of the bam. This time my father thought it was funny.

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Uncle Pete chewed tobacco. He would spit as he worked. If we happened to be nearby we were sure to receive a splat on our toes. One day I was going out to check for eggs. The chickens would lay their eggs mostly in the chicken house. If a chicken wanted to brood she would build a nest hidden somewhere around the barnyard. Sometimes, for one reason or another, they would abandon these nests. If they had just recently laid the eggs they were fresh and we would use them but if it had been a while they would rot and had to be disposed of. We didn't leave them as they attracted fox, rats etc. We could usually tell by the color of the shell; if they were borderline, we could only tell by breaking a few to know if they were eatable or not.

I was crossing the yard with a basket of these eggs when Uncle Pete started to tease me. I turned and started to throw eggs at him. I was hoping that they were rotten. Nothing smells like rotten eggs. But alas, they were good eggs. My father yelled, "Hey, what do you think your doing?" My Uncle Pete thought that was the funniest thing. Recently I saw some of his children. They said, "Do you remember when you threw eggs at Dad?" They loved their father but knowing what a tease he used to be, they loved it when someone got him back.

The 110 foot-long bam was made totally by family at the cost of ten thousand dollars. Rosalie and Laurette painted all summer long and got almost all of it done. That is, all but half of the end. And it was never finished. As far as I know it is still that way now.

When Mr. St. Pierre saw our bam he asked Dad to design and build one for him. Dad did.

Dad's back

Dad always loomed bigger than life to me. He was my Dad, my hero; in my eyes he could do no wrong. Anything that made him unhappy made me very sad. If he was happy, all was right with the world.

One day, at about noontime, he came in from the fields for lunch. His face was ashen. He brushed aside mom's offer of food and he laid down on the couch. After a few minutes, he called me over. He was laying face down on the floor. He told me to take off my shoes and walk on his back. I was about five years old at the time. Mom held my hand to give me some balance and at his direction, I walked up and down his back. I remember him telling me to go towards the lower back. I don't know if I felt or heard a snap but he let out a yelp. "Ok, ok, that's enough," he said. Trembling with the idea I had hurt him, I ran off to the kitchen. He lay there for some time and then got up saying he thought I had gotten it. I was unsure as to what exactly I had done. I was just elated that I had taken away his hurt. He suffered from back problems and every so often after that incident he would call me to come walk on his back. Unfortunately, it didn't always help.

The Lighting Rods

Notes on "The Lighting Rods"

Eva took Composition and English courses at the University of Maine on Westminster Street in Lewiston. One of her homework assignments was the composition of a story based on an event in her life. She was allowed to "embellish" the story. She chose the story that follows.

I am very familiar with this event as she spoke about it on numerous occasions. She absolutely loved her Uncle Freddie. Next to her father, Uncle Freddie was her hero. Uncle Freddie was not anything like the person she depicts in this story thus the "embellishment" previously mentioned. She must have had fun depicting her favorite Uncle in this way, precisely the contrary of what he was.

The personalities in this story are:

- Beth was her Mother, also named Eva.
- Alfred was her Uncle Freddie.
- Charlie was her Father Charles.
- Ruth was Eva (my wife).
- Mike: Unknown for sure, could have been Lionel or any of her brothers.
- Sarah: was either Laurette or Rosalie-probably Laurette.

The "big rock in the pasture" was situated in the field facing the front of the house slightly up the hill near the top and was one of Eva's favorite places to go. In the Mom book, she mentions this rock on one or two occasions. On a few instances, when we were visiting up on the farm, she pointed out the rock to me and it was obvious that that rock was a very special place for her as a child and had always remained so thereafter even as an adult.

I've enclosed both the edited version which I edited for her as well as the original unedited copy as Eva wrote it.

Eva Labonte (Jan. 25, 2007)

The Lighting Rods

There was a tap at the door, but before Beth could even say come in, the door opened and Alfred, her bother- in -law, walked in. A mixture of horse manure, and stale smoke, preceded him into the kitchen. He never looked at her but his eyes darted around the room. "Where's Charlie," he asked, without any words of greeting.

"He's washing up for lunch. Would you like to join us?" Beth said.

"No, I just had myself a good size wood sheep steak. I would have brought you some, but Charlie

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would probably have choked on it, thinking "it's against the law," said Alfred

"You mean moose meat, and yes it is against the law. You know Charles doesn't break the law. Why don't you sit down, he'll be here in a minute" Beth replied.

Not bothering to take off the rawhide vest he always wore over a faded black and red, checkered shirt, he limped over to the rocking chair by the window. Fred had been thrown from a horse as a youngster and that left him with a gimp leg; it was suspected that he had been cruel to the horse and had gotten thrown as a result.

Beth's eyes traveled to his boots that were encrusted with dung, making a mental note to wash her floor when he left. Beth could not help thinking how strange it were that he and Charles were brothers. This smelly man, just about her height, was almost always drunk, bragged constantly about how he could outwit the law and about his conquest with women. This last thought brought a smile to her lips, as she thought, who would want to go to bed with that thing?

"Did you tell him I called and wanted to borrow his saw?" he asked.

"Yes I did," she said. It's a good thing too, she thought, because that gave Charles a chance to put his good saws away. Whatever Fred borrowed, he figured he owned it. When Charles would send one of the children to retrieve something that Fred had borrowed, Fred would always say, he was not through with it, or that he had brought it back and left it on the porch, which of course everyone knew was a lie.

Charles came in, greeted his brother, invited him to share their meal, and then sat down to eat. Fred gave him the same spiel about just having had a steak, taunting Charles about it not being against the law to put food on the table for your children.

Charles thought, 'I wonder what reason he had for killing a bald eagle, the bear cub, and numerous wild animals Fred killed for sport.' Out loud he said to Beth, "Where are the children?"

"They wanted to have a picnic. I gave them sandwiches and lemonade, they went out to the big rock in the pasture," said Beth.

"They had better come back soon, there is a big storm coming, if fact I saw that it was getting cloudy as I was coming here," said Fred. He had no sooner stopped speaking when they heard thunder. A few minutes later there was more thunder, but this time it was louder. The storm was coming fast.

Beth went to the door to see if she could see the children. The wind was picking up and another clap of thunder came rolling in. "I see them up by the gate, they are running, 'oooh' poor little Ruth fell down, Mike is picking her up, Sarah is laughing, she loves to play in the rain, oh, it's really pouring now. That thunder sure sounds close, I wish they would hurry up and get here," Beth was verbalizing what she was seeing. As they came in Beth told them to go to their rooms and change out of their wet clothes. Little Ruth was crying, so Beth took off her dress, wrapped her in a towel and sat her on a chair, then left the kitchen to get her some dry clothes. "Mommy tunder, Mommy, the tunder's loud," cried Ruth. Just then a thunderclap shook the house. Fred picked her up and sat her on his knee.

"Don't cry, Uncle Freddy will take care of you. On my house I have lighting rods, ft attracts lightning;

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it grabs it and sends it into the ground. You can come and live at my house, said Fred." Then trying to be funny he added, "Your house may get hit with lighting but you will be safe at my house." Ruth cried, "I don't want our house to burn" Charles got up, picked up Ruth, and sat her on his lap as he finished his lunch. He thought what kind of monster would scare a young child? I have to remember that he is my brother; otherwise I would squash him like a cockroach.

With each clap of thunder Ruth whimpered and snuggled closer to her father.

Mike was furious at his uncle for having scared his young sister. He said to his uncle "What if the lighting misses the rods and hits your house, what will you do then? Where will you and your nine kids live then?" Mike glanced at his father. Charles was looking straight at him, and his hazel eyes were not smiling. Mike knew he had spoken out of turn. They were never allowed to speak with disrespect to anyone. Then Charles turned to his brother, his face looked as though it had been chiseled from stone.

Fred squirmed on his seat. People called Charles the gentle giant, but he knew from experience that his grip was like a steel vise. He did not want to experience that again! Perhaps he had better leave now. "You Know Charlie, I have a lot of repairs to do, perhaps I had better get a saw of my own," Fred mumbled and was out the door before anyone could answer.

Eva Labonte

Chapter 15

Oct. 15

The Lighting Rods

There was a tap at the door, but before Beth could even say come in, the door opened and Alfred, her bother- in -law, walked in. A mixture of horse manure, and stale smoke, preceded him into the kitchen. He never looked at her but his eyes darted around the room. "Where's Charlie," he asked, without any words of greeting.

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"You mean moose meat, and yes it is against the law. You know Charles doesn't break the law. Why don't you sit down, he'll be here in a minute." Beth replied.

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"They wanted to have a picnic, I gave them sandwiches and lemonade, they went out to the big rock in the pasture," said Beth.

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Wild Experiences

Wild Experiences. This is a working copy or notes mother made of what eventually became the seventy- two page "My Memories of Life on the Farm."

Wild Experience

In 1939 my father moved his family to a farm in central Maine. . It was the depression years just before World War II. Like most farms of that era, there was no electricity. Every thing was done by hand. Farming was a good life, but everyone in the family had to work hard. I was only four and a half years old when we first arrived on the farm, yet some of the things are still vivid in my mind.

The first Sunday we were there, Aunt Marie, my father's sister brought us a mixed breed, half Collie and half German-Shepherd puppy. Aunt Marie put the puppy in my arms and said, "he is now your puppy. What are you going to name him?"

I answered, "Puppy"

"No, no, he is a puppy, you have to give him a name, she said.

No matter how they tried to explain this to me I insisted that he was to be called, Puppy. And so he was named Puppy. He grew to be a big gentle dog. He became my sister's best friend. At one point he saved her from drowning. He sat at her feet while she ate and shared her meals. He slept at the foot of her bed. He was our playmate and guardian when we had to go into the woods or far off fields to get the cows, pick berries or do farm work.

After working in the hot hay fields or hoeing long rows of com we would go to Round Pond for a swim. This was not only refreshing and fun but a way to bathe. We didn't have indoor plumbing, and therefore no bathtub or shower. Although the pond's shore was within a few hundred feet from the lower end of the farm's boundary, we did not own any frontage on the small lake. In Maine, ponds are often the size of lakes out west. The owners of the shoreline had given us permission to use it any time they were not there. On the rare times that they were there we used the public area. That was not as nice, there was no beach and the water was deep just a few feet from the shore. My sister Laurette, a fair swimmer, jumped off the pier, realized she was over her head and panicked. She went under a couple of times yelling for help. I could not swim at that point in time, ran to get dad. Puppy jumped in she grabbed on to him. With my sister in tow, he swam to the end of the pier where my father pulled her out. Our hero became a celebrity in the family.

My mother had been born into a genteel family. Catholic nuns in a parochial school educated her. She was slight of built but strong of character. She weighed all of ninety- eight pounds and her waist measured only seventeen inches, when she got married. She had large brown eyes and long brown hair that she wore in a bun. She loved to laugh and had a way of bring out the best in people. Every time there was a family or neighborhood party, you could rest assured that they would ask my mother to sing. Although all of her children could sing, none of us inherited her beautiful voice. Dad was the

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third child in a family of thirteen children. His parents had twenty-two babies, but nine died in infancy or at birth. My Father never went to school. He could however count and figure number faster in his head than most people using an adding machine. He was a carpenter by trade and he made blueprints for his customers and for many other builders. He measures slightly over six feet tall, His neck size is seventeen and his ring size twenty.

Jokes centered on people's need of bathroom facilities abound. Outhouses have a category of their own. Humor permitted people to cope with inconveniences and hardship.

I remember as a youngster that no matter what ailed you, it could be cured with a dose of castor oil. If you suffered from cramps, headaches, the flues, or nausea, and I think maybe even hangnails, you were sure to get a glass of orange juice with the famous Caster oil floating on top. I believe the way it cured colds is that after it started to take affect, you did not dare cough for fear of soiling your pants. One such day I was about six or seven years old at the time, I was kept home from school because I fell into one of those categories. I got the trusted dose of Caster oil. It was cold outside so I decided to use the chamber pot. Oh No! they were all outside being cleaned. A quick look around the kitchen produced an empty gallon can. I grabbed it and raced for my bedroom upstairs. To my horror I could not stop going and the rim of the can was becoming more and more imbedded into my flesh. After what seemed an eternity I was able to extract myself from the can. Just then I heard my cousin voice telling my mother that she had brought my homework from school. We met half way up-down the stairs. To this day I do not know if it was the look of pain on my face or the smell that followed me out of the room, which sent her scurrying for the door. The first thing I did when I got old enough to go to work was save money for a bathroom.

There came a time when the farm could no longer support the family, plus the extended family. Two of the older brothers who had cattle sold their shares and went on to other places. One went to work as a mechanic in Lewiston, while another went to work for a farmer who had a large farm, which also furnished rents for their hired hands. This was the first time my brother and his wife had indoor plumbing, and also the first time the children took a bath in a bathtub. While my sister-in-law was bathing her two oldest sons, their little sister came toddling into the bathroom. One of the boys looked and her and decided he did not want to share their new bathtub with their little sister. He looked at the flush and said, " Mom there is no room for Germaine here with us, put her in the flush.

Poor

We were poor, but as a child I never thought we were poor. We always had plenty to eat. My mother was a magician when it came time to cooking a scrumptious out of practically nothing. Everyone around us was poor, so we never felt poor. In fact I maintain that one of the best gift that God has ever given me, was poverty. Through it I learned to appreciate the fact that the finest joys of life need not cost money. Only a poor person would stoop to pickup wild field strawberries for hours on end in the hot sun. Each tiny berry is an explosion of flavor that tickled the palate with pure ambrosia. I remember my sisters and I placing a bowl of these fresh wild strawberries in front of our parents. The look of pleasure on their faces was worth all the hard work. We knew that they were aware of the sacrifice such a gift represented. A dozen long stemmed red roses, grown by a professional gardener, delivered by a florist in a cardboard box, tied up with a synthetic ribbon, can not measure up to even one small strawberry pick with loving hands.

The wood stove and black slate sink

The wood stove and the black slate sink were an essential part of farm family living. In the winter the stove was lit before Dad and the boys went out to the bam to do chores. A pitcher of water was always left on the counter to prime the pump. If luck was with you it hadn't frozen during the night and we had plenty of water for the day's work. The huge teakettle was filled and set on the stove. In no time the combination of the heat and steam had the kitchen toasty warm. If the temperature went down really low during the night, the pipes would often freeze. Many a night my mother would get up to draw water to prevent such a mishap. Not always succeeding. When that happened the men would fill the milk cans with water before returning from delivering the milk to the local creamery. On washday, they had to make a run to the pond for extra water. Back then most pond and lakes could boast of pure, drinkable, water. If the pipes could not be thawed during the day, we would go out after chores at night to get water for the next day. We automatically rationed ourselves to the amount of water we used without being told.

There was a built in tank on the back end of the stove, which we would try to keep full. The heat from the oven would heat the water in the tank, and that was our source of hot water to wash dishes, and do our chores. The last one to empty the tank had to refill it. That was hard work, because we had to fill a bucket, lug it over to the stove, lift the tank cover and pour the water into a rather small opening. Water would splash over the stove onto the floor, which we had to wipe up. As children we would make sure we always left a couple of inches of water in the bottom of the tank. The next person to take hot water would surly empty the tank and would be responsible for filling it. We did not make allowances for evaporation and therefore it seemed the tank was always bone dry.

Mom's question as to who emptied the tank was always met with, "It wasn't me. There was still some water in the tank when I finished taking some," was the standard reply. And of course we were not lying.

The morning meal

Breakfast was served when the men came in from the bam. On the farm, life revolved around the welfare of the cattle. They came first. If we took care of the animal they took care of us. So after they had been fed their breakfast, we had ours. Slabs of bacon or ham were sliced thick for dad and thin for the rest of the family. He like his bacon fatty, we liked ours crispy. Potatoes were fried in the bacon fat with fresh eggs sunny side up. My favorite was what we called, "A German Fry". Instead of sunny side eggs we would toss the eggs onto the fried potatoes and they would stick to them as they cooked. Hot coffee and ice cold whole milk. We pan fried slices of homemade bread spread thick with butter. What could be better than that? Cholesterol heaven! During the school year we were off to school right after breakfast and returned to our share of duties. Supper was served early, because the men had to milk the cows right after. Those of us who stayed in the house would clean up the dishes and get things lined up for the next day.

You could tell the seasons by what was done after supper. There was never a shortage of work to be done. When I was old enough, I took over baking the bread for the family. Every other day I would take an enameled tub, pour water into it until it was about two inches deep in the bottom of the pan. I would add two fresh yeast, a handful of salt, two scoops of lard, and one scoop of sugar. I would let that sit until the yeast would start to bubble. Then I would add flour. Beat the batter until it was

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smooth. Add flour and beat until it was smooth again. I would place a couple of scoops of flour on the table and knead the dough until it was no longer sticky. I used twenty-five lbs of flour a week. I never used measures; it was all done by sight and feel. The warmth of the stove made the dough rise and then it was put into loaf pans to rise again. The oven held twelve loafs. If we were expecting company over the weekend I would make fifteen or twenty breads. IF by chance anyone came in the house when I was taking the bread out of the oven, I was sure they would slice into a hot bread and most of it would disappear. Some nights I would make fried dough and we would eat it with molasses. That was always a treat.

We had a washing machine that was powered with a small gas motor. There was a pedal that Mom would pump and start up the motor and we would wash all the clothes. This was done in the kitchen. We closed the doors to the other rooms so that the smell of gas stayed in the kitchen. Mom had two huge cooper boilers that sat on the stove and she would fill them with water with pails. Then with the same pails filled her washing machine. She burned herself more than once transferring the hot water from boiler to the washing machine. When the washing was finished she had to empty the water into the pails and pour the dirty water in the sink. It is unbelievable how hard these women worked. In the winter months she hung her clothes out on the lines in freezing weather. The wind would be too strong, the clothespins would snap, and we had to go chasing our clothes all over the yard. Clothes racks were placed near an old potbellied furnace in the family room. We would bring the clothes frozen like boards and wait for them to go limp to place them on the racks to finish drying.

One winter my mother suffered a heart attack. While she was ill, Lionel, the youngest of the boys, and older than us three girls, had to do the washing. He told our older brothers to bring down their dirty clothes, if they wanted them washed. He told them he was not going to go from room to room to collect them. Lawrence, another of my brothers, did not do it and therefore his clothes did not get washed. Come Saturday night he wanted his clean clothes to take a bath and go into town. This was their big night out. When Lawrence was told that his longjions were not washed he went upstairs, and sure enough, found them under his bed. He took them down washed them in the kitchen sink and hung them out to dry. Well you know that they became frozen solid in no time at all. He never realized that it took days for clothes to dry in the winter. When he went to get them to take his bath, they were as stiff as boards.

The memory of the look on Lawrence's face and the comments that flew around the house for the next few hours still has the power, after over fifty years, to send Lionel into tears of laughter.

Lionel was sixteen when my Mother had her heart attack. He had decided he did not want to go to high school. He wanted to stay and work on the farm. When Mom became ill Dad asked him to stay in the house to care for her, and the three of us girls. I was seven at the time. My two sisters were nine and eleven years old, respectfully. The first day he stayed at home Dad told him, "As soon as the girls leave for school, go see what your mother would like for breakfast. He did as he was told and Mom told him she was not very hungry , and would like just a toast and a cup of tea. In no time at all he returned with a slice of toasted homemade bread in his hand. He asked her where she wanted it and she said, "Why don't you put it on the chair." He walked up to the chair near her bed and plopped the toast right on the chair. Mom did not say a word but started to laugh. He picked up the toast and headed back to the kitchen and returned with it on a plate. Mom said, "The next and all other meals were served on a well arranged, tray with silverware and napkins." There always was a special bond between the two of them. He took care of our parents until they died. He is still living on the same farm. He brought his bride

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there, when they were married, and that is where they raised their eight children.

With oil lamps for lights, the winter evenings were spent doing things that did not need bright lights. We made sure all the lamps were full of kerosene before nightfall. The chimneys were washed and the wicks trimmed, almost every day. We would gather in the kitchen, around the stove and make popcorn, or sliced potatoes about an eighth of an inch thick and cook them right on the top of the woodstove. First we would wipe the stove with an oily paper than, when the stove was nice and hot, we would place the slices one next to the other on the hot stovetop. When they were ready we would salt and butter them. Mmmmmm mmmmm, were they ever good.

Ice House

Every farm had an icehouse. It was a square building with one foot, thick walls. The walls were insulated with sawdust. There was sawdust on the earth floor. Each layer of ice was insulated with sawdust. I don't remember ever running out of ice. Each morning two blocks of ice were dug out and washed clean. They were cut into smaller pieces and one piece was brought into the house for the icebox, where we kept our food. The rest of the ice was put in the water cooler that kept the milk ice cold, even in the hot July heat. In the winter my brother would shovel snow in the cooler to save on ice.

In January, when the ice on the lakes, was about three feet thick, the farmers would harvest the ice. Sometimes it was cut by hand, other time if a farmer had a gas powered saw he would cut the ice for other farmers in return for their help to haul the ice to his storage building. It would fascinate me to watch the men work so close to the water's edge. With grapple irons on long poles they would bring the floating blocks of ice to the conveyer belt to be loaded on the sleds. I would beg to do it until Dad would let me do a few just to get rid of me. I could feel his big hand holding on to the back of my coat least I should slip and fall into the icy water. As we got older we helped with the ice harvest. We started at home at home spreading the sawdust. As we got older we were permitted to go to the pond. It was such hard work, with a lot of heavy lifting that it was done mostly by the men. Once one sled was loaded, the teamster would go off with a helper to one of the farms. It was picturest to see the horse drawn sled heavy laden with the ice blocks glide over the lake's smooth surface.

until the ice shed was full and then they would start on another farmers shed. So much depended on people helping people. My father had a sawmill and whatever sawdust he had leftover he shared with the other farmers.

We had big draft horses. In the summer they were used to plow the fields, rake the hay pull the machinery and wagons for all the farm chores. In the winter months they pulled the sleds and skidders used for pulp and heating wood. We had a matched pair of dapple Gray draft horses. Our teamster sent hours in his spare time training then for the drag races at the state fair. Dad did not mind too much but when he saw how they were pushed almost beyond their endurance he stopped it and not long after that he sold them.

In the beginning I was afraid of the bigger horses. We had a mare, Maud that was gentle and would permit me to lead her anywhere. Her teammate, Gerry, would follow wherever I lead her. However she did not always follow where he went. If she were tired or hungry she would lift her head up high and left me off the ground until I would let go of her halter and then nonchalantly go back to eating.

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Other times I would call them by name, " Come Maud, come Gerry and they would follow me to the stable.

Crops were essential for the survival of farm families. A good crop meant the family could afford the bare necessities for daily living. A bad year sent the farmer into debt or even bankruptcy. When my father moved us on the farm there were nine farmers on the horseshoe road that went up over Haggett Hill and down the other side to North Livermore. When I left eighteen years later there were only two left. Most farms had been abandoned because of the farmer's inability to pay the taxes. Others sold their land for a fraction of what the farms were originally worth.

The fields were plowed as soon as they were dry enough for a team of horses to walk on, and could pull the plow without sinking. From dawn to dusk the teams turn the long furrows of dark rich soil. After supper they family would divide the chores. Some would go milk the cows and feed all the animals. Others like myself would wash the dishes, clean the kitchen, and prepare the next morning's breakfast. Evenings were spent as a family; sewing, doing odd chores, and listening to the radio, or to my brother Lionel play the piano.

The next day variations of this process would start again, starting with chores and ending with chores.

We were out of school by planting time. Sometimes I would ride one of the horses pulling the seeder, to guide it back and forth as my father handled the seeder. I would sit close to the necks, as the backs of these draft horses were too large for a saddle, which we did not own anyways, so I rode them bareback. Girls wore dresses most of the time. The sweat from the horses left me chaffed for weeks.

As soon as the seedling appeared we spent hours pulling out weeds. We had to know what each type of seedling looked like and had to be very careful not to pull out the young plants. To a child the seedlings often looked like weeds and vice versa. It was our job to weed close to the plants because our small finger could get in between the tiny seedlings and the weeds. The grownups would do the heavy hoeing.

We did not spray our gardens. Natural products, like pepper were used on cabbage plants to prevent worms. We would walk down the rows of potatoes with cans and sticks to knock off the bugs into the cans. Tomato worms were picked off the plants the same way. How I hated doing that. We used Rotatone, made of natural ingredients to the adult plants. Fungicides were not needed. As I remember it, there did not seem to have the same amount of insects and diseases as we do now. The fruits were more juicier and tastier also. The high- bred varieties of today produce larger, more uniform fruits. They are also more pulpy, drier and tasteless. As production grew, the need for insect and fungus control became mandatory. The younger generation, thought it was wonderful and a big leap for progress. My Father said that this would cause mutation of both the species of plants and insects, and that it would alter the world forever. He was uncomfortable about using any of these products, but gave in to my brother's arguments, whose thoughts were modern, therefore contrary to Dad's.

Rhubarb, field strawberries, peas, and onions, were some of the first to ripen and that sent the canning season into full swing. Green beans, carrots, corn, and tomatoes, were main staples. Assorted pickles, jams, jelly, and relishes were fun things that the farmer women loved to make. Each year new and favorite tried new recipes were exchanged, made and tested. Some fruits, such as pears and peaches were canned, while apples were kept fresh in barrels, dried and sometimes canned. Potatoes were in

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big dark, cool bins. Cabbage, turnips and squash were put in root cellars.

Curing and salting food was an art. Salt port was a staple in our house. The fresh pork was brought in and scraped clean. It was then scrubbed with course salt. A thick layer of salt was placed on the bottom of the crocks or barrels, and then a row of pork was tightly layered on top of the salt. The process was repeated until the crocks or barrels were full. A thick layer of salt was added to the top. A brim solution that could float an egg was pour in until it covered the pork. This was brought down cellar where it was cool. Salt pork was added to many French Canadian dishes. When fried the fat was use much as we use vegetable oil today.

Hundreds of pound of cabbage was shredded fine and salted to make sauerkraut. Cabbage and salt were layered in stone ware crocks. Then it was placed near the wood-buming stove. It would have to be close enough to keep it warm so it could ferment, but not too close, because then the cabbage would cook, and the sauerkraut would be spoiled. A large ironstone plate was placed on top of the cabbage. Then a weight was placed on top of that to keep the mixture packed tight. As the fermenting process began the juice released from the cabbage rose to the top. The smell was much like old sweaty stockings that had not been washed for months. Fortunately the process did not take long and the sauerkraut was canned. Amazing how something that smelled so bad could taste so good!

Fifteen hundred -two thousand quarts of food were needed to supply our family food for one year.

Nothing was wasted. If one family had too much of one thing, it was sent on to another family. There was no refrigeration so even meat had to be canned. Beef was always slaughtered during the winter months. We kept as much fresh meat as the family could consume while it could be kept just at the freezing point, and the rest was canned. Pork was cured, and smoked or salted.

Blood sausage, headcheese, and pickle hocks were made on the same day the pigs were slaughtered. Next came the curing, salting and fat rendering. Meat pies and pork crotons were made and frozen. The hustling to get everything done in its proper time was fun and exciting. My mother used to say she always felt wealthy after a beef or pork had been stashed away for the winter months.

To have fresh meat longer Families would stager the time of butchering. If my Dad butchered his beef during the first part of November, he would send a portion of it to his brother, for his family. His brother would not kill his beef until the middle of December, and we would receive a portion of his beef. Thus the families enjoyed fresh meat longer.

As a youngster I was expected to fetch the cows for milking. I never minded this chore as it meant long walks in the fields. It was a time when children could walk just about anywhere and not have to worry about men attacking them. In fact if a young girl happened to meet a stranger, which was rare, he would more than likely protect her until she was safely home. We had Puppy that would have fought to the death to protect us and he would never stray from us. I loved these long walks plus it excused me from other chores that to me were less agreeable. There were a few favorite spots, which are still vivid in my memory. One was a huge boulder that sat on top of Haggert Hill, near the old stagecoach road. I cannot count the many times I climbed that rock to dream of what the future would hold for me, ponder problems, or just for the sheer pleasure I got from the beautiful landscape that could be seen from there, and of course, look for the cows. When it was dark, we could see, the lights of the closest city far in the distance, which was Lewiston, reflected in the sky. That was about thirty miles away. For

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me it was another world. My oldest brother and his family lived there. Once a month He would take the Blue Line Bus up to the end of our road and walk the mile to the house to spend the week-end with the family. If he had the chance to call from a bus stop in Livermore, my father would go pick him up with the car. My parents always looked forward to his visits. During the summer months his three girls would spend most of their school vacation on the farm.

A pleasant summer day on the farm

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From my vantage point on my rock I could see down the valley and the rolling fields, pastures and woodland that were part of Dad's farm. I was very proud of the fact that if we started at one end of the farm and walked in a straight line it would take us over a mile to get to the other end of the property.

At the bottom of the hill there was a spring that gushed out of the ground. It was clear and ice cold even in the warmest days of summer. It ran all along the foot of the hill where it met with a larger brook. It curved and meandered through the lowlands.

We loved to go along to where the shallow pools formed and watch the trout dash under the rocks whenever a shadow was cast over the brook. If we sat quietly long enough, they would venture out again to bask in the warm sun.

In the lower part of the pasture, we would follow a wooded road where the pine trees formed a canopy overhead. It was always cool there and a welcomed reprise from the summer heat. The path was laden thick with pine needles. Every step brought up whiffs of pine scent mixed with the pungent odor of the rich soil and the redolence of hundreds of varied plants growing in the underbrush. The air was filled with the most wonderful aroma under the heavens. I could close my eyes and know exactly where I was on that particular stretch of road by the smells. I always felt very close to God there. Only God could accomplish such wonder.

Memories

Mother (Eva) enjoyed writing.

I don't know what year she started a file she called and saved on her computer as "Memories". Upon reviewing this file, it becomes obvious that the writings in this file were made over a long period of time, probably years, and covered five distinctive periods of her (and our) life that ranged from the years 1952 through 2005. In this file, the distinctive periods mentioned above were not written in chronological order as you can tell by looking at the page numbers of the file.

I've arranged the five distinctive periods in chronological order as indicated below:

- Memories: Work: covers the years from 1952 through 1958
- Memories: Met John, Married and Settled Down: covers the years 1957 through 1963
- Memories: A New Beginning: covers the years 1976 through 2003
- Memories: Decorations at Church: covers the years 1978 through 2005
- Memories: A New Era Begins: covers the year 2005

You will find each of the "distinctive periods" in this binder at the proper chronological order or period.

Work (1952-1958)

When I was seventeen, I decided I wanted to go to work and earn some money. I applied at the local shoe shop and started work at fifty cents an hour. When Laurette heard this, she ask if I could call for her also, which I did. She started work there at the same time as me. After about a month, the minimum wage went from fifty cents an hour to seventy- five cents an hour. A short while later, the minimum wage went up to a dollar an hour, but by then I was earning almost twice that on piecework. I worked there five years. My first paycheck went to pay a bill that was overdue. Mom and Dad were so in debt. That first year Laurette and I gave all our pay to cover bills and buying groceries. After about a year, Laurette couldn't take being cooped up between the cement walls of a shoe factory. She was so lonely for the outdoors that she quit her job and went back on the farm. I continued working. I had a bathroom put in at the house and then the siding on the house. I bought my mother beautiful clothes. I got such a kick out of getting her new things. I bought her a kitchen set. I let her choose the one she wanted. Every week, I took part of my paycheck and bought groceries. I got all kinds of food I knew Dad liked but never could afford. For me it was the best kind of living. My parents were my world and whatever made them happy made me happier. The look on my mother's face when I came home one day with a box of new dresses for her to try was wonderful. If Dad and I thought they looked good on her, I bought then, if not, I would bring them back. Mrs. Coolidge, the storeowner, trusted me with anything I wanted. In a small town everyone knew everyone living in that town. Mrs. Coolidge knew Mom and liked her. I did not know anyone who didn't like Mom. Mrs. Coolidge got a big kick out off seeing me shop for Mom. Her Son John and my bother Henry were the best of friends. When I was

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younger I had been asked to go spend the summer at the seacoast as a mother's helper for Mrs. Coolidge grandchildren. Dad did not like the idea that I would sometimes have to stay alone at night babysitting. I had to refuse the offer. Down deep inside I was relieved. I didn't know if I could measure up to that responsibility. I had taken care of small babies and babysat for my Aunt Odelie many times, but this was different.

I did well at the shoe shop. I was fast, and thanks to my home training, I was a good worker. I got the job of vamping all the samples for my department. I got paid double time for that and time and half for fixing the "cripples." In my last full year at the shoe shop I earned over five thousand dollars. I was the highest paid worker in my department. In 1957 those were big wages. I asked dad to get dressed in a suit, I had made an appointment to have their pictures taken in Lewiston. It was the last year before I got married and I gave all of my siblings a five by eight picture of our parents for Christmas. Everyone was excited to have it. We did not have a good picture of them and this was something I really wanted. Mom died less than two years later so those pictures have become a cherished treasure for all of us.

When I got married at the age of twenty- two I paid for my own wedding and had bought a sewing machine. The rest of the money, other than buying my clothes, went up on the farm. My cousins and friend at the time were paying fifteen dollars for room and board. Did I resent the fact that everything I gave eventually went to my brother? No, I did not. Like my parents many years before who had given all of their savings to help Grammy, I was glad to have been able to do so. Dad kept telling me to save my money that I would need it after I was married. But at that point in time, they needed it more. I remember Mom saying God will bless you for this and she was so right. Rosalie and Laurette both gave their time and wages also and they also see it as helping Mom and Dad. I firmly believe that if we were in the same position today we would do the same thing all over again.

Met John (1957-1963)

Met John. Married and Settled Down

As we grew up we had our share of crushes and disappointments before true love came our way. John and I met when I went to Lewiston to buy a hand saw for Dad for Father's Day. Not being familiar with the store, Lewiston Hardware where he worked, I went to the wrong counter. He happened to wait on me. He brought me to the tool department. I had written all the specifics on a paper, which I proceeded to read to him. It took him a few minutes to find what I wanted. I turned to my friend, Martine Martin, who was with me and said in French, " I don't know too much about saws but I think I have forgotten more than he knows." He turned towards me and in perfect French said, "But I know a lot about electricity in the department where I work." Of course my face turned beet red and he teased me a bit, sold me the saw and I left. Dad was waiting for me in the car. Well would you know it, it was the wrong saw! Dad, not to hurt my feelings wanted to keep it but I insisted that I would exchange it. I ran back in now it was my turn to tease him. I got the right saw and left again.

When we got home I told my sister that I had met the man I would like to marry. She asked, "What's his name?" I replied, "I don't know." She said, "Where does he live?"

I replied, "I don't know, but God willing I will find out."

A week later I had to get supplies for a wedding I was catering. I asked Laurette to drive me to

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Lewiston to get them. Martine was with us. Once there I managed to give them the slip. I snuck into Lewiston Hardware, in hopes of seeing him again. Sure enough, there he was. My heart was beating so hard I thought I had better get out of here before he sees me. Too late he saw me and came over to talk to me. He asked for a date that Friday. I said yes but then remembered I was setting tables for that wedding I was catering. I said, Oh! I just remembered I can't Friday." He said, "You changed your mind. You don't want to go out with me." To this I said, "Oh no! I truly have to set tables Friday night, but I am free Saturday night. Do you want to come up then?" Little did I know that he already had a date for Saturday night. But he said yes anyways. Now he had to break his date with the other girl. Her name was Gisele. It's a funny world because two years latter we introduced Laurette to Gerry, this girl's brother, and they eventually got married.

The year was 1957. In my mind, it was the best of all times. Modern inventions made it possible to live comfortably. It was a safe world for children to play outside without fear of pedophiles making away with them. Family values were still intact. Women dressed to make themselves beautiful, not to shock and provoke. I had a good job making more than twice the minimum wage. Now I had met John. He had asked me for a date. He asked me if I wanted to go dancing but I said after catering the wedding I would be tired, would he mind coming to the farm. He had no problems coming up to the farm to meet my folks. It was a warm summer evening so we went to sit out on the lawn. I did not know at the time that John did not like dogs. Our big dog, Puppy, came over to sniff him out, and he shooed him away. I thought no more of it until much later I learned that Puppy had barfed in the pocket of John's brand new, white cashmere sport jacket. He never told me until after we were married.

My parents were very strict, so out of fairness to him I told him all the things I was not permitted to do, things that most girls my age take for granted. It never fazed him a bit.

In fact he was more attracted to me because of it.

John and I got married May 3, 1958. It was Grandpa's 93rd birthday. The family asked if I would mind celebrating his birthday at the wedding reception. There was about three hundred guest at the wedding. It was an old fashion type wedding. Everyone pitched-in to help make the food and decorate the hall. It cost me about three hundred dollars for everything.

John and I went to Canada for our honeymoon. We both had family we wanted to visit while we were there. We did all the crazy things honeymooners do. We took a ride in a horse drawn buggy. We went sight seeing. While we were at St Anne de Beaupre Shrine, a photographer asked if I would let him take pictures of me for a tourist brochure he was making. One night we decided to eat in our room. John went to get us something to eat and forgot which motel we had registered at. He went up and down the strip asking if a Mr. And Mrs. John Labonte we registered there never telling them who was asking. Finally he found me and we ate cold spaghetti.

We set-up housekeeping in a three apartment block on Wood St. in Lewiston. He made fifty- five dollars a week and we were saving part of it for a new home. In January of 1959, John was offered two jobs. The first one was with North American Philips, a firm that makes electronic components, which promised a solid income. The other was with Prudential Insurance of America. This one promised more to start with but then the salary was based on commissions. They both came on the same week and he had a deadline to make up his mind. I told him I would back him up no matter what he decided to do. At the last minute, he picked Prudential. He was with that company for thirty years and he rose

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to become a Vice President of the company.

He took to selling insurance like it was his second nature. His reputation for being honest spread and soon people were calling him to care for their insurance needs. We bought a house that October 6th on the anniversary of our engagement two years prior. By this time, Mom was in the hospital suffering from insulin shock. I went to the hospital and asked if I could take her home with me. They told me she would be a lot of work as most of the time she was not coherent and was incontinent. I didn't care, I wanted her with me. I was pregnant for my second child, but I was young and strong. I knew I could do it. I called Dad and asked him to come stay with me to help turn her in bed and change her. When I would change the bed he would take her in his arms and rock her like a child. He tended to her better than any nurse could have. He left her side only to come to the table to eat. Most of the time he would take his plate and eat his meals by her bedside. How those two loved each other!

She had lucid moments. Once she called to me saying, "Eva, look your boy is walking." Mark was taking his first steps towards her room. I was more excited to know that she could see him, than I was about Mark walking. She stayed at our house for two weeks and passed away October 21, 1959.

Five months later my brother Laurence died from internal bleeding caused by an accident he had at the IP Mill. He was thirty years old and left seven children. Rosalie could not come to the funeral because she had just lost a full term baby. A month later, my father-in-law died. A few months later my cousin, Robert Tessier, lost his wife who was nine months pregnant. There were eleven deaths in our family in a twelve month period.

We were in our first home only a year when John was promoted to Staff Manager. This meant we had to sell our house and move to Farmington. As luck would have it, there was a neighbor who had a relative who wanted to move into our area. We sold the house in a few weeks. Finding a house up there was not as easy. In fact there were none to be had. We took an apartment while a house was being built for us in Wilton. The apartment was in the attic of an old farmhouse. The people were super nice to us, but the situation was a riot. Whenever they had company the people had to come through our living room to go to their bedroom. There were no closets whatsoever and only two very small cupboards in the small kitchen. The apartment was designed for collage kids. The University of Maine at Farmington surrounded the farm, at least what was left of it.

UMF had bought most of the fields and when the couple passed away UMF bought the rest of it. When the old couple found out the predicament we were in they consented to let us live there while our house was being built. Mark slept in what was supposed to be a storage room. It was about six feet by eight feet long. Pauline slept in our bedroom.

The ceilings in all the rooms, except for the living room, were slanted because of the roof. I did not have a clothes dryer. When I did laundry, I had to go through a shed, down a flight of stairs, through another shed, up a short flight of stairs to the hayloft to hang my clothes on a pulley line. The lady of the house was a schoolteacher and washed on weekends so we shared clotheslines. When I took a basket of clothes to hang them up to dry, I would have to put the two children in their cribs so they would be safe. I would run back up for another load I would take them out of their cribs until I was ready to go again. From January to September we were quite happy in our attic apartment, but even more so to go to our new home in Wilton.

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The house in Wilton was our design and it was a dream-come-true. When we moved there the people from the neighborhood would leave small, "welcome home" gifts at the door without a card. I would have to find out who did it so I could thank them, and that is how I got to meet everyone. That was a neat way of doing it.

The following month our neighbor from across the street had spent all day digging around his foundation. That evening, John invited him for a drink. The man sat next to me on the couch. We had just started to talk when he leaned back and started to make loud snorting sounds. He suffered a stroke and died a few days later.

Memorable Event: The Madonna holding the child Jesus in her arms

On a warm summer day in late July of 1957, Eva asked me if, on a Sunday in the near future, we could take her mother to Colebrook, New Hampshire for a visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace. She was somewhat reluctant to ask this of me as we had only gone out for two or three times since we met on June 15, a few weeks before.

Her mother, also named Eva, had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and for a long time now, she had wanted to visit that sanctuary. Mr. Castonguay was not a very good driver and very rarely, if ever, wandered very far beyond a few miles from home. Eva wanted to please her mother and knew that this trip would greatly delight her.

I told Eva that I thought it was a good idea and on a sunny Sunday in early August, after attending Mass, Mr. and Mrs. Castonguay, Eva and I left for Colebrook. It was a three hour drive and we arrived at the shrine in the early afternoon. Mrs. Castonguay visited the shrine to her heart's delight and her face "glowed" with obvious pleasure.

We stayed at the site for about three or four hours and in the course of the afternoon we visited the Shrine's very small gift shop. There were but just a few items displayed. The Shrine is situated on thirty acres of landscaped and manicured grounds and has over fifty marble and granite monuments depicting various scenes in the life of Jesus and Mary. It is owned and run by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and I surmised by the size and content of the gift shop that souvenirs and memorabilia were not one of their major concerns. However, the few items they did have were of good quality and were appropriate of the "raison d'être" of the Shrine.

I noticed that Eva admired one particular piece, an Italian made statuette of the Madonna with the baby Jesus in her arms, it was indeed beautiful. For the remainder of our visit, I looked for an opportunity to get that particular statuette for her without causing her any embarrassment since we had only known each other for just a few weeks. When it was time to leave and everyone was in the car, I excused myself and went to use the restroom. I came back with the Madonna and gave it to her.

Eva, like her mother, also had a very special devotion to the Blessed Virgin. For the next fifty-two years, she cherished her statuette and what it represented and displayed it in a predominant place, usually in a curio cabinet in our bedroom. Whenever she would go by the curio cabinet, she would take a moment to admire it and I assume to say a short prayer as well.

After she passed away in April of 2009, I brought the statuette to the dining room curio. There I could

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see it more often and remember this pleasant event of our past as well.

As I placed the statuette on the glass shelf in the dining room curio, I came to the sudden realization that no matter how much you love something or how long you've had it or cherished it and how much it became a part of your life, in the end, it stays behind. It's as if you only had it on "loan" of those fifty-two years, but now that you're gone, it's no longer yours- you relinquish it. You came into the world with nothing and you leave the world with nothing. Makes you think about what is the purpose of life- what is your reason for being.

The Christmas Tree

There are three versions of this composition, each a little different from one another. See "General Notes" at the beginning of this book.

The Christmas Tree (Version one)

The silence in the room was absolute. The windows had stopped rattling. The storm was over. A dusting of snow covered the floor near the windows. Each pane was displaying its own unique version of Jack Frost's artwork. The intricate ice crystal display also acted like a thermometer. I was luxuriating in the warmth of my bed under the pile of homemade quilts, when suddenly I remembered this was "The Day". Wham! The covers flew off and my feet hit the linoleum floor and instantly turn to solid ice! Never giving a second thought to the cruel shock to my poor feet, I ran across the hall to my brothers' room and scraped the ice off the windowpanes. In the moonlight I could see the plow had passed sometimes during the night and the roads were open. Yes! YES! It promised to be a wonderful day. John Labonte, my fiance, would be able to come up from the city thirty miles away to go into the woods with us to cut our Christmas tree. As I stood there the sun slowly rose over the horizon. The morning sky was a blaze of reds. On the far hills the trees, silhouetted black against the sky, looked like soldiers standing watch over the valley. They contrasted against fields of white snow. I thought to myself that there was nothing in the world to match the beauty of a winter sunrise in the country.

Across the yard the lights streaming from the bam windows told me that my father and siblings were hard at work milking and feeding the cows.

A shiver brought me back to reality. I snatched my clothes on the way to the warmth of the first floor. The comforting, familiar smell of wood heat rising from the center grate greeted me as I opened the downstairs hall door. With wood furnaces that push hot air, you could always smell the heat before you felt it. I stood on the grate as the hot air rising from it made my nightgown billow like a balloon. I stayed there for a few minutes to let the warm air caress my frozen body. With all the people out in the bam the bathroom was free for as long as I wanted it. With eight members of the family in the house and only one bathroom it was at times comical, frustrating or out and out war trying to get the bathroom without interruption. Once washed and dressed I went to my mother's room and softly said for her to stay in bed, as I would make the breakfast for the family.

My mother was ill most of her life, yet we never heard her complain. She was always cheerful and doing something for somebody. She was known throughout our community for her many talents and her willingness to share with others. Whenever any member of the family had a chance to make life a little easier for her, we would. Today I was able to let her get some rest.

I went into the family room. There, before a large Crucifix I knelt and said my morning prayers, a ritual instilled in us at a very young age. We started and ended our day with God. For a minute my mind wondered to the day John had given me my diamond engagement ring. Dad had laughed because he could not even put it on the tip of his size twenty ring finger. He liked John and often the two of them would team up to tease me.

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Being Saturday I did not have to go to work. My sister, Laurette, and I had planned to spend the morning baking for the coming holidays. By ten thirty we were cooking up a storm. She baked the desserts while I made the main dishes. The bread was rising, pies of all sorts were lining the counter tops, and the smell of beans slowly baking in an old cast iron pot, permeated the kitchen. I had just about finished grinding the cooked pork loins for the crotons and "les tourtieres, " French meat pies, when Laurette who was stirring the batter for cookies said, "I think I'll have time to bake my cookies before the bread need to go into the oven.

We were singing Christmas carols along with the radio. Just being alive was exhilarating. Just then Dad opened the door. His shoulders filled the doorframe. His steel gray eyes sparkled as though he had just won a major jackpot. Looking at us he said, "Girls, the team of horses is harnessed and ready to go. I will give them their grain while you get ready. Oh, it is very cold so dress up warm."

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Then as on cue we both stood up and pelted Dad with snowballs. One got him full in the chest before he could get the horses moving again. "Wait for us," we yelled as we ran after him and the team disappeared around a bend in the road. Then the harness bells stopped ringing. We looked at each other, laughed, and slowed down to a walk. Harness bells were meant as a warning that another team was approaching and both teamsters would slow down and approach with caution. However this time the silence of the bells told us that Dad was waiting for us.

When we first moved to this farm almost twenty years prior there were eight farmers living on the horseshoe dirt road, called Round Pond Road. This road started at Route 4, went past our house up to the Old Stage Coach Road, and up a hill where it came to a fork. The right fork went to the wood lots while the left fork went past three abandoned farms. Five miles and two right turns later, it came out on Route 4 again, two miles from the first entrance. Back then, every farmer had two or three teams of horses, but the depression years sent one family after another to the city looking for work. The town or state foreclosed on the farms for unpaid taxes. Now only my father's teams traveled this road. It was sad to think that out of all the acres of fertile land, only his remained a working farm. The dirt road still continued up the hill where there were twenty five to thirty thousand acres of wild country owned mostly by the State of Maine. Harness bells were now used for sentimental reasons rather than necessity

We continued on the logging road to a clearing. To the west, the majestic Presidential range of the White Mountains graced the horizon and to the east, the Androscoggin valley spread like a giant white tapestry. The scenery was so breathtaking, as though embroidered by angels with farms, trees, and lakes. Dad was resting the horses when he said in a hoarse whisper, "Girls, look to your left!" He was pointing to a meadow a couple of hundred feet away. There on a knoll was a huge stag. A short distance to the left of us was his herd of does and yearlings that were pawing the snow to get to the moss. There we were, human and buck locked in a frozen stare. Suddenly the stag rose on his hind legs and thumped the ground with his front hooves. Responding to the signal of danger, the herd raced for the woods. It seemed as though their feet barely touched the snow as they bounded into the thicket. We gazed in awe at their grace and beauty. This scene brought back childhood memories of fairy tale wood nymphs floating in a magical forest.

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said, "You are going to miss all of this when you move to the city, aren't you?"

"Dad, I am not going to the end of the world you know. I am moving to Lewiston. It's only thirty miles away." I realized he was going to miss me! "Dad," I continued, "why didn't you want to wait for Johnny to come with us?"

He looked like a little boy when he said in a barely audible voice. "This is the last time I will have you to myself. He has the rest of his life to choose Christmas trees with you." Dad pushed me away as though embarrassed that his emotions were showing. In a gruff voice he said, "Come on, let's go get that tree."

We finally got to the stand of spruce trees. Laurette and I ran from one tree to the other trying to make up our minds. We kept picking trees that were at least fifteen to twenty feet tall. Choosing a Christmas out in the wild is much different than going to a tree farm. There the seedlings are planted far enough apart to give space for the trees to grow without interfering with each other. As the tree begins to grow tall it is fertilized and trimmed every year so that as it matures, it is full and perfectly shaped. Seedlings growing in the wild have to vie for space, sunlight, water, and nutrients with mature trees. While they are still considered part of the underbrush animals that chew at their branches for food often trample them on. By the time they are big enough to be cut for a Christmas tree, most of them are lop sided or too scrawny to cut. Getting a Christmas tree in the wild can be fun but challenging. Dad said, "Look girls, I'm over six feet tall. Try to find one that is not much taller than I am." Try as we might all the pretty ones were at least ten feet tall. Dad decided that if he was to get back home, he had to chop the one Laurette and I agreed was the perfect tree, even if he had to cut a good portion of it off to get it into the house. We decide we could make a wreath with the extra boughs.

My heart was filled with happiness as we started back home. We sang Christmas Carols, and our voices echoed back to us from the distant hills. As we rode along the crest of the hill we could see the farm buildings below. Gray smoke drifted from the chimneys to blend into the pale blue atmosphere. The sun shining on the snow reflected on the flecks of ice in the crust, giving the appearance that millions of tiny diamonds had fallen from the heavens. I remember thinking, "I wish I could paint. This is so pretty. Oh! To be able to capture the true beauty of nature on paper."

We unloaded the tree and stood it against the house. The top reached half way up to the roof. One of my brothers came around the corner of the barn, stopped, stared at the tree for a minute, and burst out laughing. He kidded us about how we were going to have to rebuild the house to get it in. This was not the first time we had brought home a Christmas tree big enough for a grand ballroom. The guys always teased us girls about it, while sawing off the bottom to make it fit in the house. The boys started to tell about the time Laurette and I had brought this big tree for Christmas, a couple of years prior.

When they had trimmed it down to size, it was lop-sided. We tried putting the scrawny side in the corner, but that did not work. Not to be outwitted by a tree, Laurette and I took some of the extra bows and wired them wherever they were needed. It looked wonderful, and Laurette and I were pretty proud of our little deception. After a couple of days, however, because these branches could not get water, the needles dried and fell. Heating with forced hot air seem to suck the moisture right out of them. It was our custom to keep the tree up until after New Years Day. For the better part of the week, we had this crazy looking tree with dried up branches sticking out every which way with ornaments on them. What was even more comical was the look on our friend's faces when they came to visit. With

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each telling the story got longer and more embellished. It was all part of the fun of growing up in a large family. The teasing did not bother us.

This year we did get a perfect tree!

Dad in the meantime had brought the team to the stable. I ran to him and gave him a big hug. "Thanks, Dad, I understand and I will remember this as long as I live."

Just then I heard John's car drive in the front yard. I turned and ran to meet him. The look of disappointment that was written on his face as he saw the Christmas tree broke my heart. I knew though that he would understand when I explained that my father had to make one last memory for his mental scrapbook to sustain him when I went left to marry the man I loved.

The Christmas Tree (Version two)

The silence in the room was absolute. The windows had stopped rattling. The storm was over. A dusting of snow covered the floor near the windows. Each pane was displaying its own unique version of Jack Frost's artwork. The intricate ice crystal display also acted like a thermometer. I was luxuriating in the warmth of my bed under the pile of homemade quilts, when suddenly I remembered this was "The Day". Wham! The covers flew off and my feet hit the linoleum floor and instantly turn to solid ice! Never giving a second thought to the cruel shock to my poor feet, I ran across the hall to my brothers' room and scraped the ice off the windowpanes. In the moonlight I could see the plow had passed sometimes during the night and the roads were open. Yes! YES! It promised to be a wonderful day. John Labonte, my fiancé, would be able to come up from the city thirty miles away, to go into the woods with us to cut our Christmas tree. As I stood there, the sun slowly rose over the horizon. The morning sky was a blaze of reds. On the far hills, the trees, silhouetted black against the sky, looked like soldiers standing watch over the valley. They contrasted against fields of white snow. I thought to myself that there was nothing in the world to match the beauty of a winter sunrise in the country. Across the yard the lights streaming from the barn windows told me that my father and siblings were hard at work milking and feeding the cows. A shiver brought me back to reality. I snatched my clothes on the way to the warmth of the first floor. The comforting, familiar smell of wood heat rising from the center grate greeted me as I opened the downstairs hall door. With wood furnaces that push hot air, you could always smell the heat before you felt it. I stood on the grate; the hot air rising from it made my nightgown billow like a balloon. I stayed there for a few minutes to let the warm air caress my frozen body. With all the people out in the barn the bathroom was free for as long as I wanted it. With eight members of the family in the house and only one bathroom it was at times comical, frustrating or out and out war trying to get the bathroom without interruption. Once washed and dressed I went to my mother's room and softly said for her to stay in bed, as I would make the breakfast for the family.

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We continued on the logging road to a clearing. To the west, the majestic Presidential range of the White Mountains graced the horizon and to the east, the Androscoggin valley spread like a giant white tapestry. The scenery was so breathtaking, as though embroidered by angels, with farms, trees, and lakes. Dad was resting the horses when he said in a hoarse whisper, "Girls, look to your left!" He was pointing to a meadow a couple of hundred feet away. There on a knoll was a huge stag. A short distance to the left of us was his herd of does and yearlings that were pawing the snow to get to the moss. There we were, human and buck locked in a frozen stare. Suddenly the stag rose on his hind legs and thumped the ground with his front hooves. Responding to the signal of danger, the herd raced for the woods. It seemed as though their feet barely touched the snow as they bounded into the thicket. We gazed in awe at their grace and beauty. This scene brought back childhood memories of fairy tale wood nymphs floating in a magical forest.

Dad put his arm around me, and with a vise like grip he pulled me backwards to his broad chest, and said, "You are going to miss all of this when you move to the city, aren't you?"

"Dad, I am not going to the end of the world you know. I am moving to Lewiston. It's only thirty miles away." I realized he was going to miss me! "Dad," I continued, "why didn't you want to wait for

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Johnny to come with us?"

He looked like a little boy when he said in a barely audible voice. "This is the last time I will have you to myself. He has the rest of his life to choose Christmas trees with you." Dad pushed me away as though embarrassed that his emotions were showing. In a gruff voice he said, "Come on, let's go get that tree."

We finally got to the stand of spruce trees. Laurette and I ran from one tree to the other trying to make up our minds. We kept picking trees that were at least fifteen to twenty feet tall. Choosing a Christmas out in the wild is much different than going to a tree farm. There the seedlings are planted far enough apart as to give space for it to grow without interfering with each other. As the tree begins to grow tall it is fertilized and trimmed every year so that as it matures, it is full and perfectly shaped. Seedlings growing in the wild have to vie for space, sunlight, water, and nutrients with mature trees. While they are still considered part of the underbrush they are often trampled on by animals, who chewed at their branches for food. By the time they were big enough to be cut for a Christmas tree, most of them are lop sided or too scrawny to cut. Getting a Christmas tree in the wild can be fun but challenging. Dad said, "Look girls, I'm over six feet tall. Try to find one that is not much taller than I am." Try as we might all the pretty ones were at least ten feet tall. Dad decided that if he was to get back home, he had to chop the pine Laurette and I agreed was the perfect tree, even if he had to cut a good portion of it off to get it into the house. We decide we could make a wreath with the extra boughs.

My heart was filled with happiness as we started back home. We sang Christmas Carols, and our voices echoed back to us from the distant hills. As we rode along the crest of the hill we could see the farm buildings below. Gray smoke drifted from the chimneys to blend into the pale blue atmosphere. The sun shining on the snow reflected on the flecks of ice in the crust, giving the appearance that millions of tiny diamonds had fallen from the heavens. I remember thinking, "I wish I could paint. This is so pretty, oh to be able to capture the true beauty of nature on paper."

We unloaded the tree and stood it against the house. The top reached half way up to the roof. My brother came around the corner of the barn, stopped, stared at the tree for a minute, and burst out laughing. He kidded us about how we were going to have to rebuild

the house to get it in. This was not the first time we had brought home a Christmas tree big enough for a grand ballroom. The guys always teased us girls about it, while sawing off the bottom to make it fit in the house. The boys started to tell about the time Laurette and I had brought this big tree a couple of years prior. When they, our brothers, had trimmed it down to size, it was lop-sided. We tried putting the scrawny side in the corner, but that did not work. Not to be outwitted by a tree, Laurette and I took some of the extra bows and wired them wherever they were needed. It looked wonderful, and Laurette was pretty proud of our little deception. After a couple of days, however, because these branches could not get water, the needles dried and fell. Heating with forced hot air seem to suck the moisture right out of the tree. It was our custom to keep the tree up until after New Years Day. For the better part of the week, we had this crazy looking tree with dried up branches sticking out every which way with ornaments on them. What was even more comical was the look on our friend's faces when they came to visit. With each telling the story got longer and embellished. It was all part of the fun of growing up in a large family. Their teasing did not bother us. This year we did get a perfect tree!

Dad in the mean time had brought the team to the stable. I ran to him and gave him a big hug.

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"Thanks, Dad, I understand and I will remember this as long as I live."

Just then I heard John's car drive in the front yard. I turned and ran to meet him. The look of disappointment that was written on his face as he saw the Christmas tree broke my heart, but I knew he would understand when I explained that my father had to make one last memory for his mental scrapbook to sustain him when I went left to marry the man I loved.

The Christmas Tree (Version three)

The silence in the room was absolute. The windows had stopped rattling, the storm was over. A dusting of snow covered the floor near the windows. Each pane was displaying its own unique version of Jack Frost's artwork. The intricate ice crystal display also acted like a thermometer. I was luxuriating in the warmth of my bed under the pile of homemade quilts. Suddenly I remembered this was "The Day". Wham! The covers flew off and my feet hit the linoleum floor and instantly turn to solid ice! But never giving a second thought to the cruel shock to my poor feet, I ran across the hall to my brothers' room and scraped the ice off the windowpanes. In the moonlight I could see the plow had passed sometimes in the night and the roads were open. Yes! YES! It promised to be a wonderful day. John Labonte, my fiance, would be able to come up from the city thirty miles away, to go into the woods with us to cut our Christmas tree. As I stood there, the sun slowly rose over the horizon turning the snow and morning sky into a blaze of reds. The trees, silhouetted black, on the far hills looked like soldiers standing watch over the valley. I remember thinking that there was nothing in the world to match the beauty of a winter sunrise in the country. Across the yard the lights streaming from the barn windows told me that my father and siblings were hard at work milking and feeding the cows. A shiver brought me back to reality. I snatched my clothes on the way to the warmth of the first floor. The smell and heat rising from the center grate greeted me as I opened the downstairs hall door. I stood on the grate for a few minutes to let the warm air soothe my frozen body. The hot air made my nightgown billow like a balloon. With all the people out in the barn, the bathroom was free for as long as I wanted it. With eight people in the house and only one bathroom it was at times comical, frustrating or out and out war trying to get the bathroom without interruptions. Once washed and dressed I went to my mother's room and softly said for her to stay in bed, as I would make the breakfast for the family.

I went into the family room, there before a large Crucifix I knelt and said my morning prayers. A ritual instilled in us at a very young age. We started and ended our day with God. For a minute my mind wandered to the day John had given me my diamond engagement ring. Dad had laughed because he could not even put it on the tip of his size twenty ring finger. He liked John and often the two would team up to tease me.

The kitchen was toasty warm. My brother always stoked the wood furnace down in the cellar and lit the stove in the kitchen before going to the barn, so that my mother would not have to get up in a cold house. There were still traces of snow on the wood in the huge box. I dug under until I found dry pieces and filled the firebox of the black, cast iron woodstove that was aglow with hot coals. I placed three large cast-iron skillets on to heat as I took the slab of bacon my father had brought in from the smokehouse before going into the barn. Thick slices for dad, the rest of us preferred our bacon thin and crispy. I sliced the homemade bread an inch thick, spread it with plenty of real country butter and fried them until golden brown. Hash brown potatoes, fresh eggs, coffee along with large pitchers of ice-cold milk completed the country breakfast. When the family came in, the aroma of home cooking whetted their already ravenous appetites. As Dad came in, his form dwarfed the doorway. I said, " Hi

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Dad, Johnny is coming today remember? He's coming for lunch and then coming with us to get the Christmas tree. Are you going to take us up with the horses?" I was the youngest of eleven children and could do little wrong in my Dad's eyes. Lin turn, adored every fiber of his being. John, the man I was to marry had many of my father's qualities. Dad was not one to hold long conversations. When his eyes twinkled he was happy, a scowl equaled to a scolding, and you knew better than to argue with a cold stare.

Being Saturday I did not have to go to work. My sister Laurette, and I had planned to spend the morning cooking and baking for the coming holidays. At about ten thirty we were cooking up a storm. She baked the desserts while I cooked the main dishes. The bread was rising, pies of all sorts were lining the counter tops, and the smell of beans slowly baking permeated the kitchen. I was chopping the last of the vegetables for the beef and pork stew, while my sister was stirring batter for cookies. We were singing Christmas carols along with the radio. Just being alive was exhilarating. Dad opened the door and said, "Girls the team of horses is harnessed and ready to go. I will give them their grain while you get ready. Oh, it is very cold so dress up warm."

For a minute I was stunned and then said, But Dad, Johnny is not coming until lunch time, we have to wait for him."

My father just looked at me and said, "The horses are harnessed and we are going in about ten minutes. Come out as soon as you're dressed."

"But Dad, I promised Johnny I yelled to an already closed door. I quickly put my feet shoes and all into my brother's bam boots, grabbed a jacket off the hook and raced out to persuade dad to delay the tree cutting expedition. My father, his back to me, made a big project of adjusting the harnesses. He never acknowledged my questions. I was just about to make one last plea when he turned around and his penetrating hazel eyes told me even I should not question this decision. Confused but compelled by years of trust respect and obedience I reluctantly returned to the house.

I was twenty-two years old. I had never disobeyed my father. But, I was seriously thinking of it when Laurette said, "Eva I think we had better go with him." I couldn't believe my ears, Laurette loved my father but they never communicated well. I was often the go between for the two of them. Laurette and I shared our youth not only as sisters, but we were also best friends. She sensed my inner turmoil and wanted to defuse an impasse between my father and myself.

Mom said, "Go ahead I will watch the bread and put it in the loaf pans if need be."

The team was hitched to the big wood sled used for hauling logs from the mountain woodlots. It consisted of a floorless rack, which sat on two set of massive runners whose bottoms were lined with steel plates for durability. There was a post at each corner of the rack to hold the logs. It was an ingenious contraption constructed in such a way that even when it held a heavy load it could turn on a dime and go through rough terrain with minimal chances of tipping over. The sled was quite stable in front and there was a small platform there for the teamster to stand. However no other person ever stood on the front of the rack for fear of falling into the cross chains that steered the runners. When the runners hit a stump or large bolder the sled would slide off and then swing back and forth like a whiplash. It obviously was not designed to carry passengers. Rarely would my father permit anyone to ride on it. Being brought up on a farm, we were taught at a very young age how to ride such equipment.

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Laurette and I jumped on the back runner, held onto the post. Not only was it safer there, it was a lot more fun. That is, if you could stay on.

Dad spoke to his team, they moved as one at his voice commands. My father never used whips on any of his animals. He picked up the reins in his left hand and transferred them to his steel and leather claw that replaced the fingers of his right hand. He had fabricated this claw to fit over the remaining palm. With his thumb and claw he could handle the tools he used as a finished cabinetmaker. He was a young man with five children when he lost the four fingers of his right hand in a wood planer. At that point in time artificial limbs were still very primitive. By creating his own prosthesis, Dad proved to himself and the world he had lost part of his hand, not his ability to do his work.

We were on the road going west towards the mountain. We passed the frog pond and the old abandoned schoolhouse. Built in the early eighteen hundreds, it now housed our grain thrasher and assorted tools. We climbed up a long steep hill and turned onto the Old Stage Coach Road. Breaking a path through new snow was hard on the horses so Dad stopped the team often to let them rest. The trees were still covered with snow. Laurette and I would jump off the sled and creep under the branches, where the snowladen branches formed mini-rooms. We would shake the branches. I would try to get the snow to tumble on her and she in turn would try to get me smothered in the snow. When we heard the sled bells we knew the team was moving and scampered back on the sled.

We were nearing the logging road. A small bump caught me offguard and knocked me off the sled. I managed to land on my feet, got my balance and ran after the sled and jumped back on, but before I could get a solid grip on the corner post, the runner on Laurette's side hit a huge stump and sent the whole sled swinging. Knowing I could not hold on, I half jumped, half fell off, landing flat on my back in the snow. The runner hit yet another stump. Laurette, bent in two laughing at my wild antics, was caught of guard. She swung all the way around the post, but, could not hold on came sailing through the air and landed on top of me. Our arms, and legs were thrashing the snow sending it flying in all directions.

Dad felt the jarring, stopped the team and looked back just in time to observe the whole escapade. He was ready to jump off to help us when he heard us laughing. He sat on the cross beam with a big smile on his face. We were tumbling in the snow like two kids trying to give each other a white wash. I whispered, "Lets get Dad." Then as on cue we both stood up and pelted Dad with snowballs. One got him full in the chest before he could get the horses moving again. Wait for us," we yelled as we ran after him, the team disappeared around a bend in the road. The harness bells stopped ringing; we looked at each other, laughed, and slowed down to a walk.

Harness bells were meant as a warning that another team was approaching and both teamsters would slow down and approach with caution. However this time the silence of the bells told us dad was waiting for us. When we first moved to this farm almost twenty years prior, there were eight farmers living on the horseshoe dirt road, call Round Pond Road. Every farmer had two or three teams of horses. The depression years sent one family after another to the city looking for work. The town or state foreclosed on the farms for unpaid taxes. Now only my father's farm remained. The dirt road still continued up the hill where there was twenty five to thirty thousand acres of wild country owned mostly by the State of Maine. Harness bells were now used for sentimental reasons rather than necessity.

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We continued on the logging road to a clearing. To the west, the majestic presidential range of the White Mountains graced the horizon and to the east, the Androscoggin valley spread like a giant white quilt, appliqued with farms, trees, and lakes. Dad was resting the horses when, in a hoarse whisper, he said, "Girls! Look to your left!" He was pointing to a meadow a couple of hundred feet away. There on a knoll was a huge stag. A short distance away the herd of does and yearlings were pawing the snow to get to the moss. Human and animal locked in a frozen stare. Suddenly the stag rose on his hind legs and thumped the ground with his front hooves. Responding to the signal of danger, the herd raced for the woods. It seemed as though their feet barely touched the snow as they bounded into the thicket. We gazed in awe at their grace and beauty. This scene brought back childhood memories of fairytale wood nymphs floating in a magical forest. Dad put his arm around me with a vise like grip he pulled me to his broad chest and said, "You are going to miss all of this when you move to the city, aren't you?"

"Dad, I am not going to the end of the world you know, I am moving to Lewiston. It's only thirty miles away." I realize he was going to miss me! "Dad," I continued, "why didn't you want to wait for Johnny to come with us?"

He looked like a little boy when he said in a barely audible voice. "This is the last time I will have you to myself. He has the rest of his life to choose Christmas trees with you.

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My heart was filled with happiness as we started back home. We sang Christmas carols and our voices echoed back to us. As we rode the crest of the hill we could see the farm buildings below. Gray smoke from the chimneys drifted and blended into the pale blue atmosphere. The sun shining on the snow reflected on the flecks of ice in the crust, giving the appearance that millions of tiny diamonds had fallen from heaven. I remember thinking I wish I could paint, this is so pretty. Oh to be able to capture on paper the true beauty of nature.

We unloaded the tree and I turned to Dad and gave him a big hug. "Thanks Dad, I understand and I will remember this as long as I live."

Just then John drove up. I turned and ran to meet him. Disappointment was written on his face as he looked at the Christmas tree leaning on the shed. I knew he would understand when I explained that my father needed a few memories for his mental scrapbook to sustain him when I went away to marry the man I loved.

A Trip Into the Past - A Tale of Two Women

Notes on "A Trip Into The Past, A Tale of Two Women"

On Mother's birthday, September 12, 2005, seeing that Mother was anxious about her good friend, Lise Griffin who was dying of cancer, I suggested we go visit with Jean Marc & Francoise Tremblay and also visit Lise who was in a Montreal hospital.

Unfortunately, we did not go directly to the hospital where Lise was a patient. Being tired from our long drive from Lewiston, I suggested we go to Jean Marc and visit Lise the following day. That was not a good decision-Lise passed away the night before-had we gone immediately upon our arrival in Montreal, Mother would have had the chance to see Lise.

Upon returning home from our trip and at some point thereafter and saddened at having missed seeing Lise before she died, Mother wrote this article about the two women who became very close friends to her (us) during our stay in the Quebec area and for many years thereafter. Both of their story or lives were sad ones which ended on a sour note as you can see. However, one, Lise, remained a friend to the end, whereas, the other, Lucille, rejected our friendship because we refused to take sides and still considered both of them our friends.

In the last paragraph of this article, Mother ends it by saying "We went to her son's restaurant with Lise for dinner." This is obviously an oversight on the part of Mother, Lise died while we were on that trip and therefore could not have gone to her "son's (Lucille's son) restaurant with Lise for dinner." Mother did not write this article until some point between September 25, 2005 and August 14, 2006--probably the latter date is the correct date. When Mother and I went to Lucille's son's (Eric) restaurant on a later visit, probably in 2006, it was just mother and I that went.

In the article, all the parentheses () are names and notes that I inserted for clarity.

I almost think that Mother intended to continue or add more to this article but either forgot or did not find the time.

A Trip Into The Past - A Tale of Two Women

(The first woman)

Getting ready to go to Canada has always been an exciting time for us. This time, it was different. I was going up to see Lise (Griffin), a good friend, who was dying of cancer. We left on the morning of September twelfth (2005), which happened to be my seventieth birthday. It will be one I shall never forget.

In December of 1966, John and I and the family moved from Toronto to Ste Foy, a suburb of Quebec City. The move meant a promotion for John. John and I are both of French decent so the move to the Quebec area was of particular interest to us.

We arrived at our new home in the dead of winter. A few of the neighbors came over to welcome us to

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the Ste. Foy. They were mostly young couples with children about the same age as ours. Lise Griffin, who lived next door, and I became instant friends. Although all the neighbors were friendly, there was a special bond between she and I that never developed with anyone else. Lise was a quiet, unassuming person. She lived for her family. She was a beautiful tall blond with a Marilyn Monroe figure. What little clothes she had were modest and in good taste. She was married to Terrance Griffin, a spoiled son of rich people-for example, as a youngster; he went to school in a chauffeured limousine. He was verbally abusive to her, but she loved him in spite of that.

(The second woman)

The Quebec district was one of the largest in Canada. As Manager he (John), was always hiring and training new men. The very first person he hired, a man I shall call Mike (Ernest Simard).

Mike married Judy (Lucille) a few weeks after being hired. He soon became one of the top agents in Canada. In a very short period of time, John promoted Mike to sales manager. Judy was a needy person and John asked me to sort of take her under my wings. Although there were only a few years difference in our ages I felt much older than her. We went on many business trips together over the years and soon John, Mike, Judy and I became good friends.

Judy was feisty and "demanded" what she wanted. The excessive use of makeup tended to accentuate her rough features, while her expensive trendy clothes did nothing to hide her weight problem. The children remembered that when they came to visit, the seven of us had to share a bathroom while she and her husband took over the upstairs bathroom. And even then, we could all take our showers and be finished dressing before they would come down for breakfast. But, they were both full of fun and the family enjoyed having them over. The boys never minded the inconvenience of giving up their room and bath.

She and Mike both came from poor families. Even though Mike made good wages, better than most, they were always in deeply in debt.

After more than twenty-five years of marriage, Mike left Judy for another woman. He claimed that he was tired of being embarrassed in public by her loud and inappropriate comments and her unreasonable demands. She tried everything she could to save her marriage. She went on a strict diet and lost a lot of weight and bought an eight hundred dollar outfit to wear for their day in court. When I asked her why she would spend so much on clothes when she claimed not to have any money for food, she answered that she "wanted to show him what he was going to miss."

When nothing worked she turned on him and anyone who had any contact with him. She became very bitter and alienated most all her friends. Judy asked John and me to renounce Mike as a friend. When we said that although we did not approve of what he did to her we could not alienate him.

Mike died and we went to his funeral. She asked if she could see him in private to pay her last respects but Mike's new wife had her barred from the funeral parlor.

Judy and I had a long talk but she more or less told me that she was not really interested in continuing a friendship. I sent her Christmas cards but she never replied.

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Back to my birthday (2005). We went to her son's restaurant with Lise for dinner. He was so happy to see us and asked that I call his mother.

Lady of the House

Notes on "Lady of the House"

Generally, the Canadian people, largely English or French, although many other nationalities are part of its total population, are more class conscious than the American population. To them, "position", occupation and nationality are very much part of their culture.

The three places we lived in our eleven plus years in Canada; Toronto, Ste. Foy (suburb of Quebec City) and Beaconsfield (suburb of Montreal), were no exception to this "class" consciousness.

Not being accustomed to this, we (mostly Mother) were often queried as to what "position" did I have and in what occupation, etc. Mother wrote the following story with this class consciousness as her centerpiece to tell of the three places we lived while in Canada.

Lady of the House

By Eva Labonte

In 1964, John, my husband, was offered a position in Canada. After weighing all the pros and cons, we decided to accept the offer. This launched us into a flurry of activity. We had six weeks to sell our house, get immunization shots, change address and fill out tons of paper work.

Finally we arrived as "landed immigrants" in Toronto, Ontario, the fastest growing city in Canada. Skyscrapers in construction dotted the landscape. The huge cranes, lifting massive steel girders for the framework of the skyscrapers, looked like giant erector sets silhouetted against the sky. Ritzy condominiums lined the ridges of the ravines that crisscrossed the city. The ravines, by city ordinance, were kept as public parks. Some were developed into lovely arboretums or flower gardens. The lawns throughout the city were beautifully manicured and a variety of plants and flowers, planted in artful designs, made each home look like picture postcards. Land within the city sold at a premium. Both, the affluent and the land developers, sought after land, especially the land that bordered the ravines.

Bordered on the south by Lake Ontario, Toronto was expanding into the countryside to its north, east and west. Older structures were constantly being torn down to make room for more modern, efficient office or apartment buildings. Traffic was a problem in this rapidly growing city. Major highways, such as the twelve lanes "Inter-province 401", north of the city, became obsolete even before completion. Though Toronto was the largest and fastest growing city in Canada, the city officials were very strict about enforcing ordinances that kept the city beautiful and clean. The most amazing feature was that there were virtually no slums in the city. While there, we learned that you could walk the streets at night in complete safety.

When John came home on long weekends, our big treat was to hire a baby sitter for the children and spend an evening alone, window-shopping.

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We would stop for a cup of coffee and chat quietly before going home. With four young children, who saw their father only a few days a month, to have time alone for John and I, was a luxury. Toronto was an exciting place to live.

Houses for rent were scarce. John had to do the house hunting alone while I stayed in Maine with our four young children, but luck was with us. A couple, wishing to leave the city for a few years, but did not want to sell their house, agreed to lease it to us. The house was a beautiful brick, ranch-styled bungalow overlooking a ravine. We were excited but when we entered the house my arms fell. It was dark to the point of being oppressive. Everything in the house was drab. I knew it was a temporary situation so I hid my disappointment. John could stay only one day to help before he was sent on a four-week assignment.

Mrs. Hazleton, the lady who lived next door came over. She ask, "Would you like to hire my cleaning woman to help you set-up the house?"

"No, thank you," I said, "My husband's job demands that he travel a lot. Cleaning house will give me something to do while he is away."

I got my pails and cleaning materials out to do what I thought would be light, house cleaning. Imagine my surprise to find pink colored walls under the layers of grime! After repeated shampoos, the carpeting in that room turned out to be old rose. As I washed each room, it was transformed from dingy gray to soft pastel yellow, green, or off-white. However no amount of washing could remove the spots or smell from the rug in the girl's bedroom. These spots were left, compliments of the cats and dog of the prior occupants. In frustration, I pulled it out and threw it outside. When the landlord came to pick it up he came into the house, looked around, and then, in a demanding voice asked, "Who gave you permission to paint the walls." I spun around, looked at him and said, "I did not paint the walls, I washed them!"

I can still see the sheepish look on his face when I told him what he was looking at was the result of soap, water, and elbow grease. He took the rent check and mumbled something to the affect that the house looked nice, and then he asked if I minded if he sat at our dinning room table to do a bit of paper work. Taken off guard I said yes. As lunchtime approached, he showed no signs of leaving; I honestly think he was hoping to be invited to eat with us. I fixed the children lunches then when up to him and said, "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse us, I need to set the table for the children. He mumbled something about being almost done. He shuffled his papers and put them in his briefcase, then left. Had he stayed longer, I might have been tempted to ask to be paid for doing his work.

A while later we went back to Maine to visit our Parents. Upon our return we learned from the neighbors that our landlord, his wife and two children had moved in for the two weeks we were gone! Knowing that we were going to be in Toronto for a short while and the shortage of homes to be had, we chose not to make an issue of it.

I was so busy getting settled and taking care of our four children, I did not have time to do any socializing with the neighbors. I was aware that Toronto attracted many immigrants from all over the world. The people had a tendency to live in clusters by nationality, profession, or wealth. We happened to have moved into an area that was predominately from England.

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I was a bit puzzled when a well-dressed, dignified looking woman rang our doorbell, but declined my invitation to come in. Eager to get to know our neighbors, I chatted with her for a few minutes and renewed the invitation for her to come in for a cup of coffee. She said in a rather condescending voice, "Dear, I never drink coffee in the afternoon. We always have tea." Then she asked, "Are you American?" "Oh yes," I said proudly. Then she said, "Americans are really not welcome here." Taken aback, I asked, "Where are you from?" "We moved here from Scotland when I was a young child," she told me. I chuckled and said, "My husband's parents are both Canadians, as are my grandparents. I am probably more Canadian than you are and therefore should be welcoming you to Canada." The issue of nationality was never brought up again. I must admit to being hurt and disappointed by her attitude. Fortunately our other neighbors were more like Mrs.

Hazleton, than this woman, and our stay in Toronto was a pleasant one.

In December of 1966, just a year and a half after our arrival in Canada, John was promoted to District Manager, and was transferred to Quebec City. Again we were thrown into a flurry of activity, getting ready to move. We arose early the day of our departure to find that many of our neighbors had come to see us off. The car was so full of Christmas gifts from these beautiful people that we almost considered leaving one of the children behind (ha! ha!) to make room for the presents. Luckily, with some adjustment, we made room for both the presents and the children.

It took us about ten hours to drive from Toronto to Quebec City. But in that one day, it was like leaving the land of the future and going back centuries in time.

We arrived in Quebec City late that day, crossing over the massive, cantilevered, steel bridge that spans the St. Lawrence River. This bridge was once considered one of the seven wonders of the modern world. I could hardly contain my excitement at the thought of living in the land of my grandparents. I had a sense of "coming home."

Old Quebec was a quaint French-speaking city that had changed very little since it was built so long ago. Buildings were at a premium inside the huge granite walls that had been erected around the city "Le Vieux Quebec." These walls had been built as a protection against attacks from the native Indians and English invaders. The rows of staggered houses that lined the winding alleys and narrow streets were unique. Each dwelling shared a common wall that joined it to the next building, even though they might all be of different width, height, or style. If you were lucky enough to purchase a building inside the old city walls, you would have to agree to the strict laws that governed the use of all land and buildings inside "Vieux Quebec." Nothing could be altered in any way without written permission. This was to protect the old world charm of the city, of which Quebec could proudly boast.

Today, these streets, such as, la Rue du Tresor, are a gathering place for artists to show and sell paintings. Many do their artistic work right there on the premise. Musicians rove about outside the quaint boutiques, performing for the crowds. "Les Plaines d'Abraham" is a large battlefield on top of the cliffs overlooking the St. Lawrence River. This precipice is where the English surprised and defeated the French by scaling the escarpment, which the French thought was impenetrable, a feat the French have never forgotten nor forgiven the English for. The field is now a park that is sometimes used for military parades. On the northern part of the field is La Citadelle. This bastion housed the first regiments of "Cariqnan-Salieres" French soldiers. Now it is home to the Canadian National Guard.

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At the eastern point of the bluff, overlooking the river, is the majestic Chateau Frontenac. This chateau that looks like a medieval castle dominates the skyline. Its copper roofs, weathered green, top its many turrets and gables, which seem to be playing tag with the clouds and are reflected in the river below. Like an old sentinel, it stands guard over the city. Everything in the older section of Quebec City is historic. I was thankful that due to the foresight of the government to protect all the buildings, the European charm of the old city has been preserved. As we drove there, I tried to envision myself living there back in the time of my ancestors.

That night we stayed at a motel near our new home in Ste Foy, a suburb of Quebec City. The next morning, we got to the house early to meet the moving van. We stopped in front of our bungalow and parked across the street so as not to interfere with the movers. As I stepped from the car the little boy that lived in the house where we had parked, spied the Ontario license plates and said, "C'est des maudi anglais" (They are the damned English people.) You can imagine the startled look on his face when I answered him in French, "No, we are not English, but Franco-American." Suddenly, I felt like a stranger.

These people were still smarting over the defeat suffered by their ancestors at the hands of the English more than four hundred years prior. I shook my head in disbelief and turned to the immediate concerns of the day.

Armed with mops, pails, soap and disinfectants, I headed up the driveway. Normande Caron, the lady next door came out and asked, "When is the lady of the house arriving?" I replied, "I am she." She looked surprised and said, "Would you like to borrow 'jia bonne'?" She meant her cleaning woman. Not knowing that the French word for "good" was a slang word for "maid", I said "Your good what?" Normande looked at me as if I had two heads and said, "Ma bonne. Ma bonne." Just then John came up and explained that a "bonne" was a housekeeper. We all had a good laugh.

I paused for a minute remembering the disastrous condition of our last house, and I was tempted to accept her gracious offer, but thought it best to decline. What a wonderful surprise I got when I entered our new home; The previous owners had covered the spotless carpets so that the movers would not soil them, the windows shone like diamonds in the sun and the cupboard shelves had been freshly painted.

Soon after we were settled, Normande invited me to a tea to meet the neighbors. During the course of the afternoon, I was asked what my husband did for work. When I said, "Insurance", one woman said, "Oh my, didn't anyone tell you that in this neighborhood we are all professionals?" I could not believe my ears! I thought it was rather comical to hear the same kind of questions I had been asked in Toronto being asked again here. I replied, "No, but I'll tell you something, when you get any of our bills, you can start to worry. Until then don't worry about my husband's occupation."

The other women were taken aback by that lady's audacity, apologized for her rudeness. Our children found there were many children living in the neighborhood who were their ages. The language difference was not a barrier for long. I was grateful to our neighbors for teaching my children and I French, and they in turn, were eager to learn English. Our family made new friendships, which have lasted over thirty years.

Five years later, in 1971, my husband was promoted to Director of Agencies for Eastern Canada. This

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meant we had to move to Montreal. John left immediately, while I stayed behind to sell the house, pack our belongings and do all the other necessities of changing places.

This time there was a series of going-away parties and promises to visit and write often. Although the move promised to be exciting there was much sadness at leaving so many good friends behind.

Our new home, Montreal, was the largest city in Canada, yet, like Toronto, it was safe to walk the streets any time of the day or night. As a District Manager in Quebec, John was home every night. Now, as V.P. of Marketing, he would have to do a lot more traveling and spend time away from home.

Montreal was a cosmopolitan city with much to offer culturally. We decide to move to Beaconsfield, a suburb that was home to many families like ours who had to move often because of their work.

I went a day early to clean the house before the moving vans arrived.

No sooner had I stepped out of the car, I was met by a couple of the neighborhood women. The very questions that had greeted me at my two earlier homes were asked again! "When was the lady of the house arriving?" "Did I want a cleaning woman?" and "What did my husband do for work?" By now I had learned that occupations, positions, and class distinction, were important to the Canadians, and having a cleaning lady was a status symbol. To my new neighbor's surprise, I started to laugh. They thought it was funny also when I shared with them what had happened before. In the meantime our children had piled out of the car to meet the throng of neighborhood children who had gathered around, curious to see who was moving into their area. As in all our prior moves, the children had also found friends before the moving van was even empty.

A few weeks after having moved, John came home from a meeting with the top brass in Toronto. He announced that he was now a Vice President of Marketing. "Another promotion," I exclaimed. "No Promotion, no raise in pay, just a new title," he chuckled.

A few months later I learned I was pregnant with our fifth child. It was an exciting time for all of us. Mark, our oldest, was thirteen years old, Anne, the youngest was nine. They all fell in love with the new baby, Andre, from the moment he arrived home from the hospital. A new baby made it more difficult for me to travel with John for business conventions and related meetings, John hated being away from the children and especially Andre. He had missed out on their baby years and didn't want to lose that again

After five years of being on the road, John was tired and missed being home with the family so much that he asked his company for a position back in the states. His mother was getting on in age and was growing frail. But above all we especially wanted to get away from the rat race of high management. It was not a good influence on our children. Some of John's people thought they could win points by complementing our children. I remember once scolding our son for not doing his chores. He said, "I don't understand why you are always harping on me, the others think I do a lot for ir.y age." That is when I realize just how great an impact these people's compliments had on our children. Leading a life in the fast lane means you need to keep up with the people next door. They felt they "NEEDED" all the latest fashions. It is difficult for children to distinguish what is real and important at that age. When John's company had an opening in his hometown of Lewiston, Maine, he quickly asked to be transferred there to be close to his mother in her advanced years. The company management

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attempted to have him change his mind and stay. Later when we looked back, we were happy that their attempts were to no avail.

The children having lived most of their young life in Canada had mixed feelings about this latest move. Our youngest son, having been born in Canada, was a Canadian citizen. The rounds of going away parties were bitter sweet. We now had many close ties to the Canadian people. We had learned to love and respect their culture. We treated them with dignity and we were loved and respected in return by our many friends and business associates.

It was moving time again. We bought a lovely Cape Cod in Lewiston. It was a typical New England style house on a large lot overlooking a city park. With five children, we needed a good size house and wanted to be close to good schools. My sister-in-law, Stella, had the house cleaned before we moved in. For once I did not have to come charging in like a cleaning brigade. The first few weeks in our new home, I was busy setting up house.

One beautiful spring day, I decided the gardens needed attention. I donned a pair of work jeans and an old shirt and got down to the business at hand. I attacked the weeds with a vengeance. One of the neighborhood women came out and said, "Miss, are you the maid? Could you tell me when the lady of the house will arrive?" I stood up, threw my hand spade up in the air and said, "I am as much lady as you are going to get." Startled, she said, "Did I say something wrong?" After I explained to her what had been happening during our many moves through the years, she understood my frustration. We enjoyed a good laugh together over it.

The following year, she had a new baby which she named Mark after our oldest son. Our Mark felt very proud as this was the second time a neighbor had named their new baby after him.

We have moved nine times during the course of my husband's career.

Each time we came away with new friends and richer for the experiences. Some people may have had difficulty identifying me as the "lady of the house." Who knows, maybe I am a cleaning lady, or I might be a lady who cleans, but I am the "Lady of My House."

A Challenge for Eva

By Eva Labonte

The crystal stemware captured the glow of the candlelight from the pink tapered candles. A fresh floral arrangement on the dining room table filled the room with the delicate scent of an English garden. I was placing the last pieces of silverware on the hand-embroidered napkins inherited from my mother when my husband, John, came in. He smiled and said; "It sure smells good in here. Your table looks nice." "Do you really think so?" I asked, as I took the homemade bread out of the oven. I double-checked the table, the flowers, and each dish to make sure everything was perfect. I hated to admit even to myself that I was getting butterflies in the pit of my stomach.

John and I are of French descent and John is perfectly bilingual. It did not come as a surprise when, in 1965, his company assigned him to Quebec City in the heart of French speaking Canada. He was promoted to a District Manager. The area of his district was larger than our native state of Maine.

Upon our arrival, the people of the district gave us a lovely reception. My French was limited, but it did not faze them at all. They made me feel welcome. The Quebec French are a fun loving people who are known for their hospitality and good cooking. At first I was intimidated by the fact that all of John's assistants, and many of his agents, were older and more experienced in the Canadian company practices, than we were. My fears were quickly put to rest by their friendliness.

After we had settled in, John asked if we could invite each of his assistants and their wives to dinner so that we could get to know them better. I had grown up with a mother who catered weddings and parties, so cooking was not new to me. But this was different. I would be cooking for people who were all considered excellent cooks and for them; French cuisine was a daily fare.

The first of John's assistants to be invited was Paul Pierre Delorme, better known as "P.P." P.P. was having a difficult time at work, so John thought we might start with him to try and encourage him.

That morning, I got up early to check that I had all the ingredients for the upcoming feast I was planning to make. I had even made lists as to when each item was to be prepared.

I wanted everything to be timed just right.

When P.P. and his wife, Yvonne, arrived we invited them into the living room for a drink. Our children came in to meet them and then left to do their homework and go off with friends. Yvonne was a motherly, warm, pleasant person. Even though Yvonne was much older than I, with a reputation for being a gourmet cook, her kindly manner was completely disarming. Soon we were chatting like a couple of old friends. I remember thinking, "This is rather nice, and this entertaining bit will be a breeze."

Momentarily, I excused myself to put the finishing touches on the meal and set-up the first course. Confident that all was perfect, I announced that dinner was served.

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As they entered the dining room, Yvonne exclaimed how beautiful everything was.

Jumbo shrimps on a bed of ice, circling a small cup of homemade cocktail sauce sat at each place.

P.P. looked at the shrimp for what seemed a long time, but did not pick up his fork. "Is something wrong?" I asked. "I'm sorry Eva, but I do not eat anything spicy," P.P. answered. "Oh, it's not a problem," I replied. "I have a milder sauce I made for the children. Would you prefer that?" He indicated that he would, so I took his cup of sauce and ran to the kitchen to exchange it for less spicy version of what we were having. I congratulated myself for handling the situation well.

Next, came the salads, individually made and decorated. I placed one at each setting and was just sitting down when he said, "Eva, I never eat salads. Lettuce gives me gas."

I was taken aback but, looking at his wife, I said, "Oh, no problem we can eat ours as a side dish, if that is ok with you, Yvonne." She seemed a little embarrassed and quickly nodded her approval. I think she would have agreed to anything to ease the situation. I took his salad out to the kitchen and brought out homemade French Onion soup in single serving onion soup crocks. The cheese on top was melted to a perfect golden brown.

The wonderful aroma permeated the room. As I brought it in, Yvonne said, "Oh how lovely. Onion soup is my favorite dish." No sooner had she finished speaking when P.P. said, "And I hate it as much as you like it."

I stopped short and looked at Yvonne. Her face was flush with embarrassment. It would have given me great pleasure to pour the piping hot soup on his lap, but I said, "You know I have such a big meal. I was really debating whether or not to serve it. Why don't we skip the soup and I can fix a dish for you to take home Yvonne. It will be nice for your lunch tomorrow."

John too had been taken aback by P.P.'s boorish manners, but always the gentleman and not wanting to hurt Yvonne's feelings, kept silent. John had told me that the menu I had chosen was perfect based on the fact that he had seen P.P. eat onion soup and salads in restaurants when they were out on the road working together. Seeing that I did not seem flustered or upset, John engaged Yvonne in conversation to dissipate the mounting tension in the air.

No matter what meal I plan, I always bake a batch of my mother's recipe for crusty buns. The guests love to nibble on them between courses. Nothing can compare to the aroma and taste of homemade bread. I placed a basket of these warm buns on the table.

Next came the entree for which I had prepared a Fondue Chinoise. It is customary to serve four or five sauces with fondue. Each sauce has its own distinct flavor and color. I had made the delicate sauces myself, taking great pains to have just the right seasoning.

Making these sauces is a time consuming process, but, since cooking is something I enjoy immensely, I never considered preparing a fancy meal as work but fun. For the red sauce I had chosen a spicy tomato recipe. I used an orange cheddar cheese for the Cheese and Wine sauce. White cream cheese was the base for the Garlic and Herbs sauce in which I had sprinkled green chives and parsley making a lovely contrast in the white sauce. Finally, came my personal favorite; the tangy, pale, yellow curry

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sauce. Each was garnished with fresh herbs and the dishes were placed on small round turntable trays. I placed one at each end of the table so we wouldn't have to keep passing it around.

Next, to compliment the meal, I carried out a platter of baked stuffed potatoes "a la Parisienne." I also had fresh asparagus and mushroom caps "au beurre." I had asked John to light up the fire under the fondue pots while I brought out all the hot dishes. To save time I had preheated the broth. When all the dishes were in for the main meal, I brought out "la piece de resistance" Fillet mignon sliced paper-thin, arranged in a flower pattern on special Fondue plates. Placing these by each person I sat down feeling quite proud of our meal. I picked up my napkin, and placing it on my lap, said, "Shall we eat?"

P.P. looked at his plate and said, "I don't believe this. You expect me to eat raw meat?"

He had a look of disgust on his face, as he pushed the plate of meat away from him.

I was dumbfounded by his blatant display of poor manners. I felt the blood rush to my face. I was trying hard to regain my composure while thinking, "You Bast...., I have had it with you." I must admit I was just about to lose it when I heard John say in a very quiet but firm voice, "P.P., if you cook it, it will no longer be raw. How can you say you don't like it when you haven't even tried anything? Why don't you taste it first, and then, if you don't like it, you might just want to keep us company while we enjoy our meal." John took his long fondue fork, twirled a slice of fillet on it, calmly placed it in the fondue dish to cook, turned to Yvonne, and continued his conversation. I sat there stunned, but decided to follow John's lead and ignored P.P. At first, Yvonne was too choked up to eat, but when she saw that John and I were not making a big deal out of it she began to enjoy her meal.

Shocked that John had spoken to him like that, P.P. sat there in silence. When he saw that he was being ignored, he started to eat, and started to join in the conversation. He cleaned his plate and even asked for more. He never once said that the food was delicious. I would have been happy with, "Eva, this is good", or even, "it's ok." As we ate, the mood lightened and the conversation turned to fun things. We all started to relax and actually enjoyed the meal.

When the main course was finish I cleared off the table and brought the dishes to the kitchen, I plugged in the coffee pot and while waiting for it to percolate, I started rinsing and stacking the dishes neatly in the kitchen sink. I thought I would get one up on P.P. Going to the dinning room door, I said, "P.P., I know you like apple pie, and I baked this one for you; Pie a la mode coming up." "Now let me see you find something wrong with this," I thought looking at him straight in the eye. In less than a heartbeat he said, "No ice cream for me. I'll have cheese with it instead."

By this time, I was bound and determined I would not let him get to me. Much as I would have liked to pour hot cheese, nay, boiling hot oil over his head, I decided he would not get the chance to say he had gotten my goat.

While serving the dessert I asked Yvonne, "Do you like cream and sugar in your coffee?" She replied, "No thanks, I take mine black." I knew John drank his coffee black. Before I could ask P.P. how he wanted his coffee, he said, "I'll have tea with two sugars and a slice of lemon."

I went back into the kitchen, and seething, put the teakettle on. While waiting for the water to boil I

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emptied the sugar bowl and filled it with salt. With a smirk on my face, I called from the kitchen, "One tea coming up."

Angel in a Mackinaw Jacket

Notes to "Angel in a Mackinaw Jacket"

Mother's story of this event does not emphasize enough the extreme danger we found ourselves in when we slammed into the snow bank at St. Henri in the northern part of the Beauce County. I fully realized the very dire situation we found ourselves in while I was attempting to shovel our car out. Mother, with her blinding faith, prayed we would safely come out of this intact. I, on the other hand, could only see the next morning headlines of the local papers which would have read "Family of five freezes to death on remote road at St. Henri."

The weather condition at that moment was as bad as it could be; a major winter storm with very high winds, in sub zero temperatures with a wind chill temperature of somewhere in the minus forty degrees area with visibility of perhaps no more than five to ten feet out on a remote country road with no way of knowing where, if any, shelter was available.

That a local farmer would be on this highway with his tractor in this totally blinding windy freezing snowstorm at that particular moment at exactly where we had plowed into the snow bank is, in my very sincere opinion, a veritable miracle. But, there he was.

As to the incidence of the car battery; the impact into the snow bank had caused the fluffy snow to explode into the engine compartment under the hood from the underside of the car. I tried to get rid of the snow with my gloved hands, but unknown to me at the time, the spark plug wires and the heat of the engine combined to soak through the spark plug wires and were wet through and through thus shorting out the battery. We did not find that out until the next day when I went to the garage in Lewiston. In Armstrong, the service garage mechanic told me my battery was finished and I would need a new one. That was not true, but we didn't know that at that time. Thus the reason we continued to have problems as we continued our journey towards Lewiston.

On our return trip to Ste. Foy, a very sunny and bright day, we tried to locate the farmer who had helped us. We were not successful because we really did not know what his place looked like since we had been there on the weather conditions previously described.

To this day (2010), I consider this escape from disaster for the entire family as a miracle--I still can't believe we got out of this incidence alive.

Angel In A Mackinaw Jacket

By Eva Labonte

In 1967, our family moved from Toronto Ontario to Quebec City, Quebec, in Canada.

We were excited, as Quebec was at that time a unique and intriguing city. It was the second largest French-speaking city on the American continent. Montreal, 150 kilometers to the southwest boasted

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of a larger population, but it had become cosmopolitan. Quebec, on the other hand, had preserved much of its original structures, its French language and many of its customs. The walls surrounding the old part of the city, the famous Chateau Frontenac, the Citadel and the Gothic Cathedral gave Quebec City a European flare. There were no skyscrapers or shopping malls in Quebec proper. One would have to travel to Ste Foy, a suburb, which had the only shopping mall in a greater city area of half a million people.

The Ste Foy Shopping mall might well have been where the mixture of the old and the new culture of Quebec started. The professional young women of Quebec were class and fashion conscious. They worked hard at keeping up with the latest styles. They would coordinate every article of clothing with accessories and makeup. Sheer nylons with lacy patterns, high heel black leather boots worn with mini or micro mini skirts that were the fad in the winter of 1966. Lavish fur coats with matching hat completed the ensemble. These women could be seen parading the mall carrying bags with the logos of the "smart boutiques" on them to announce to one and all where they had shopped. On the other end of the spectrum we had "Les Cultivateurs," farmers "de les 'arriere ' rangs" way off in the boonies. These families dressed the same as their ancestors did centuries ago. They wore colorful hand knitted "toques and foulards, " hats and scarves. Woolen stockings that had striped ribbing extended over their heavy work boots and made the leg of their heavy Melton wool pants puff out like balloons. Bright plaid Mackinaw jackets completed their outfits. They seemed oblivious to the stares or snide remarks poked at them by the city slickers. The cultural differences made for an interesting contrast.

Being an outsider I was fascinated by les Cultivateurs. I detected in their speech, the same French dialog my grandfather spoke years before.

Quebec City sits on high cliffs overlooking the majestic St. Lawrence River. The prevailing winds follows the river putting Quebec City smack-dab in the middle of a snow belt. Quebec is known for its severe winters resulting in many people being snowbound at least a couple of times during the year. This led us into some exciting adventures and a few serious misadventures.

Quebec experiences some form of precipitation almost every day, year round. In the summer it might be a slight drizzle or a shower during the night. Days of rain are not uncommon. During the winter it is a rare day that snow showers do not occur.

Sometimes it can be just flurries or a few inches but, when it snows every day, it accumulates. Major storms dump anywhere from ten inches to twenty inches in a single day. As winter progresses one sees less and less of the houses as the snow banks grow higher and higher on the lawns. By the end of the season only the rooftops are visible from the streets.

Christmas arrived only two weeks after we had moved to Quebec City. We woke up to a bright sunny day. After Church the children squealed with joy as they open their gifts. Santa had been good to the children and everyone was happy except for one thing-we all missed Pepere (Castonguay) and Memere (Labonte).

My husband, John, said, "Do you realize that we are only four and a half hours from Lewiston?" our hometown in Maine. "How would you children like to see Pepere and Memere?"

Looks of disbelief followed by excited yells of yes! sent our four children and myself scurrying like a

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bunch of mice packing for our three-day trip.

A light powdery snow had started to fall as we loaded the car. How perfectly beautiful, we all agreed. About an hour and a half later we noticed the storm had intensified but the roads were good so we kept going. When we reached La Beauce, which is half way to Lewiston, we realized we were in a full-fledged blizzard. Since it was as dangerous to turn back as to continue we pushed on. La Beauce is a flat area without trees and at that point in time sparsely populated. The wind would pick up the snow and whip it, sometimes at hurricane speed, causing whiteouts.

Between squalls of snow we could see the taillights of a car ahead of us. Suddenly, John veered our car to avoid hitting the car we had been following. It had stopped abruptly just ahead of us! We plowed into a snow bank on the side of the road and were completely engulfed with snow. Getting out of the car, John told me to stay with the children while he shoveled us out. Afraid that gas fumes would enter the car he turned off the ignition. In no time he had cleared the snow but the car would not start. The force of the car entering the snow bank had covered the engine with snow. The snow had melted on the hot wires, then the wet wires froze and nothing could get the car started.

We were out in the middle of nowhere with four young children in a freezing car.

We huddled together under an old green picnic blanket for warmth. We knew we could not stay there but we also knew that we could not walk very far with young children. What to do? I told the children to pray. I held my rosary and fervently asked Mary for help. In the meantime my husband had lifted the hood of the car and was desperately trying to get all the snow off the wires. A couple of times John came into the car to get out of the wind and blowing snow. The wind churned the snow around us to the point we could not see beyond the car. It gave an eerie feeling of being grasped in the clutches of a giant white, monster. We felt hopelessly caught in this whirlwind.

Then, as though in a mirage, we saw a tractor coming towards us. As he drew nearer we could barely make out a man in a Mackinaw jacket. In the swirling snow he looked like an angel sent to us in answer to our prayers. His head and face were completely covered save for two small slits for his eyes. He told my husband to get in the car as his ears and cheeks were already getting frost bitten. Taking a large chain he hitched our car to his tractor and towed it to his farm a few hundred yards away. He brought us to his home where his wife made the children and I welcome. He and John went out to the bam where he had towed the car and proceeded to try and dry the wires. We called relatives in Quebec to see if anyone there could come to our rescue, to no avail.

The man and his young wife had five children about the ages of our children. They were playing with a few inexpensive toys they apparently had just received for Christmas. Without any prompting from their mother, they started sharing their new treasures and playing with our children. During our conversation the woman told me that since a couple had nearly frozen to death during a blizzard, her husband would keep an eye out on that stretch of road whenever there was a bad storm. This explained how he found us.

It was taking the men a long time to thaw out the wires and dry them. The lady started to set the table for dinner. She placed an oilcloth on a large wooden table, and then came bowls of boiled potatoes, vegetables, and homemade bread and butter. She took a roaster out of the oven and placed a scrawny roasted chicken on a platter. It was difficult to determine if the poor chicken had been killed more to

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put it out of its misery than to grace a holiday meal. The children's eyes lit up with the anticipation of this delicacy. The aroma of all that home cooking permeated the air. The fare was simple but hearty. The woman asked her oldest to go to the barn to tell them dinner was ready. Just then the door opened and John and the farmer came in. They had succeeded in getting the car started. They were letting it run for a few minutes to make sure the wires would dry.

We were invited to stay and share their Christmas meal. We declined saying we were anxious to get to our destination and we still had a long way to go. The man would not accept any money for his work and all the trouble he had gone through to help us. We thanked them and John discreetly left money on the counter on our way out.

Once on the road we saw that there was approximately a foot of powdery snow on the road. John noticed that if he put the heater fan on high or if he put the high beams on, the lights would dim. When we reached Armstrong, a small sawmill town, we saw a service garage open for business. He checked out the car and said our car battery was low. He sold us a new one for double the going rate. At this point we had no choice but to pay so we could be on our way. John made the comment that if he had charge the regular price he would have gladly given him a bonus for helping on a holiday, but this man was out to gouge people in distress. Ironical that he should profit by cheating people on the one feast day that is celebrated in memory of Christ's coming to teach the world to be loving and charitable.

Finally we were on our way once more. When we crossed the Jackman woods in Maine near the Canadian/USA border the storm was less severe and by the time we reached Skowhegan, we were out of the storm completely.

It took another four hours to reach Lewiston because the lights kept taking too much power despite the new battery. We had to drive very slowly, with our lights on low beams. Finally we reached Lewiston. It was a good thing that they didn't know that we were coming, as they would have worried themselves to death.

As the children grew up they often spoke about our adventure on that Christmas day. The memories of that Christmas adventure were some of the best we ever had. One person we will never forget is our human Angel in the Mackinaw Jacket!

The Runaway

I found two versions of this story in Mother's computer files. It appears that each was written at different times but using the same basic story. I printed both. There are some slight differences between the two stories.

The Runaway (Version one)

When we were living in Canada, I became very friendly with Lise Griffin, our next-door neighbor. Lise and I had hit it off from day one. She had four young boys and we had Mark, Pauline, Joline and Anne. Lise loved children especially little girls. My girls loved her in return.

One day, I had scolded Joline for some small infraction. To this day I cannot recall what it was. She was about four or five years old. She got angry with me and said that I was mean. She told me that she was going to run away. I said, "Where are you planning to go?"

I am going to Mrs. Griffin. She says she likes little girls and she is nice," Joline replied.

"Oh well, in that case don't forget to pack your suitcase. How long do you think you will be gone?" I asked.

"Forever!" she snapped back, her little golden curls bouncing, as she stomped to her room.

While she was in her room packing, I called Lise and told her to expect a visitor. She laughed and agreed to be on the lookout Joline.

After about fifteen minutes Lise called to ask when Joline was leaving. "She's not there yet? Oh my gosh," I said in a panic, "Don't tell me she has decided to really run away? I have to go look for her."

I opened the front door and there was Joline sitting on the stairs, holding on to her suitcase, her face streaked with tears. "What are you doing here? I thought you were going to run away?" I said.

"Well, when I came out, there was a big dog so I have decided to wait until tomorrow." She replied in a small sobbing voice. Just about then Lise came running up the walk to help me look for Joline. When I explained to Lise what had happened she said. "Joline, I'm afraid of dogs too. Why don't you come with me and we can talk about it."

The Runaway (Version two)

Eva Labonte

Joline was the middle child, a fact she deplored. She would moan that she did not have a distinction to her "center place" among her siblings; like being the oldest child or youngest. She would say, "I'm even

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in the middle of the sisters." She did not realize that being the middle child, in a family of five, was a place of distinction in itself. Joline was thin, and had her mother's blue eyes and blond hair. That is where the resemblance stopped. Her mother was calm, but Joline was a little spitfire.

One day, Eva, Joline's mother, told her to pick up her toys. She said, "Why? I'm going to play with them again tomorrow or maybe the day after? Besides, why can't the others pick them up?"

To which Eva said, "You know the rules. You took them out; you put them away."

"Right now you're not playing with them, so put them away."

Joline stomped her foot, making her little golden curls bounce up and down. "You are mean. I'm going to run away from home," she said.

"Where are you going to go?" Eva asked.

"I'm going to Mrs. Griffen. She likes girls, and she is nice." Joline said.

"How long will you be gone?" asked Eva.

"Forever," Joline cried back. She glared at her mother with both hands on her hips as though daring her mother to stop her.

"In that case you might as well pack a bag," said Eva.

While Joline was in her room packing, Eva called Lise Griffin, her next-door neighbor, and told her the situation and to expect a visitor. Lise laughed and agreed to be on the lookout for Joline.

When Joline came out carrying her Barbie suitcase, Eva asked if she could see what she had packed. Joline open the suitcase. Inside she had her new pair of shoes, her doll, her favorite t-shirt, her toothbrush and clothes for her doll. "I think you're all set, have a nice trip." Eva said. She watched Joline go out the front door.

After about fifteen minutes, Lise called Eva to ask when Joline was going to leave home. "Oh, my gosh! Isn't she there yet?" she shrieked. "Where could she have gone? I hope she didn't decide to really run away. I have to go look for her." The phone clattered on the floor as Eva made a mad dash for the front door.

Eva opened the front door to go search for Joline. There she was, sitting on the top step of their small bungalow, holding her suitcase, her face streaked with tears. "What are you doing here? I thought you were going to run away," Eva said.

"Well, when I came out there was a big dog on the sidewalk, so I decided to wait until tomorrow," Joline replied between sobs.

Just then, Lise came running around the corner to help in the search, panic written all over her face. Eva explained to her what had happened. Lise took Joline by the hand and said, "You know, I'm afraid

of dogs too. Why don't you come home with me and we can talk about it over cookies and a glass of chocolate milk."

Memories: A New Beginning

When we moved back to Lewiston from Canada the children had the hardest adjustments to make than any other move. The cousins they had been friends with before they left were now almost twelve years older. Most were teenagers and had settled-in with their own group of friends. Their lifestyles were literally worlds apart. When we moved to Canada, Mark was in first grade and the others were preschoolers. Andre was not yet born. When we returned, Mark was a senior in high school. The only constant was their Grandmother Labonte. We moved a few blocks from where John had grown up and now the children were able to visit their Grandmother and Aunt Stella who doted on them.

That first fall, Mark, Pauline and Joline started school at St. Dorn's High School. I got busy setting-up housekeeping and planting gardens. Then I started teaching needlework. The word got around that I was from Montreal and all of a sudden my classes were the new fad in town. I had between forty and fifty students a week and a waiting list. Every year we had a showing of the student's work at a local hospital. The proceeds went to the hospital. When people registered they would often ask to be in the same class as so and so. It didn't take long for me to realize that some were taking the class not to learn needlework but because a certain person with an elite social status was taking it. The shows became popular and people from as far as Massachusetts came for the show I met some unique and interesting people while I was teaching.

I was named director of linens at the Androscoggin Historical Museum. I restored many of their linens. I got a call from a museum to see if I could restore a wedding veil. I found out later that this was an heirloom from the Walker-Dupont family, distant relatives of President Bush. It was insured for over thirty thousand dollars. I restored the veil for a good fee. I never thought to take a picture of it.

I sat on a commission from the University of Maine studying the impact of cottage industries surrounding needlework. That was interesting and an eye opener about federal grants and how they are used. It also paid well. I was asked by the University to teach courses in needlework. It would have necessitated traveling and I was not ready to leave my family to do that.

However all of this came to an end when Pauline came home and gave birth to Gregory. She stayed with us for a while and even after she moved to her own place we kept Greg.

I had to give up needlework.

When Gregory, our oldest grandson started high school, John started saying he wanted to move out into the country. John had said this many times before but we always had too many commitments to be able to act on it.

We had shared raising Gregory, our oldest grandson, with his mother Pauline our oldest daughter. Pauline had left her husband before Greg was born. John fell in love with Greg from the moment he was born. Pauline and Greg lived with us for a year before moving out on her own. But we still kept Greg while she worked. Pauline suffered from mood swings and had difficulty dealing with people.

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She left her teaching position to work at Pioneer Plastic where she moved from one department to another. Though she wanted peace and quiet she was often the center of controversy. She knew that there was something wrong but doctors could never figure out what it was. Pauline kept a journal of her ups and downs and showed this to her doctor. She thought she had PMS.

However, though many tests, it was ascertained that she was bipolar. She had a chemical disorder that sent her into mood swings over which she had no control. Finding the right combination of medicines to keep her well balanced was not an easy task. It was sheer determination and her love for Greg that kept her from giving up. It was a very difficult time for her. I cannot count how many times she hit bottom and had to start all over again. I admire her courage and strength.

The year 1999 was a horrendous year for our youngest son, Andre. Andre and his wife, Janice, moved out to Lafayette Indiana right after he graduated from University of Maine. He was accepted by Purdue University to study for a doctorate in physics, all expenses paid. A year later, Jan got pregnant and they had a beautiful daughter, Chandra. Two years later, in May of 1999, Benjamin was born. Money was tight but they were happy. In August, Andre came down with meningitis. He lost the hearing in one ear and left him with position vertigo in the other ear. He was very ill and Jan had to care for him and the two young babies. In September she returned to her job as a teacher in Crawfordsville Indiana, an hour away from their home. Andre would go into work for a couple of hours a day but the convalescent was slow.

On November first, Andre went in for a full day, but in the morning the police came to tell him that Janice had been killed in a car accident. We rushed out there to be with him. Andre and Jan's parents agreed that Jan should be buried in Maine. Andre could not fly because of his condition. John drove him home while I flew back with five month old Benjamin. Jan's parents flew to their home in New York and then drove up to Maine with Chandra for the funeral. Andre was way too ill to care for the two babies. It was decided that our youngest daughter, Anne and her husband Joseph, would care for the children while Andre would finish his doctorate. It was difficult for all concerned.

In January, Andre decided to go to the gym to exercise to build up his strength. He was running in a lane when someone momentarily stepped into his lane. Andre sidestepped to avoid him. Having position vertigo he was unable to regain his balance and he ran into the cement wall breaking both his arms. John and I took turn staying with him to drive him to and from the campus where he tried to get what little work he could do. To make matters worse, his funding ran out and he had to teach to pay for the remaining year. Finally he graduated and got his Ph.D. and was coming home.

By this time Greg was going to start High School and did not need us as much anymore. We felt comfortable looking for a place in the country. We took weekend trips to look at real estate. We had agents looking for us as far as Vermont. John wanted to go to the mountains and away from the city. I, on the other hand, did not want to go too far from the children and from our parish church. For three years we would ride through the countryside looking for our dream home. If the view was nice the house was old and ready to fall apart. If the house was passable the location was horrible, or at least not what we were looking for. If the house and location met our needs the price was out of our category. Finally I told John let's look for land and build. He was not convinced but we started looking at land. John did not want to go south and I did not want to go too far north. John hates summers, I feel the same way about winters. John wanted to go to the mountains and I tended to be near water. I wanted people close enough to be able to call them neighbors. John wanted to be completely by

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himself and wanted no part of projects even on five-acre lots. It seemed that for a couple that got along very well for over forty years, we were miles apart on what we wanted for a retirement home. I was happy on Germaine Street and had no real desire to leave, and at one point we decided to stay put and refurbish our home.

Then something happened. Lewiston gave the owners of the Arena that was situated about two blocks away from our home, a permit to have all night "rave" concerts. That sent John right back into the "lets move away mode". We started looking at land in a hundred mile radius from Lewiston. We would take a pile of property for sale slips and do drive bys. In September of 2000 we went looking at lots in Greene, about 15 miles from where we lived. A farmer by the name of Errol (Abe) Additon had put some of his hay fields up for sale. The view was beautiful. But it was in plain view of the road.

Being a hay field, there were no trees. It was also on the down side of the lay of the land, which is another of my crazy phobias. I suffer from acrophobia and one of my idiosyncrasies is being able to be "see" all around me. I could tell John really like the area. I said to him "why don't we go see the lots on the other side of the road? It is high and we would have trees to hide us from the road." John said "but that is not for sale. If it were for sale our realtor who was from Greene would surely have given us the listing along with those we were looking at." I replied that I had seen a sign at the gate entrance. So off we went and sure enough there was a "For Sale" sign there. We could see someone had driven up the hill through the tall grass and weeds so we followed the trail up the hill. When we got to the crest of the hill we turned around to a most amazing view. Off to the west we could see the tips of the White Mountains in New Hampshire, ninety miles away. We were facing three ranges of mountains, some higher than others but all together it made for a spectacular scene. Off to the north we could see the Androscoggin River through the trees. Wow! We stayed there for some time just drinking in its beauty. When we got to town we called our realtor, Monita, who happens to be my sister's cousin by marriage, to see what the scoop was on that lot. She was unaware of there being land there for sale but would check it out and get back to us. It was a very long, long half hour waiting for her call.

"It is for sale," she said, it can be bought as a whole parcel of sixteen acres or in one of four lots. It had gone on sale Monday of that week and this was Wednesday. There was a bid on the top lot where we had been standing, but the owners had not accepted yet.

We asked if we could put a bid on the entire parcel and she replied that she would try.

It took a week for us to learn that four other prospective buyers had put in bids and strangely enough they were all for the same amount. But that was not the extent of it; the owner said that he would not take a cent less than the asking price. That was more than John and I had agreed to pay, so we told Monita to forget it. Two weeks later we called to see if anything else had come on the market and Monita told John no one had put in a higher bid on the property. After talking it over for a couple of days we placed another bid. At first, the owners declined the offer but the realtor told them that since none of the others had even asked about placing another bid they might do well to reconsider. After another very long week we got the news that they had accepted our bid, but there was a question about boundaries and so John requested a survey, more waiting and nail biting. Finally everything was cleared and we signed the papers in September of 2000.

Now came the meeting with the architect and our contractor. We put in all the things we ever dreamed of having in the previous homes that we had. Oh what fun we had doing this. Then we trimmed off

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things that we didn't need and that brought the price of building up. Finally we were all set to go to break ground in early March. All the plans were in motions. Then the stock market dropped twenty five percent. We got a bit jittery about spending that kind of money on a house. This was our retirement fund we were dealing with and prudence was called for. We delayed the ground breaking by six months.

In the meantime John and I would go up on the lot and try to figure where we would place the buildings. To our dismay the whole crest of the hill was nothing but ledge.

One option was to build on a slab. I was not in favor of that. Another was to have just a crawl space, for pipes only etc. Or we could move the house a hundred feet down the slope. Yet another option was to blast into the ledge. Finally, we asked the contractor and the excavator to tell us how much it would cost to put the house where we really wanted it. When all the figures were in we decided to go with blasting into the ledge. They took out over five hundred cubic yards of granite to make the foundation. Some of the pieces of granite were huge and just full of white veins. I had the men place these a little ways from the foundation for rock gardens. Mark, our oldest son, is a landscaper by profession and he helped prepare the ground for a holding garden. That Fall I brought up over four hundred plants and over a thousand bulbs from our gardens in Lewiston. Perennials need to be thinned out every so often. Knowing that we were to move, I had refrained from doing it for some time and now I was reaping from years of gardens. To this day going to the holding garden is like going to a store where all my favorite plants are growing in profusion and I can take anything I want, free! It is so much fun.

We broke ground in August of 2001. The foundation was poured, but our contractor, Maurice (Moe) Laplante, could not start on the actual building until late fall. It took almost eight months to build our new home. John and I would go up towards the end of the day to view the progress. I don't know who had more fun, John and I watching the house go up, or Moe building it. Moe is the son of friends we had when we were first married over forty-five years ago. He is a wonderful carpenter and cabinetmaker. He loves his profession and it shows in his work. I cannot count the times we would arrive to see a big grin on his face eager to show us what he had done, or some changes he thought we might like. He was always willing to listen to our ideas. Most people say building a new home is a nightmare. Ours was a wonderful experience.

We had planned a screened-in porch, pretty much like the one we had in Lewiston. One rainy day John went up to see the house and Moe told him to go stand in the doorway that would lead to the porch and to tell him what he observed. John said, "But there is no porch yet." Moe replied, "I know, I want you to see this before the porch goes up." John opened the canvas door and standing there he could see the wind driving the rain to a horizontal slant. Turning to Moe John said, "We wouldn't get much use out of an open porch up here would we?" From months of being up there and from what the neighbors told us, we came to the conclusion that it is always windy on top of the hill.

John and I went to see all kinds of glassed in porches and Florida rooms. The better ones were too expensive and the less expensive ones did not meet our needs. Moe sent us to see an all weather sun porch he had made for himself. It was beautiful. To our delight he made one for us. In the summer, it always has a cool breeze flowing through and in the winter the sun warms it up to the point that we only have to use the propane stove in the late evening. We practically live in that room year round. The best part was that the cost was well within our budget.

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While the house was being built, John and Mark were building a bam. Being out in the country, we now needed a tractor, a mowing deck, plows, snow blower, and the list goes on. Naturally, we needed a place to store all this equipment. No sooner was the bam built that more space was needed for a wagon, a bush hog to mow the field, and a riding mower for the four acres of lawn. So now they put up a pole bam.

We had held off from placing our house in Lewiston on the market for fear that it would sell and then we would have to move twice. Since this was our tenth home, we knew the work involved in moving a household. We wanted to time it so we could sell and move just one time. Just before the holidays we called Monita and asked if we could place it on the market with an available date for late May.

In January, Andre finished his graduate work and moved back to Lewiston. I helped him find an apartment. It was small, filthy, cheaply made, but expensive apartment. Andre found a job with National Semiconductor in Portland. Every morning at seven a.m., Andre took the children to Anne and I would pick them up before supper and take them to their home. I would see to their homework and finish preparing their supper. Andre would come home anywhere from six thirty to seven o'clock, eat supper with the kids. Andre had a little time with Ben and Chandra before it was time to check their homework, their baths and tuck them to bed. I loved the children but I found the traveling difficult in the winter. While I waited for Andre, I would fold the laundry and pick up the house to help him out and keeping busy made the time pass faster. I would drive home and get supper ready for John and me. I would often finish dishes at eight or nine o'clock at night.

Houses in Portland were two and three times the price of comparable ones in Lewiston. The travel time was almost as long to go through the city at peak traveling hours, as it was to take the turnpike from Lewiston. Then there was the factor that he would not have the family support in Portland that he had in Lewiston. One day Andre came over and said, "I want to buy your house."

We were stunned. He said that he had looked at his finances and could afford to buy it. Monita's company was very nice about letting us take it off the market and not charging us commission because we were selling to our son. We hired them however to do the legal paper work for the transfer of the property. We move into our new home May 23rd 2002. Andre moved into our old house the following day. We spent the summer unpacking and trying to settle-in.

Come fall, Chandra started kindergarten at Saint Joseph School. Joe wanted to be alone with his family on his days off. On these days, I would keep Ben and Chandra would have to take the bus to her Aunt Lisa's house. Since Joe's days off from work varied from one week to another, this meant that Chandra would not have a constant schedule. Andre thought it best to have Chandra take the bus from Lisa everyday. I was thrown into a more active role with the children. Joe and Anne had done a good job in bringing them up polite and with good manners. It changed my life style but they were a joy to have around.

One day John and I picked up Chandra and Ben. On the way home, Chandra looked a little down. When I asked her what was wrong she said, "I need a picture of Daddy for Show and Tell and I don't have one. All I have is a Jesus book." To tease her, John said, "It's ok Chandra, I will give you one of my pictures." She said, "No Pepere, it has to be one of my family, besides you have veils in your eyes." "What do you mean I have veils in my eyes?" asked John. "You know Pepere, those red lines you have in your eyes." "Oh! You mean veins." John laughed. "Oh those won't show up on the picture, or I can

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keep my eyes closed, and I am part of your family, I will get you a nice big picture of your Pepere." "Pepere" Chandra said, a bit irritated, "You don't understand you do not live in my house. It is that kind of family. And you have lines in your face. It can't be anyone with lines in their faces" John then said, "All peperes have wrinkles. Don't you like my wrinkles? Chandra you sleep in my house and you live with us a lot. I am your Daddy's Daddy. Doesn't that make us family? We can have a picture of you, Ben,

Daddy and me" With a big sigh she said, "Pepere, you just don't understand! It cannot be an aunt, uncle, cousin or anybody like that, besides you have only a few hairs on your head." I Said to her. "Chandra, Are you trying to say your grandfather is old?" I was laughing. "Memere! It is not funny, all that stuff wouldn't look good on a picture." "Chandra," I said, "I think that is very funny." By this time John and I are laughing so hard, John was wiping the tears from his eyes to see where he was going. "Memere, You are annoying me. It is obvious you two do not understand; let's change the subject. I'll take care of it myself"

Ben had a difficult time with his diction. I started to correct him by having him say each word he had mispronounced slowly and correctly. At first he really thought I was punishing him for not pronouncing his words correctly. But it soon became a game and he learned by leaps and bounds. Andre had sent over some reading books for me to read to Ben. Before long he was reading whole sentences by memory. I called a neighbor who has a little boy Bens age and I am doing pre-school twice a week.

That reminds me of another such conversation John and Gregory had with Chandra. They had just picked her up from her Aunt Anne's house on Pond Ridge Road, just off, No Name Pond Rd. John asked her if she knew when they were going to give that road a name. She came back with, "Pepere, that is the name of the road." Pretending not to understand he said, "It says No Name Pond Rd., that means they have not given it a name yet." She Replied, "Look at the sign. It says No Name Pond Road. That is the name of the road." Pepere said. "I know it says No Name Pond Road, that is because they haven't found a name for it, maybe you can write to them and give it a name." The conversation went on for some time with Chandra trying to convince them that No Name Pond Rd. was the name of the pond and the street. Finally, in frustration, she said "Its obvious that you two just do not understand, you just don't get it. I do not wish to discuss this any further." For girl five years old that is pretty dam good.

Adventure on the Kennebec

Notes on "Adventure on the Kennebec"

In the years following our return to the U.S. from Canada, Mark, Andre and I took a number of fishing/camping trips on the Kennebec as well as other wilderness places.

In this story, Mother integrates events that occurred in our numerous excursions over these years and blends it into this one story.

At the beginning of the story she uses the name of "Bob Vancasta" who really was Bob Casavant, a neighbor and friend to Mark.

Adventure on the Kennebec

In the mid 1970's up in northern Maine, the forest was pretty much the same as it had been centuries ago. But for a few small dams and controlled logging operations, a good part of the state can still boast of virgin forest. There are not many places left in this country that are still unspoiled by man. Maine, whose motto is, Vacation Land, is a wonderful place for a teenager, or for that matter, anyone who loves nature. In today's world where almost everything has been exploited for profit, it is indeed a privilege to be able to explore nature in its unadulterated state. Even the names of the rivers and lakes sound intriguing: The Androscoggin, the Allagash, and the Penobscot rivers, all started from lakes with names like the Mooselookmeguntic and the Chiputneticook. The Indian names gives one the sense of being in the old frontier days when Indian tribes were in the majority and they reigned over the land. The State of Maine is fortunate to have such a rich Indian heritage.

The Kennebec, normally a shallow lazy river was swollen by the spring thaw. The current was propelling our canoe at a quick but manageable pace. The rolling landscape was gradually changing to high embankments. The river narrowed as we entered a ravine whose walls were mostly granite cliffs rising straight up from the river's edge two and three hundred feet. Farther down the river the current got stronger but we could still control the canoe easily.

My friend, Bob Vancasta, a perpetual chatterbox, was suddenly quiet. I turned to him and asked, "Are you ok? You look kind of funny?"

"I am fine," he replied. "Those cliffs sure are high, huh? Don't you think the current is getting awfully swift all of a sudden?"

I didn't think too much of Bob's comment. He had told my Dad and me, that he and his father had done a lot of camping and canoeing. As a matter of fact, that is one of the reasons Dad had consented to letting the three of us, my little brother, Andre, Bob, and me, to go on this trip without him.

I love the outdoor life, and today was perfect. The weather forecast for the weekend predicted warm days and cool nights, and for once they were right. Melting ice on the bluffs above the cliffs, sent

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hundreds of waterfalls cascading down the facade. Some were mere trickles in the crevices, while others, in gullies and flumes, were major waterfalls. The deeper we traveled into the gorge the more amazing it got. You had to be there at the right time to catch this unabashed beauty. To think that just a few weeks ago the entire terrain would have been still covered with snow and ice, and in just a week or so, it would be all gone. A soft breeze brought a variety of scents from the shore. Whiffs of pungent odors emitting from the wet spring earth, the delicate scents of pine, spruce and wild flowers were drifting over to us, like a fairy waving a perfumed wand over the river. "I could live like this forever," I said out loud, as much to myself as to the others.

I wished that Dad could see this. I knew he would have appreciated the natural beauty of the raw nature before us, but Dad was not a rugged, outdoors person. Although he liked to canoe, and enjoyed the views, he did not appreciate the "pleasures" of camping. It would seem that every bug for miles around would zone in on him and attack with relentless ferocity, while the person next to him might swat the occasional fly and then there were people like my Mom who were not bothered at all. He did not appreciate sleeping on the hard ground either. Mom called him "a screen porch nature boy."

Here I was at last, on the trip of my dreams, in charge, without adult supervision, but my mind kept darting back to Dad and the fun we had on earlier camping trips. Then remembering his grumbling, I chuckled and thought to myself, I better think twice before telling him how I missed having him with us.

My kid brother, Andre, was sitting in the middle of the canoe. He was wearing a smile that threatened to split his face in two. His head turned from side to side like a mechanical toy. I do believe they used him as a model for the Energizer Bunny, whose perpetual motions never stop, because its' batteries never run out. He chattered incessantly. "Hey guys! Look at that crazy rock. It looks like an old man sitting down. Hey Mark! Look! Look! There is a groundhog sitting on his haunches watching us."

He giggled, "let's give him a ride." Andre wanted to see everything and didn't want us to miss anything that he saw.

"Are you having fun, Buddy?" I asked. "Oh Mark, this is great! Hey, how long before we get to the rapids?" "Not too long now, Buddy. Be sure that lifejacket belt is on tight and remember, do not stand up. You stay sitting down, ok? I don't mind losing you in the river but I don't want to poison the fish. Hey cut it out," I yelled as I tried to duck. Swinging his oar to skim the water, he sent an icy spray my way. "If you don't watch it I'm going to throw you in and you can swim the rapids." If Dad had heard me say that, I'm the one who would have been navigating the river without the benefit of a canoe.

Dad had made me promise that I would take good care of Andre and see to it that he had fun. I loved the little guy but at times he could be an impossible brat.

Suddenly, the sound of the river changed and the current picked up speed. "Get ready guys, here we go! Whitewaters coming up!" This was it as last!

Our Indian canoe was sitting low in the water. We had a bit too much equipment, but we were going in style. My Dad had bought the canoe when we were living in Quebec City, Canada. It was well balanced, and wide in the center, making it less apt to tip. The skin of the canoe was a thick canvas pulled tight over wooden ribs and treated with different lacquers and paint until it was strong and

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watertight. Dad was a stickler for quality and it usually paid off.

The canoe responded to the slightest touch of our oars. The first part of the rapids was like a long water slide. We were all shouting in sheer joy. As we reached the bottom I thought to myself, "It will be difficult to beat the feeling of sheer ecstasy I am experiencing at this moment." I realized later that Bob's yells were more of panic than enjoyment.

Andre said, "Wow! That was fun. I can't wait for the next rapids. Look Mark there they are."

Bob was not saying much of anything but I knew he was paddling because the canoe was staying on course. We had planned the rhythm of five strokes of the oar on one side of the canoe, switch, and five strokes on the other side. This way our muscles did not cramp up. Sure enough we were at the head of a channel of whitewater. There were giant rocks all over the place but we would push against them with our oars and slide right by. Suddenly there was a huge boulders right in front of us. We were heading straight for it.

I yelled to Bob to steer to the left. "Left, Bob! Left! Bob, steer to the left! Damn it,

Bob, steer!" The rapids were not so swift at this point that with proper paddling we should have been able to maneuver around the boulders easily. We missed the rock by a fraction of an eyelash only to be headed for another one. I yelled to Bob to steer right. I screamed as loud as I could, but I knew I was steering alone. I thrust my oar against the boulder with all my strength, but the rush of the water was too strong. Without help I knew it was impossible to steer the canoe away from the rocks. I heard and felt the impact at the same time. I winced as the canoe grazed the edge of the rock. Finally we were in calm waters again. I turned to look at Bob and his face was ashen.

"Bob! What is the matter? What's wrong?"

He was holding on to the sides of the canoe so hard that his knuckles were white. His oar lay idle in front of him. He was frozen with fear. I knew we were not too far from more rapids. If the map was accurate, they were even stronger and swifter than the ones we had just passed. I could not do it alone. There was no place for us to land the boat as the cliffs came right to the waters edge. I could hear the roar of the rapids up ahead. I didn't know what was wrong with Bob, and there was no time for me to try to find out what it could be. "Oh God, help me," I prayed.

Andre had sized-up the situation as quickly as I had. "Hey Mark, I can do it," he said, as he laid his small oar under the seat, and grabbed Bob's full size oar. Out of habit, I was about to tell him that he was too little but before I had time to think we were at the head of the next stretch of whitewater. For a few minutes, that seemed more like hours, we were at the mercy of the river. We were coming close to rocks. I yelled to Andre, "To the right, Buddy." He reacted like a pro and we swooshed by safely but not without taking in some water.

These rapids were longer and the drops steeper than the other two. I thought we were going to be torn to shreds. At times we were tilted almost sideways. Sometimes it felt like the canoe was going to stand on its end. We sloshed down a channel between humongous rocks. We would push away from one boulder only to head for another.

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The icy spray drenched and numbed all feeling from my hands. The shock of the constant pounding of my oars against the rocks caused my arms to feel leaden. Every muscle in my back ached. At times the water churned so high around our canoe that I thought we were going to be swamped.

Just ahead I could see a long smooth, natural flume. It was like sliding down the water slide at Fun City. I could hear Andre's shouts of glee, as we swished down at an incredible speed. I thought, "Now this is more like it." Just then we hit a large eddy that spun us around like a top. Oh no! I had heard horror stories of people being caught in them for hours. Fortunately, the canoe caught the current, and we were swept down another long water slide, and were deposited, with a bang, at the bottom, facing upstream. I breathed a sigh of relief that we had made it down safely. I turned around to check on the other two. Andre's grin was bigger than ever.

"Mark, that was fun! Can we do it again?" I knew it was because of his help that we managed to get through this with only minor scrapes and bruises to the canoe. I grinned back at him.

Bob on the other hand, was green! Suddenly he was leaning over the side of the canoe, heaving. "Oh boy, I've got a sick puppy on my hands." I thought, "Where is Mom, now that I need her? We always run to Mom whenever anyone is sick. Boy oh boy. What am I going to do?" I've got to find a place to dock."

The cliffs still started at the water's edge, and were very high, but the river was much wider and the currents closer to the edge were not as swift as they were in the center of the river. I was getting desperate to find a spot to land to see what was wrong with Bob, and also to assess the damage to the canoe. We turned a bend to see a long wooden log chute protruding over the water, a leftover from the river log runs. The practice of floating logs down the river, had been banned years ago, but the rivers were still suffering from the impact of the excessive amount of wood bark and debris on its riverbeds from the years of abuse.

We paddled to the chute and found that there were crude steps along the chute upon which a few small platforms had been built at intervals. I imagined that this was where the men would stand to push any logs or debris that might get caught in the chute and cause a backup. There was a small landing to one side of the chute. It was rocky but at least it was a place to pull in and take stock of the situation.

By this time, we were shivering, and wanted to get into dry clothes. I was really worried about Bob. He had hardly said a word since we entered the first set of whitewater. I was concerned about being able to repair the damage to the canoe. As we unloaded our equipment, I told Andre to bring the bedrolls up on the platforms and open them up to dry. We put our food and life jackets on the rocks. Then we pulled the canoe onto the chute and flipped it upside down. Taking out my repair kit I wiped the scraped spots on the hull of the canoe and applied quick drying lacquer. The canoe had fared much better than I had hoped. I was feeling pretty important being able to repair our equipment in the wild. Bob seemed to return to his normal self and was looking at Andre's new gadgets he had gotten for the trip.

Andre was having a grand time rummaging through the food hamper. He knew that Mom always hid treats as little surprises throughout our equipment, for us. He let out a whoop every time he found one. I said to him, "Don't unpack too much. We're going to be on our way as soon as the paint dries."

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Feeling very much like a frontier man in charge of the situation, I said, "We had better change into dry clothes before we get a chill, and then we can enjoy our lunch."

Suddenly, Andre stopped what he was doing, stood up, and yelled, "Hey Mark, do you hear that noise? It sounds like a freight train."

I heard it. We all stood there wondering what it could be. It was then that we saw, in complete shock, a ten-foot wall of rolling, frothy water roaring down the ravine. I grabbed Andre and put him in the chute and yelled, "Climb!" He started to go back for his new canteen and compass. I screamed, "Climb!"

Bob and I grabbed what little we could and threw it on the platform. He climbed up and I went back to get the oars. I reached the chute just ahead of the water. Bob came down the chute to help me flip the canoe over so we could pull it up to safety. I threw one oar into the canoe but before I could grab the other one, the current got hold of the oar, jabbed me in the side and spun out of reach. Ice floes hit the pilings and shattered, spewing tiny, sharp, ice particles that felt like hundreds of pinpricks. Debris bobbed in the raging torrent. At that speed a small log could cripple or even kill a person. Thank God, the piling on the side of the chute either deflected or smashed the ice and driftwood before it could reach me. Bob was completely out of the water, but I was on the low end of our 14-foot canoe, and had water up to my waist. My legs were growing numb from the icy water. The current was pushing me against the side of the chute, which was tearing at my shirt. I saw blood on my arms but felt nothing. I kept climbing up the chute, pushing my end of the canoe, but the water was rising faster than I could go. The water was now up to my shoulders. As it hit the piling it would spray up in the air showering me with everything it had picked up on its way down the river. I lost my footing and was hanging on for dear life. It felt like I would either freeze to death or be killed by all the junk flying at me. I yelled at Bob to hurry but the roar of the rushing waters drowned out my voice. The next wave engulfed me completely. I could not breathe. I tried to get a footing, but the rush of the water was too strong. For the life of me I don't know how I managed to keep my grip on the canoe.

My arms, already fatigued from the pounding from the whitewater, were growing numb from the icy water. I hung on for what seemed like hours. I could feel my strength ebbing. I thought I was a goner, then, I felt a hand on the back of my shirt pulling me to safety. While Bob was pulling the canoe and me up the chute, Andre had come down the stairs alongside the canoe. With one hand holding on to the railing, he used his other hand to grab the back of my shirt and pulled my head out of the water. I vaguely heard him screaming, "Come on Mark! Come on!" I opened my eyes to look into the face of a frightened little boy. He was looking in the face of a scared big boy, who felt very small. By this time, Bob had pulled the canoe almost completely out of the water. He came down and helped Andre bring me to safety. I sat in the chute and looked up just in time to see the bright orange of our life jackets float out of sight.

Still shaken I sat down to catch my breath. I felt pain where the blood was oozing from a gash in my arm. It was not deep and fortunately the first aid kit was tucked in the sleeping bags. Bob cleaned the cut and bandaged it up for me.

He kept saying, "I'm so sorry Mark." Finally, he broke down and said, "I never canoed rapids before. We always were on lakes. I never thought it would be this different. I really screwed things up. I'll pay for your lost equipment." Bob was crying, but at this point I was so exhausted and bummed out, I

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couldn't think. What's more, I was too upset to care about Bob and I was in no mood to try to sooth his feeling. Without saying a word to him, I walked down the steps towards the landing to see if anything was left.

We started checking out to see if we had enough equipment to continue. We had only one oar, no lifejackets, and the food hamper was gone. Our fishing rods were still tied to the underside of the seats but the tackle box was gone. Our tent, sleeping bags and clothes were damp but ok.

We were starved and tired. Everything was a mess. From up the chute, Andre let out one of his famous earsplitting, whoops. I was just about to go up there and wallop him when I saw he had a bunch of treats Mom had hidden in our bedding. Whoever said junk food was not good for you was never as hungry as we were at that moment. There was a bag of trail mix and some chocolate chip granola bars.

I knew we had to abort our trip. Months of planning disintegrate before my very eyes. I was angry with the rangers for not warning us that they were going to release that amount of water. Dad had taught me to always prepare for the unexpected and I had not done that. It never occurred to me that the rangers would open the dam without warning us first. I had too much pride to admit it to the boys, but deep inside I was ashamed of not having thought to ask about the water controls. I had been told over and over by Dad, never assume anything. I was to learn later that, if I had asked, this fiasco would have been avoided. At that moment, it dawned on me, that I had no one to blame but myself.

I said, "Guys, I'm going to walk back to the dam and call Dad to come out and pick us up. When the water comes down again see if you can find any more of the stuff."

It was an unusually warm day for May. I took off my wet jeans and put on a pair of cutoffs. My shoes were soaked so I hung them on a tree to dry. I decided to walk barefoot.

I would have to travel on top of the cliffs as there was not even walking room at the river's edge. I now understand why Yankee woodsmen say, "One mile as the crow flies, but you can't get there from here." Their brand of humor has a lot of truth to it. I had to walk around boulders, backtrack to get pass gullies, gulches, and deep splits in the ledges, too deep and wide for me to cross, all the while fighting my way through the rough underbrush. My legs and arms were covered with little scratches from the bramble. Broken branches shredded first my shirt and then my skin. My feet were bleeding from multiple cuts and bruises. I had never given thought of how treacherous sharp stones and debris on the forest floor could be on bare feet.

Hindsight told me I would have been much better off wearing my wet sneakers. I remembered reading a story where a king had offered half his kingdom for a horse. Right then I would have given half my fishing equipment for a pair of shoes. The black flies, better known as the "state bird," came at me with a vengeance. A dark cloud of them followed me, getting into my eyes, nose, hair, and mostly where my skin was bleeding. Imitating the wild animals when they want to rid themselves of these pests, I ran through low evergreen branches but to no avail, I could not lose them.

I was crying from the pain but more so from the frustration of having failed on my first trip alone. For years, Dad, who hated everything about camping, had planned and taken me on at least one fishing trip every summer. As much as Dad enjoyed the beauty of nature, he did not enjoy being out in the sun, the flies or wild animals; yet, he would plan a yearly fishing trip with me. He took me anywhere I wanted to

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go. There was always a variety of activities available planned for me, and any friend whom I wanted to invite to come with us. He would teach me to always plan for the unexpected. Eager to prove I was capable of being on my own, every year, I would beg him to let me go alone or with my friends. Every time he would say, "I don't think you're ready yet." I was tenacious; each year I gave him my best argument as to why I was responsible and ready. How excited I was when he said yes! How was I going to tell him I failed in the first hour of my trip! The mere thought of what would have happened if we had been in the middle of the white water when the flash flood had come was more than I could stand. I had taken on the responsibility of my little brother, and had failed. Why didn't I learn from watching Dad preparing for our yearly excursions?

When it came time to plan for one of our many trips, Dad would ask people he knew that were expert outdoors men, to help plan every detail of that trip. Sometimes they were friends who came along with their sons, other times he would hire a guide. These men taught us to be cautious, and to never take unnecessary risks. I had been taught from a young age to make noise while walking in the woods, unless of course I was hunting. Surprising wild animals can be very dangerous. Animals will normally shy away from humans but will attack when startled. At this point, wild animals were the furthest things from my mind.

I was walking along thinking about what had just happened. Bad as it was, it could have been even worse, we could have been seriously hurt or even drowned. Just the idea of that made me shiver. I was shaken out of my deep reverie by a snapping branch. I came face to face with a small black bear. He was so cute. He was more frightened than I was and took off, down the slope "Oh phew! It's only a cub." I laughed as I watched him romp away. Then a chilling thought crossed my mind. "Oh no!" I remembered being told by my grandfather, who was an avid woodsman, "Where there is a cub, there is usually a protective mother bear close by. A bear will avoid a human if they have a choice, but will challenge, cripple or even kill a human if they think there is a threat of danger to their young." I had no desire to meet an angry mother bear. Forgetting my poor aching feet, I started to yell while running in the opposite direction that the bear cub had gone. I slipped and fell head over heels into the brambles. I was glad my mother was not around to hear my choice of words as I disentangled myself from the briars. I could just hear her say, "Real men don't have to use foul language to prove they are men. Only those who want to show others how macho they are needed to make up what they don't have." I hated her little moral sayings, even if they were true.

Somehow a few cuss words seemed to help ease the pain. I had been told to sing at the top of my lungs to ward off any surprise confrontations with wild animals when walking in the deep woods. Singing as a form of noise was not really an option I felt like using just then. I picked up a stick and said in a loud, but not too convincing voice, "OK mama bear, I dare you to show your ugly face. I will have me the finest bear rug innn " A branch snapped somewhere behind me! I dropped the stick and ran as though she was right on my heels. I never found out what broke the branch but I was not about to stick around to find out. Worst, I had no idea how far I had gone or how much further I had to walk.

My arms and legs were bleeding all over from scratches, attracting the gnats and black flies even worse than before. They were relentless. I stopped at a puddle, rimmed with ice, and drank. Then, I took mud and plastered my face, neck and any exposed skin to ward off the miniature vampires. It was the longest miles I had ever walked. Finally I could see a clearing up ahead.

In spite of all my mishaps I had arrived at the Rangers station before noon. I knocked at the station

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door. At first there was no answer. I thought, "Oh please God, let there be someone here." I called even louder. This time, out came the young man who was with the ranger when I got my permit to board the river this morning. He started screaming for Gus. We both must have jumped two feet in the air-he, for seeing a mud covered creature, and me, for being startled by his screams. Gus, I remembered, was the ranger I had dealt with that very morning. "What was wrong with this idiot?" I thought. When Gus came in the room he let out a mild oath and said, "What is that?" I guess I must have been quite a sight.

I related to them what had happen. Then to my surprise Gus apologized. He explained that when experienced white water rafters apply for a permit to navigate the river, they often request that the dam be opened to let more water out and hence create a more exciting ride. The kid helping at the station had not been told that the dam is never opened without the request of the people getting rafting permits, and then only after checking first, to see if the people making this request were licensed or experienced rafters. When the river is high it is not opened unless the rafters are licensed professionals. Here we were amateurs in a canoe!

I asked to use the phone, only to be told it was against company policies. Out here in the boonies any call made was a toll call. It meant that the rangers would have to call the operator to find out the cost of the call, charge the tourist that amount and then reimburse the company. It was a lot of bother and red tape, so they made a rule not to permit anyone other than company employees to use the phone. I answered it was against company policies to open the dam too, and that I was stranded because of it. I persuaded them to break company rules and allow me use the phone to call home.

Imagine my mother's surprise to hear from us so soon. She asked what the number was at the station and told me to stay right there. She was going to contact Dad and he would call me right back. Man! Did I dread that phone call.

Sure enough, in a few minutes Dad called and started asking questions like a rapid fire machine gun. He asked, "What happened? Are you all right? Where is Buddy? Is he OK?" He was yelling so loud I think I could have heard him all the way from Lewiston, even without a phone.

"Dad! Dad!" I managed to squeeze in between questions. "We're all ok, but most of our equipment is drenched or lost. Can you come and get us?" He said, "I'm on my way." Then he added, "I'll put more gear together and we will finish that trip." I tried to tell him that I really did not want to finish the trip, but the line was dead. He had already hung up.

I went outside, hungry and exhausted. I saw people having a picnic. I don't believe I actually went up to them and asked them for some food. I knew by the way the ranger reacted that I must have looked a sight, but my hunger overpowered my common sense. They looked at me kind of funny. I gave them a brief account of what had happened.

The father made a few jokes, I guess he was trying to cheer me up, and then gave me the best hotdog I have ever had. After they left, I laid down on the picnic table with my face in my arms, and let the warm spring sun lull me to sleep.

The sound of my parent's car woke me up. Oh man, was I stiff! My whole backside felt like it was on fire. I had slept almost two hours in the warm sun. I wanted to run over to show how happy I was to

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see them. All I could manage was a slow limp and a weak smile.

Dad looked me over and said, "Rough day huh, Sport."

Mom hovered over me, concerned about my scratches, but more about the sunburn I had taken while asleep. I swear Mom carries a magical Mary Poppins bag with her all the time, but that day she outdid herself. She pulled out food and drink, which I promptly wolfed down. She suggested that I go to the river to clean up before putting on clean clothes. Mothers don't understand that men do not wash while on a fishing trip. Dad on the other hand was more interested in getting to his little Buddy.

"Come on, we have to hurry if we're to set up camp before dark." Not a word was said about my bungling the trip. "Dad, we really don't have to continue. I can plan another one for later in the season."

"Mark, you've planned too long and hard for this trip to have it all washed away. Get it? Get it? All washed away?" Dad laughed at his own pun. "Besides, look at the bright side. Your camping trip would not be the same without me bitching about the black flies and the heat. "You want to bet?" I replied, "that is one of the reasons I wanted to go without you, so I wouldn't have to listen to you moan and groan." Unfazed, Dad came back with, "Hey, it could be worse, it is too early in the season for heat, so I'll only have to put up with the black flies."

I could hear him chuckling as he walked towards the station to get directions on how to get to the chute by car. He hoped the logging road would still be in use even though the chute had been abandoned. We could hear him talking with Gus and all of a sudden we heard him giving the young assistant a tongue lashing as only my father could. As he was coming out of the door he turned and said, "Do you realize your irresponsible act could have killed three boys?" I would have hated to be in that kid's shoes just then. Little did he know I was smarting as much from Dad's words as Gus's assistant was squirming under the barrage of reprimands. He still considered me a boy. Man! What would it take to make him understand I wanted to be treated like an adult?

"Come on. Get in the station wagon. We have at least ten miles to go by road to get there. It's already late." Mom, Dad and I clambered into the station wagon. The plan was for Mom to let us off at the chute so we could continue our fishing trip and then she would turn around, and go home.

Bob and Andre had figured that we would be coming by the logging road and were waiting for us at the top of the chute where the trucks unloaded the logs. After I had left and the water had gone down they had retrieved a few more things. Andre was excited because he had found his pocketknife. Bob and Andre were really surprised to see all the new equipment my parents had brought up. When I told Bob that Dad wanted to continue, he said he would rather call it quits. I told him I wanted to call it off too, but I knew my Dad would not let me quit. Andre on the other hand was raring to go!

We could hear him telling Dad, "Are you really coming with us, Dad? Oh boy, that is neat! Hey wait till you see the chute, Dad! I found my pocketknife. It was stuck between a couple of rocks." Taking Dad's hand Andre pulled him towards the chute.

I said, "If I hear that kid say, 'Hey guys,' or, 'Is that neat, one more time I am tying him to the front of the canoe and I'm sending him down the next water fall.'"

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Bob gave a low chuckle, "Come on, Mark, he is a cute kid. You have to admit he is a lot of fun. He sure has guts. He came through on the rapids when I froze up. You don't know how much I envy him. Did you already forget that he helped pull you out of the water? I wouldn't mind having a kid brother like him, and it sure is nice of your father to change his weekend plans so that your trip would not be a loss."

"Yah, it's easy for you to say. You don't have to live with them. You want them? I'll give them both to you. What I would give to shut that kid up. With Dad around to spoil him, he will be impossible. Then with mock horror, added, "Hey, maybe I can make him eat his fish raw, head and all." I said this all jokingly, but down deep inside, I meant some of it.

Bob laughed, "Nothing fazes that kid. He would probably like it. Your father is right. You shouldn't let this ruin your trip. Come on, I will help you get your gear together." "What do you mean my stuff? They brought some for you too." I said.

"Mark, there are more rapids yet to come. I am not up to it. I thought I was going to pass out. There is no way I want to be sick in front of your father. Besides it will be rather crowded with four in the canoe. I've decided to go back with your mother. No hard feelings?"

I told him that I understood but part of me hated to see him go, as we had so much fun planning this trip together. I wish he could have finished it with us.

Mom came towards us, pulled a couple of bottles out of her Mary Poppin bag and said, "Come here so I can put this on your scratches and also put more lotion on your sunburn. Tomorrow, I want you to put this on a couple of times a day and keep your shirt on so your bum doesn't get worse." First she literally poured the antiseptic on my cuts and bruises. "Yipes, that smarts!" I yelled. Without blinking an eye, she took the cap off the tube of ointment for my sunburn and started to rub some on my back. "Augh, man! That stuff reeks. I don't want that stuff on me. Besides I didn't burn that much." Actually I looked like a boiled lobster, but putting on that lotion was "sissy." Not me! I could take it.

Mom raised her eyebrows and said, "It's up to you. I will put it in the kit just in case you change your mind or if Andre needs it."

Dad and Andre came back carrying some soggy equipment. "Gus was right it would be dangerous to try to shoot the rest of the rapids in the gorge at this time of day. He said that there is a more suitable place to launch about fifteen miles further down river past the gorge. We will still have white water but nothing like what is waiting for us in the gorge. Let's get the canoe tied to the car rack. We can leave the tailgate down and tie what equipment that you have left on it. We don't have far to go, and there's no traffic. If we take it slow and easy, we should be o.k." Dad was telling us this while tying the canoe on top of the station wagon.

Mom gathered all our wet stuff, put it in plastic bags, and piled it in the car. She was just as eager to get on the road as Dad was to get on the river. We reached the new launching site and sorted out what we were going to keep for our trip and what was going back home with Mom. She still had a two and a half hour drive ahead of her, ten miles of it being the old, rough logging road. Once home she had to take Bob to his place and unload all his gear. When everything was set and it was time for Mom and Bob to leave, Dad told Mom to be careful and gave her a hug and kiss and all that mushy stuff. As I watched

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the red taillights disappear I got a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I wish I were going too.

It was dark when we finally got every thing in the canoe. The full moon reflecting on the water permitted us to see pretty well. It sure was beautiful. We hit some more white water. Gus had told Dad that from this point on we would be past the toughest part of the river and there should not be any problems getting to a place to land. The river embankments were not nearly as high here, but still not appropriate for camping. The current was very much as it was at the beginning of our trip, swift but manageable. We started to look for a place to set up camp. I spotted a small island and thought it would be a suitable site to set up our tent.

Dad took his maglight, flashed it on the tree trunks, and pointed out, "Look, Mark. See how the trees have watermarks on them? What if they open the dam during the night or in the early morning before we break camp? What do you think would happen? You have to observe the signs around you."

I wish he would just tell me I had goofed and get it over with, but he never said a word about it. We continued until we were finally able to find a spot suitable for a campsite.

Bone weary and at the point of exhaustion, we lugged all the tent, sleeping bags, food, etc. up to high grounds. We were not taking any chances on another washout.

I was still smarting from my sunburn and the humiliation of having Dad come to rescue me. I was tired, and every bone in my body ached, my sunburn made every movement painful. Andre's was at a snail's pace and his dalliance irritated me even more and I started to take my frustration out on him. I grumbled, "Come on, Andre, you re dragging butt. Move it, will ya?" Go get some wood for the fire. Do something!" I lashed out at him. Luckily for me, Dad did not hear me cussing Andre out.

Dad was getting supper ready while I was setting up the tent. Putting in the last comer loop over the anchor peg is always the hardest part of the tent set up. My muscles were so tired I couldn't get it tight. Andre was crouching next to a fallen tree examining some kind of bugs. At any other time I would have joined him as I was always fascinated by nature. Right now however, all I wanted to do was to get the tent up so I could rest. I called to Andre for help. I asked him to pull tight on the guide rope so I could attach the noose to the anchor. Just as I was about to hook the last loop, he let go of the rope! It snapped back and hit the tent. I thought the whole thing was going to collapse.

I growled, "For Pete's sake, can't you do anything right?"

This time Dad heard me, and he snapped back, "Mark, how much did you do at his age? Can't you see he is tuckered out?"

"He's tuckered out! What about me? I'm the one who had to walk five miles back to the station," I wanted to shout back.

I pounded in another peg and threw the hammer on the ground. It took a wrong bounce, hit the camp lantern and knocked it down. The glass globe did not break, but the mesh was ruined.

Dad looked at me under his heavy set eyebrows and said, in not too gentle a voice, "That is enough. Don't take your frustration out on us. Get a new mesh and relight the lantern." I had learned not to

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argue with those eyes and did as I was told. We settled in for the night. I was aching all over, but finally got to sleep.

As the first light of dawn was breaking, I woke up so stiff I could barely move. I heard footsteps outside the tent, and thought, "Dad must be up." Then I heard, Snort! Snort! Sitting up I said, "What's that? Ouch! Ooooooh my back."

A hand clamped over my mouth as I heard, "SSSSSH, Be quiet!"

The footsteps came closer to the tent. We saw the canvas slope inwards as whatever it was brushed alongside of it. Six eyes and three mouths were wide open but not a sound was heard inside the tent. We could hear whatever it was outside sniff around the tent and then slowly, ever so slowly, the footsteps faded towards the river. Dad moved as though in slow motion and unzipped the flap of the tent. A huge bull moose was eating from the bottom of the river. His head disappeared below the water and came back up with a mouthful of green vegetation. We watched as he lowered his head again and again, in and out of the water to grab mouthfuls of the succulent plants found growing on the riverbed.

Andre stuck his head out of the flap and said, "Wow! This is neat. Dad, look at the size of that sucker." We watched for a few minutes when we heard more footsteps. We retracted our heads to the inside of the tent. We must have looked like a three headed turtle retreating into its shell. Sure enough, another moose joined the first one. They were between the canoe and us. We watched for a long time. They are amazing creatures. Andre sneezed. We froze into human statues. They looked towards the tent, saw us, turned slowly, and then meandered down river. Dad went outside the tent, and with a great show of bravado, shook his fist at them, saying, "Get out of here you pests." He was making believe that he was chasing them off. Andre and I were bent in two laughing to see Dad, who is a serious person by nature, acting up.

The pain in my muscles brought me back to the reality of my situation. Where my skin was sunburned, it felt like it had been pulled tight like the skin on a bongo drum. Andre poured aloe lotion on my back. It soothed the pain somewhat, then he helped me with my shirt. I was turning away when I heard his annoying little giggle. His face was all

screwed up as he said. "Yuck, you smell like a " Whup! Spinning around I sent my

knapsack sailing through the air. It stopped him in mid sentence. It hit him harder than I had intended to. I hissed so Dad couldn't hear me, "I don't need any of your crap, Andre." His eyes got as big as boulders and full of tears as he cried, "Gosh I was only kidding. What has gotten into you anyways? You're not fun anymore. It is not my fault that all those things went wrong. I didn't do it. If you hate it so much why did you come? Why don't you walk home? Dad and I don't need you."

He ran out of the tent, and I sat there and cried. After a few minutes I followed him outside and found him hiding behind a big boulder, weeping. "I'm sorry, brat. I really didn't mean to hit you so hard," I apologized. He wiped the tears on his sleeve and said, "And I don't want you to go." We kind of made up and went to look for Dad. He had started a fire for breakfast.

That day we hit a couple more rapids but nothing as exciting as the first ones. As the day wore on we

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got some fishing in but only caught a few yellow perch. It was a peaceful restful day. We found a beautiful spot to camp and decided to stop early and fish from the shore.

Dad was awakened by the sound of splashing in the river. Again, he carefully unzipped the flap to see what was going on. He called to us to come and see. There before our eyes, was one of the most spectacular sights we had ever seen. Salmon were swimming up river to spawn. Their silvery skin was shining in the full moonlight, as they leaped high out of the water, fighting against the river's swift current. Sprays of water flew into the air when their bodies hit the water. All too soon it was over and we went back to sleep.

The next day we got up early all excited, and with high expectations of catching salmon, but alas, all we caught were yellow perch. After awhile we loaded our gear and paddled down river. The further south we got the more the river fanned out. We reached a point where it got very shallow. The canoe was so loaded, that in some places we scraped bottom. We got out and walked alongside of the canoe. The icy water numbed our legs. We had to carry our backpacks to lighten the load. Dad carried mine because of my sunburn. Dad observed that, if we continued, we would risk damaging the canoe. He suggested that we do a portage. That is when you learn the advantages of traveling light. Having all the benefits of home did not seem as important now. About a mile down river we were able to get back in the canoe.

Andre spotted something orange caught in the branches; Sure enough, it was one of our life jackets! To our amazement we found all three of them and then we spotted our red cooler and a canteen.

The sun was really getting hot. Only later, when we got back home, did we find out that a record had been set on that day, for the warmest temperature in May. We went to shore, unloaded some of the gear to give us more room in the canoe. We decided to do some serious fishing, but, again, all we caught were yellow perch. Since they are not good eating that time of year we threw them back in the river. Dad grumbled, "Stop throwing them back in. They're the same ones that we keep catching over and over.

They are looking for a free meal." That got us all laughing. Suddenly, Dad practically shouted, "Hey boys look at my rod! It's bent! I've got a real fish this time." Bet it's a salmon! It sure is a fighter." as he worked his fish, he named it Charley. He worked it for over twenty minutes and was finally able to reel it in. He pulled in the biggest yellow perch we had ever seen. Andre stood up laughing so hard he flipped overboard. Dad threw Charley back in and we pulled Andre, who was still laughing, back into the canoe. We couldn't decide if it was Charley or Andre, who was the biggest fish we caught on the trip.

That evening we reached Wyman Lake and made camp on one of the islands. The lake is so large that the level of the water stays pretty constant. We ate some of Mom's baked beans, as we had not caught any edible fish. We toasted wieners and reminisced about past fishing trips. I told Dad about my bear incident. We laughed at my antics, and then I asked Dad if he remembered the time we had gone to Por-No-Lac, in the Laurentien Mountains, in Canada.

We had to drive up steep dirt roads to get there, at one point we had to go through a notch. Our guide, who was in front of us in his jeep, came to a stop. He got out of his vehicle and came back to tell us that the road had a washout, but if we stayed close to the side of the cliff we would be fine. He sent his partner up ahead to stop any cars from entering the notch. To the right of us, the land dropped

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thousands of feet. To the left the cliffs started from the road, and went up fifty feet or so. The road was wide enough for one vehicle only. As we followed the jeep he came to a place where the tires were on the very edge of the road. When a friend, who was in the car with us, saw this, he asked us to stop and he got out of the car. "I'll see you at the top," he said. We asked him if he wanted us to wait for him to pass the notch, but he was insistent that he would not drive up, because it was too risky.

Our little caravan crept pass the narrow passage. We had not gone more that half a mile when we startled a huge black bear. We decided to wait for our friend, but when he caught with us he said he would rather take his chances with the bear than ride any further on that road. We talked about how we caught our quota of salmon trout every day, and how good they were cooked over an open fire.

Over the years, we went back three times to that mountain lake. The last time, the brakes on my father's car let go and he had to navigate those steep hills and narrow roads with only his hand (emergency) brake. That did it; we went to another site the following year.

My father recalled the time we had gone way up in the northern part of Quebec on a fishing trip with two of his friends, Ernest Simard and Gaston Belanger. Gaston was a storyteller and one of his favorite lines was, "Have no Fear Gaston is here." Gaston had made arrangements for a beaver plane to pick us up and fly us into the fishing camp. There were no roads there and the only way in or out was to go by amphibious planes. Gaston had brought too much equipment and argued with the pilot, until the pilot, against his better judgment, relented and took Ernest, Guston, Gaston's son, Raymond, Dad and I, plus all the equipment in one load. The plane almost did not make it over the trees on takeoff. When we landed the pilot told Gaston, "Gaston, when I pick you up at the end of the week, you get rid of some stuff or you stay here." I think Dad and I had as much fun reliving those trips as when they actually took place.

We had reminisced for some time and Mother's beans were taking effect. I let go of some gas. Andre looked at me and then at Dad, expecting Dad to reprimand me for my breach of etiquette. Dad let go of a thunder-boomer, which sounded like the mating call of a bull moose. Dad and I continued to talk as though all was normal. Andre's eyes threatened to pop out of his head. He let himself fall off the log he was sitting on, and rolled on the ground in kanip-fits, laughing. He had just been inducted into the world of fishermen.

The next morning I got up early, hoping to catch some kind of edible fish. It was already warm at six o'clock in the morning. By ten o'clock Dad moaned, "I am going to shore and get in the shade. I cannot stand the heat." The black flies were so bad though, that he came back out into the water and found a big rock in the lake, sat there, put his feet in the icy water and a wet towel over his head and shoulders in an effort to find relief from the heat.

I said, "Dad, why don't we just pack up and go home. It doesn't look like we are going to catch anything anyways. The only thing biting are the black flies and the stupid yellow perch."

I could tell that he had had more than he could stand, but he was willing to stay just to please me. I always knew that I had a good father. At that moment, I wondered how many dads would do what he was doing, knowing how much he hated the heat and the black flies.

He replied, "Why don't you give it another hour. If the fish are still not biting we will call it a day, fair

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enough?"

Dad went back to the food hamper and scrounged around for a snack. He took a few crackers and peanut butter. He pulled out a can of smoked oysters, one of Mom's special treats. Taking his goodies out to his rock and continued his soggy vigil, as he chomped down on his meager lunch. I remember thinking, "I hope he saves us a few oysters."

Andre and I paddled the canoe a little ways further out for one last-ditch effort to catch a trout. I was worried about Dad and kept looking his way. I saw him struggling to open the can of smoked oysters. It was one of those maddening little jobbies that you can't open with a regular can opener, and the turn-key that come with them are not too efficient either. You have to be a magician, or a mother, to open those cans. Andre and I chuckled as we saw Dad, whose patience was getting very short trying to get that stupid little can open. All of a sudden, frustration got the best of Dad; he stood up and sent the can with our precious oysters still locked safely inside, sailing over our heads, and into the middle of the lake. "Oh, Dad, not the oysters," I whimpered, as my favorite delicacy disappeared under the blue green depths of the lake. Andre bent in two with laughter just tossed his fishing line into the water.

No sooner had he thrown his line in when he yelled, "Hey guys, I got a big one. It must be Charley." He braced his feet against the seat and pulled. His little arms were straining. He played his fish in, that silly grin of his never left his face. I could see he was getting tired so I offered to help but he was determined to bring it in alone. "I don't care if it's only Charley. He is mine and I am taking him home." Finally he got the fish close to the canoe and I netted him. To our surprise he had caught a huge Bass, his fishhook firmly imbedded in the belly fin!

Dad looked at Andre in sheer amazement and joy that his little Buddy had caught a fish. A big one at that! "That beats the hell out of me fellows," he declared. "Let's go home."

Eva Labonte April 5, 2000

Memories: Decorations at Church (1978-2005)

It was about 1978 when I first started to bring pails of cut flowers from my garden to Holy Cross Church. Father Paul Plant asked if anyone had flowers in their gardens could they bring some in. I had a large garden and was thrilled to offer my flowers. I was not permitted to arrange any of the flowers, even though I donated most of them. I would stand back and watched, as the group of volunteers would marvel at the beauty of my flowers. I just ached to be a part of them as they worked and laughed sharing the joys of decorating the church. I wanted so to be part of the group. Eventually there was a change of Pastor and assistant. The volunteers all walked out because the assistant priest took over the decorations and even though he was artistic he wanted things done his way or not at all. After a year he was transferred to another parish and there was no one to do the decorations.

I got a call asking me if I would please bring in some flowers. When I got there, the secretary asked if I could arrange them, the old volunteers did not want to come back. From not being permitted to do any arrangements to being the sole decorator was like, "baptism by fire." I can't remember how long I had been working there when I received a call from the assistant priest at Saints Peter and Paul Church telling me that their decorator had passed away and a couple of people had recommended me to him. I thanked him for the kind remarks but declined saying I was very happy at Holy Cross. After the third call I relented and said I would help but I stressed that it would be only for this one time. When I went to the church to see what they had for decorations, I was appalled to find everything was old and broken and with no money to buy anything. I called everyone I knew who could help including my sister Laurette who promptly refused saying she had never done any decorations in her life and had no desire to do so.

I said, "Hey listen, it is your parish, and if I can do it for your parish you can help me.

It's a one shot deal so come on we will have fun." Famous last words. I worked there eleven years. For a while I did both Churches but that got to be too much. The need at St Peter and Paul was greater and for some reason I chose to stay there even if it wasn't my parish. While I was there, I had to solicit all the money I needed for decorations. The pastor would not permit me to put out flower envelopes. That was tough. The one thing I did do was whenever volunteers came in I would always ask them what they could do and gave them a chance to share in whatever it was they desired to help with. There was no way I was going to have them anguish over not being able to join in like I had years before.

I have decorated many churches, I've done some alone and some with my sister Laurette. We have been asked to do weddings and special occasions. All of them were "thank you" jobs as we never asked for or received payment for the work or the flowers that we supplied. We had some fun times and some tough situations but we have always offered it to the greater glory of God, therefore we have never felt shortchanged. One of the things I enjoyed the most was the making of the Grotto. John made the frame and then Laurette and I use old wedding runners stuffed with paper stapled to the frame, then spray painted it black and gray to make it look like stone. It has been put up every year for the past twenty years and it still awes people every time it goes up.

Another favorite was the sepulcher of our Lord for lent and Holy Week. That was such a big hit with

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the parishioners. Then there was the Roman garden Mark made at Saint Joseph. It was breathtaking. Even the Bishop who saw it thought it was outstanding.

I have learned that each pastor has his likes and dislikes when it comes to decorations. Some take an active part in the decorations while others couldn't care less what you do. Others want the church bare with no decorations at all. The one I enjoyed working for the most was Father McLaughlin. He was an artist and had wonderful ideas. He challenged me constantly. When I fouled up he showed me how to salvage the situation. There were times when nothing could help the mess that I made. We had a good laugh about it and moved on. Most of the time he just let me do what I wanted. The decorating crew loved to play little jokes on him and he went along with it. He is a wonderful priest who is not afraid to let his human side show. Mark took over doing the Manger at Christmas and the waterfall at Easter. He has a flare for decorations and has surrounded himself with a few good workers who love doing it. Each year the congregation looks forward to what they are going to come up with.

There were some funny incidences that happened that have become some of my fondest memories of working with Father Rick. One day I brought in two pails of flowers, one pail of red and the other one of yellow flowers. I started with the red flowers in front of the altar. It was like magic every flower fell into place. In no time at all I had a large bouquet done. It was, in my estimation, quite pretty. I started on the yellow bouquet. After an hour I was still struggling with it. The more I tried, the worse it got. Finally I gave up and let it go for what it was. After Mass I apologized to Father Rick for the flowers not being up to snuff. Said I, "I'm so sorry they look so bad I just could not get them to look right." He looked at them and said, "I see what you mean, but you sure made up for it with the yellow bouquet, It's beautiful!"

After Easter Father came to me and said, "Eva, wouldn't it be smashing to have flames of fire coming down over the altar for Pentecost?" I looked at him and said "Yah Right!

And do you expect me to flutter like a dove over the altar to hold them up there?' He started to laugh, "No, not quite," he then said, "I'm not kidding. We could hang it from the ceiling and have it hover right over the altar. Think about it." He looked at me with that grin of his and walked away. I went to Winnie, the custodian, and asked him if he could lower a fish line from the light over the altar. He said, "Sure, Oh gosh, what are you and Father McLaughlin up to now?" I went to a stain glass studio and had 18 flames cut from a marbled yellow and red glass. I glued small brass loop from which I tied nylon fish line and connected them on a ring. I put fluffy quilt fiber filling to form a cloud and in the cone of strings that held this all together I placed a white dove with its wings spread as in flight. Winnie went up in the loft over the altar, removed the light and dropped the fish line down to me. I tied the loop I had made at the top and Whinny pulled it up to about ten feet over the altar. The fish line was invisible. The comments we got on that one were priceless.

Bruce Lepage, a parishioner, had made us a beautiful grapevine wreath. It was about three feet across and six or seven inches around. We were going to hang it up on the reredos for lent. Father came in and said, "Do you know what I envision? A very thin cross made of branches going right through the wreath." I could not find branches long or straight enough for that, so I cut down four or five Sumac trees. Their rough bark was perfect for what we needed. It was in the middle of the winter and we had lots of snow on the ground. At some point I was sinking so deep I could not walk, therefore I laid on the snow and rolled from one tree to the next. I shoveled to the base of the trees and sawed them down. I tied them with a rope so I could pull them to the road. All the while mumbling something to

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how God had better remember all of this. A woman in her mid sixties acting like a kid was a sight, I am sure. Bruce and I worked all afternoon hanging the large wreath and making the cross through it. When we got done we looked at each other and said, "YUK!" We called Father to come look at it so we could go to plan (B). He took one look at it and said, "It is more beautiful than my wildest expectations." We were stupefied but delighted. We just could not see what he saw beautiful in it. However it is the strangest thing, whenever I show the pictures of the decorations to other priests, they all love this display. There must be something there that I don't understand.

My worst disaster happened one Easter when Father asked if I could drape fine gauze on the cross to make it look like an illusion of the spirit of Jesus rising from the cross. We all agreed it was not one I wanted to take a picture of. His drawing of what he wanted was exquisite; my execution of it was not. Those were wonderful years.

Then there are those who micro-manage everything down to the most minuet details. I never was one to be a passive mindless robot. So I clashed with Father Greenleaf. He had come in, not as Pastor but as administrator for ten months. I did learn that diplomacy is better than a brickbat, but there are times when neither works. I, being a person of strong character, I am sure that often times Fr. Greenleaf would have loved to use the brickbat on me. When he was at our church I was both the sacristan and the head decorator. I would ask him what he wanted and tried to do it that way. Then he would come in and rearrange everything. Even if it was to just turn the pot a quarter inch. He had to have the last say. Another thing he did was to tell someone to do something and not tell the person in charge of that particular area what he had in mind. There was much upheaval the months he was there. Two or three resigned their positions. I tried to resign a couple of times but he talked me out of it. Not because he liked me but because he knew that nobody wanted to put in the long tedious hours that I did. He was an excellent priest and spiritual leader but a horrible administrator.

One Easter, this woman came in to help with the decorations. She looked so tired. She told me that her husband was dying of Alzheimer but she felt she needed to get away for a while therefore came to volunteer. I was frustrated because I could not find the pins that I needed in a large box filled with nail, pins, tacks, brads etc. Sheila Patrick sat there all afternoon sorting that whole box and put each kind of nail or pin into small containers, then arranged them in a tray. Every time I use them I think of her patience.

For the past two years I have worked with Father Mike Seavey. It has been like working for another Father Rick. I told him today that I have to step away from decoration because of my bad knee. Flow I hated doing that, but I have no choice. I will be Seventy Years old this year.

Decorating at local Churches

I've decorated many churches over the years, alone and with my sister Laurette. We have been asked to do weddings and special occasions. All of them were thank-you jobs as we never asked for or received payment for the work or the flowers that we supplied from our gardens. We had some fun times and some tough situations but we have always offered it to the greater glory of God therefore we have never felt shortchanged.

One of the decorations I enjoyed working on the most was the creation of a Grotto for St. Peter & Paul Church. John made the Grotto's framework and then Laurette and I use old wedding runners

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stuffed with paper and stapled them to the frame. We then spray painted it black and gray to make it look like stone. It has been put up every year for the past twenty years and it still awes people every time it goes up.

Another favorite was the Sepulcher of our Lord that we created for lent and Holy Week. That was such a big hit with the parishioners. Then there was the Roman Garden Mark made at Saint Joseph Church. It was breathtaking. Even the Bishop who saw it on a visit thought it was outstanding.

Holy Cross Parish

In the twenty- five years I have been decorating churches I've learned that each pastor has his likes and dislikes when it comes to decorations. Some take an active part in the decorations while others couldn't care less what you do. Then there are those who micro- manage everything down to the most minuet details. I never was one to be a passive mindless robot; so we had clashes. I did learn that diplomacy is better than a brickbat, but there are times when neither works. I, being a person of strong mind, am sure that often times the pastor would have loved to use the brickbat on me.

I started by bringing in pails of cut flowers from my garden to church every Friday. I was not permitted to arrange any of the flowers, even those I donated. I would stand back and watch them as the group of volunteers would work and laugh as they shared the joys of decorating the church. I just ached to be a part of them. Then there was a change of Pastor and assistant. The volunteers all walked out because the assistant priest took over the decorations and even though he was artistic he wanted things done his way or not at all. After a year he was transferred to another parish and there was no one to do the decorations. I got a call from the parish office asking me if I would please bring in some flowers. When I got there the secretary asked if I could arrange them because the old volunteers did not want to come back. From not being permitted to do any decorating and arrangements to being the sole decorator was like a baptism by fire.

St. Peter's & Paul Parish

I can't remember how long I had been working at Holy Cross when I received a call from the vicar (priest) at Saints Peter and Paul Church telling me that their decorator had passed away and a couple of their parishioners had recommended me to him. I thanked him for the kind remarks but declined the offer saying I was very happy at Holy Cross. After the third call I relented and said I would help but I stressed that it would be only for this one time. When I went to the church to see what they had for decorations I was appalled to find everything was old and broken and they had no funds to buy anything. I called everyone I knew who could help including my sister Laurette who promptly refused saying she had never done any decorations in her life and had no desire to do so. I said, "Hey! listen, it's your parish and if I can do it for your parish you can help me. It's a one-shot deal so come on we'll have fun." Famous last words-I worked there almost ten years and she is still there in charge of decorating.

St. Joseph's Parish

(Note: Eva did not write anything about her decorating at St. Joseph's although she decorated there for some thirteen to fifteen years. Except for the remark she made about Mark's creation of the Roman Garden previously mentioned above "Then there was the Roman Garden Mark made at Saint Joseph Church. It was breathtaking. Even the Bishop who saw it on a visit thought it was outstanding." and

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the following paragraph, she wrote nothing else about St. Joseph's. This is puzzling.)

One Easter, this woman came in to help with the decorations. She looked so tired. She told me that her husband was dying of Alzheimer's but she felt she needed to get away for a while therefore came to volunteer. It so happened at that moment that I was frustrated because I could not find the pins that I needed in a large box filled with nail, pins, tacks, brads etc. Sheila Patrick sat there and sorted that whole box and put each kind of nail or pin into small containers, then arranged them in a tray. Every time I use them I think of her patience.

Eva A. Labonte (written on or about July 17, 2004)

Reflections of Life on the Hill (Greene)

John and I have both attained our seventieth birthday this year (2005). We have kept busy on the hill. John keeps finding new projects. He redid the stairs coming from the garage into the mudroom. The floor boards are of a vinyl composite that never needs painting. He likes the looks of it so much that he changed the stairs coming from the back patio to the sunroom. Now he wants to change the floor of the front porch and the mudroom porch with the same vinyl composite. Being a Labonte, he has to clean up his workshop after every job. Then he lines up his next project. He is a perfectionist to the nth degree.

John and I walked the tree line surrounding our property, looking for vines. When we moved here three years ago, the tree line was full of dead trees killed by vines. One day, we saw a tree toppling over by the pull of the vines. That first year, John and I pulled out vines and cleared away the dead trees in the most affected area. The following year, he hired Greg to help him whenever Greg had a day off from school or from his other job. Now it is a matter of maintaining it. This year it took us only a forenoon to clear the new vines that were starting up.

There isn't a day that goes by without John saying how beautiful it is or how happy he is on the hill. Today he came in from servicing his big snow blower and mounting it on the large tractor. The air is crystal. The mountains are different shades of blue and purple while the foothills are brimming with reds, yellows, orange and gold. The cool green of the fir trees and the blue and purple of the mountains enhances the warm color of the fall foliage. On a clear day we can see the snow covered peaks of the White Mountains in New Hampshire, a hundred miles away.

We can see the Androscoggin River from our front window less than four tenths of a mile away. The river is wide and smooth, more like a lake than a river. On our side of the river, the banks raise steeply forming a clear line between the river and land. On the other side, the land is more flat and marshy. The river cuts through land creating islands and wetlands as it meanders on its way to the ocean many miles away. The marshes have a beauty all their own. Moose, deer, eagles, geese, ducks and many other forms of wildlife call the marshes home.

One day in October, early in the morning, the fall foliage was reflected on the river's edge, while the smooth water mirrored the misty gray sky. It gave the optical illusion the river was a cavernous gray bottomless pit. It took my breath away. I felt that if I got too close I would slip into a void but not necessary fall, but simply float in the fine mist that hung over river. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. It was mesmerizing! My imagination took me to a magical place deep within its beauty where anything wonderful was possible. A land where an adult's knowledge tells them that they cannot go, it just does not exist. But if you're young at heart, the journey into the make-believe can be a wonderful experience. For a few fleeting moments I let myself be whisked away to the very depths of its alluring abyss. But alas, an on-coming car brought me back to reality.

By the afternoon, when the sun had burnt off the fog, the image was totally different.

The cobalt blue water of the river, famous in the New England rivers, cut a sharp swath through the

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countryside. The colored leaves took on an iridescent glow that defied description. Many artists have tried in vain to capture this God made beauty that repeats itself every year. It is like the trees are having a magnificent ball before going to sleep for the winter. I can't believe we have a front row seat to this panoramic display. I never get tired of looking at it. I have taken so many pictures only to be disappointed when the film was developed. The pictures cannot capture the iridescent glow of the sun on the leaves.

Towards the end of summer and the early part of autumn, the animals and birds gather in flocks, herds or groups of their own kind to migrate south. They seem to go into a frenzy of feeding as though to put on fat for the long treks or flights to their winter feeding grounds.

At twilight, the moose come out in the marshes to feed. One of their crossings is just around our tree line. The first year we were here, John and Mark saw a huge buck cross the field. They were working on the bam and watched as the moose walked at a steady but unhurried pace come out of the woods, cross the field, the road, and went on to the neighbors land, heading for the river. I usually leave early in the morning to go to Mass and a couple of times I have been lucky enough to see them crossing over. It is always exciting to catch sight of these huge ugly but also majestic beasts.

We have counted as many as twenty deer in our front field.

For some reason, the Canadian geese when migrating south in the fall and north in the spring, always land and feed in our neighbor's field. We kid them about it. We say that we can enjoy their beauty without having to put up with the mess they leave behind.

Being close to the river we enjoy a vast array of birds, anywhere from the large bald eagles, hawks, falcon, and ospreys to the tiniest humming birds.

In the summer, a breeze off the waters cools the shores of the river. Tall evergreen trees line the boat launch a hundred feet or so from the bridge. It is like an oasis of coolness from the hot sun. It is like being in nature's family room. There are families having picnics while other launch their boats. Children run up and down exploring every nook and cranny of the river's edge. Water brings out the highlights of minerals in rocks that otherwise are dull and are difficult to see. The pine needles create a soft carpet. As you walk on the needles, whiffs of pine scent rise to tickle your senses.

The bridge separates the town of Turner on one side and Leeds and Greene on the other. As you go up Church Hill Road, Greene is on the right and Leeds on the left. The town line is the center of the road. A dam owned by the electric company controls the river's water level. The river is used for all sorts of sports, such as fishing, kayaking, boating and swimming. Androscoggin Lake, up river, is surrounded with cottages while farther down river there is a campground that promotes all sorts of activities.

There are fishing contests, which bring in hundreds of anglers hoping to catch the "big-one-that-got-away" last year. There is a balloon festival at the Great Fall's Plaza in Auburn in the month of August. The balloons dip and touch the river just before the rapids situated between Lewiston and Auburn.

Yet in spite of all these activities there is a serene calmness that prevails over much of the river.

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Situated as we are on a hill overlooking valleys in the distance, we are privileged to observe changing weather patterns. It is not unusual for us to see two or three storms in different parts of the landscape. We have an unobstructed view of about 180 degrees of the horizon, as far as the White Mountains to the west, Rangeley Mts. to the north, to low rolling hills to the east and southeast. To the south we have a forest. In the morning, the sunrises are vying with the sunsets in the evening to see which can put on the most sensational display of light and colors. Each one is different and more impressive than the last. I think God has a flare for the dramatic. There are times we have to stop whatever we are doing to gape in wonder at the spectacular show preformed by nature.

Last year, the weather stations kept announcing a massive cold front coming down from Canada. We have experienced many of these before, but not like this one, so we were not prepared for a most extraordinary display of nature. As the cold front came over the horizon we were held captive by the most incredible sight. A wall of dark rolling clouds, stretched across the entire breadth of the horizon. It was not preceded slowly with scattered clouds, but by a gigantic expanse of billowing clouds sweeping in eerie silence towards us. A massive wall of clouds, whose range surpassed the realm of imagination, suddenly invaded the clear blue sky. The bottom layer was the thickest and of a menacing black with a charcoal gray layer directly over it and a gray layer capped it all. We could see the sun being blocked out in the valley as it made its way across the heavens. If I were to permit myself to use an oxymoron, I would say its scope was higher than high and so low it seemed as though when it reach us we would be able to reach up and touch it. It was not until it had passed us obscuring the sun and leaving us in a tenebrous atmosphere that the wind came in a fury followed by torrential rain.

My nephew, an outdoor person, who loves studying the weather, told his mother that at one point it was really scary. Yet he could not take his eyes off such a rare show of power.

We have dirt roads on both ends of our property. One starts from the bottom of our field, south east of the house, goes though a wooded area, then past a large farm that is being divided into building lots. The lots are all fifteen plus acres. It is still very much country living. Every day, I walk down this road for exercise. Nature at work never ceases to amaze me. There is always something going on. One day I saw three flocks of turkeys. Another day I saw a doe and her twin fawns. This week I saw a small fox. He did not run away but cowered in the bushes. He did not look well. Snakes are a common sight, mostly small ones.

I love the vegetation. A wide variety of trees line both side of the road. There are dozens of species of ferns, from the small delicate to the huge tall hardy kind. Moss covers many of the rocks on the shady side of the road. The moss on the rocks is like a carpet, short and olive green while the moss on the dead stumps is taller and deeper green.

Mushrooms grow in varied shapes and size. I do not know which ones are good and which are poisonous so I content myself to looking at their beauty. Some have dried to a reddish brown. The caps split around the edges and made them look like wooden flowers. I picked some of them up for my Christmas manger scene. I also picked different kinds of moss to use as grass.

Further down the road there is a corral with three horses in it, two racehorses and a foal. They come towards me hoping I have apples or carrots for them. This road is absolutely beautiful; many people use it for their daily walks. They stuff their pockets with carrots and treats for the horses. They are spoiled. The farmer to the south of us has two workhorses and two riding horses. We hear the horses

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all the time, but their buildings are situated behind a long row of trees so we do not see them at all. The farmer, to the northwest of us, has a riding stable. The lady teaches all-over the states and every year she has students from Europe that come as interns to learn the care and maintenance of a stable. We gave them permission to extend their bridle path through our woods and around the perimeter of our fields. It's so pretty to see them ride their horses.

There was a ditch between our field and the dirt road. The horses were sometimes afraid to cross it especially after a rain when the ditch was half-full with running water. The horses would turn away or rear up. John felt this was dangerous for both the riders and the horses, so he had a culvert put in across the ditch and built stonewalls on each side of the culvert. It is so pretty.

This week we were hit by a frost. I now have all my bulbs dug up and stored for the winter. As much as I love gardening, I won't mind not having to worry about weeds for a few months. Now it's time for quilting and needlework.

Farms growing pumpkins and vegetables offer a different, but not less exciting fare.

There are pumpkin carving contests and other activities to entice the children to bring their parents to farmer's stores.

Much of this brings back fuzzy warm feelings of my childhood and all the good smells and hustle and bustle of harvesting that I experienced as a child on the farm. Having been brought up on a farm, I now appreciate the season's cycle more now than when I was a child. I love sharing the farmer's way of life. They have nicknamed John, "Farmer John." They think it is nothing short of amazing to see John, a city boy, on his tractor pulling out trees stumps, digging rocks and anything else that country living demands.

He has won their hearts with his kind and generous nature.

Autumn is the time when the days are still balmy but the nights are cool. The fields are in different stages of being harvested. There is a sense of well being with the bams and storage houses bursting at the seams with provisions for the winter for both animals and humans alike.

The orchards are beehives of activity as the apples are gathered and stored. Many of the orchard owners let the public pick their own apples. They offer hayrides, petting of animals, and all sorts of fun things for the children and the young-at-heart adults. It is an unwritten agreement that you can eat an apple as you pick. There is nothing like biting into a cold apple freshly picked from the tree. As you bite into it, the skin snaps and there is an explosion of tart sweetness in your mouth. Juice trickles down your chin as you get to the core where the brown seeds peek out at you. Just what the doctor ordered. The smell of fresh apple pies and doughnut coming from the small farm store will break the resolute of the most disciplined dieters. Once inside, there is an array of home baked goods, cider, cheese in large round molds, cut to your specifications, candies and of course, apples.

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New Era Begins (2005)

The year 2005 will be a year I shall not forget. On May 3rd , I got a total knee replacement. All went well and I had a wonderful time in the gardens. Christian helped me with the heavy work and the weather was such that I will properly never again see such an abundance of flowers. It was a wonderful year for gardens.

On December 2nd, I went for a routine mammogram. I told John I had a few errands to do but would be back for lunch. When the technician called me back for a second take I thought nothing of it but when she called me back for a third time I knew something was wrong. By noontime they told me to go for lunch but to come back for a biopsy. I called John and we had lunch together. He tried to encourage me but in my heart I knew from having seen the film that there was a good possibility that I had cancer. They took six biopsies. It was so painful. I left there at 3:30 pm feeling though someone had punched me in the stomach. I drove around the mall not wanting to go home. On Dec. 6th I got confirmation that the lump in my breast was indeed cancerous. On the ninth I met with the surgeon and was operated for the first time on the 12th of December. In the recovery room I was told the preliminary test showed that the lymph nodes were cancer free. I was ecstatic. We had caught it in time. That Friday, December 16th, I received a call telling me that the more extensive test showed that the lymph nodes were cancerous. Six days later I underwent another operation to remove the lymph nodes under my arm. Three of those were found to be cancerous.

Tomorrow I start Chemo Therapy.

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This is my Journey with Cancer

Notes to "This Is My Journey with Cancer":

The copy of "This Is My Journey with Cancer" that follows cannot be found on any computer Hard Drive; Zip Drive; CD Drive or E-Book Drive or any other form of "saving drive". It is the only hard copy of this story as you see it. I cannot understand why this is so.

However, previous copies of this "Journey" can be found on all the above mentioned drives in her computer files but is minimally different than the hard copy that you have in this book. In the thumb drive that I've given you with this book, you'll find it under a folder titled "Cancer"-If you open this folder, the files "Eva's Cancer Journey"; "My cancerjourney phase two" and "Cancer Phase 3" will give you this "Journey".

If you make a comparison between the cancer files on the thumb drive with the hard copy that follows, you will find very minor differences and the two versions are essentially alike.

Every day I make notes on a calendar. When I have a good day or if I am up during the night I write my thoughts down. These are my own personal thoughts. If I know my kids, I know they will want copies. I have written short stories on a lot of subjects and have been published many times, but this is my journey with cancer.

This is my journey with Cancer

On December 2, 2006, I went for a routine mammogram at Central Maine Medical Center (CMMC). I told John I had a few errands to do but would be back for lunch. When the technician called me back for a second take, I thought nothing of it. But when she called me back for a third time, I knew something was wrong. By noontime^ they told me to go for lunch but to come back for a biopsy. I called John and we had lunch together. He tried to encourage me but in my heart I knew from having seen the film that there was a good possibility that I had cancer. They took six biopsies. It was so painful.

I left there at 3:30 pm feeling as though someone had punched me in the stomach. I drove around the mall not wanting to go home. John was anxiously waiting for me and has been my strongest "support".

On December six, I got confirmation that the lump in my breast was indeed cancerous.

On the ninth John and I met with Dr. D'Augustine, a surgeon. He and his team explained to John and me that the entire breast seemed infected and it would be best to remove it all. I was operated for the first time on the 12th of December. In the recovery room I was told the preliminary test showed that the lymph nodes were cancer free. I was ecstatic; we had caught it in time. I had no pain from my incision.

On Friday December 16th I received a call telling me that the more extensive test showed the lymph nodes were cancerous. That hit me hard. I went upstairs and lay on my bed and cried. This shocked

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John; he called the doctor to have him talk to me. I told him "Look you hit me over the head with a two by four and then you smile and ask me if I'm alright. Give me time. I need time to process all of this." I had to talk myself into accepting it. He understood, but tried to reassure me that I would be fine, but now my cancer was in "stage two".

Six days later, I underwent another operation to remove the lymph nodes under my arm. Three of those were found to be cancerous. That operation was very painful. Dr. D'Augustine came to visit me in my hospital room. He examined my incision and asked me how I felt. I told him I was fine. He asked me how John was handling it and I told him that he was very supportive and there were no problems there. For some reason he kept asking me how I was doing emotionally and was there anything I wanted to talk about with him. Finally I said, "There is one thing that has me very upset." His face dropped a mile. I continued, "You doctors have a way of messing up a girl's life. Dr. Moody did a knee replacement and messed up my leg so bad I had to cancel my leg commercials then you come along and take away one of my breast and I have to cancel my Playboy center folds." but I still have one good side and I have hope Victoria's Secret will be able to take side shots. He looked at me with a quizzical look on his face, and then he burst out laughing, "I don't think you have any problems with that sense of humor. You will be all right"

He told me there was a good chance that if there were only a few lymph nodes affected I would not need chemo. I learned that three out of the nine they removed were cancerous. Again I felt good that I would not need chemo. Then Dr. D'Augustine called to set up a date for a port implant; they added the three lymph nodes to the original two, so now the numbers were five out of eleven instead of the three out of nine. I was devastated. I cried on my bed for about twenty minutes. Then I got up dressed and took a long walk on a lonely country road. It was snowing hard. I stopped every so often and just stood there trying to make sense out of it all. I reasoned that I could not change what was happening but I could my attitude.

Dr. D'Augustine wanted me to see Dr. Erickson, the oncologist, on very short notice.

She gave up her lunch hour to see me. She made me feel that I was more important than her lunch. I was anxious and she did everything she could to put my fears to rest. She also showed me ways that I could help myself during chemo to make it easier. I made notes so I could follow her advice to the letter.

I was scheduled to have the port put in on the 23rd of January. Dr. Erickson asked to have it moved up so I could start my treatment sooner. That next Tuesday I was called to come in and Dr. D'Augustine did minor surgery and placed the port under my left collarbone. Yup, you guessed it, there goes all hope that I had with Victoria's Secret.

I walk at least a mile and a half every day and pedal on a stationary exercise bike for at least twenty minutes every morning. This helps me more than anything because it gives me time to think and forces me to be active.

I called a friend who had just been through a double mastectomy. I had walked with her through some tough spiritual times. We chatted and she was caring and cheerful. But then she said something that knocked me for a loop. She said, "You know Eva, once the cancer has gone into your lymph nodes it is nothing but a crap shoot. It can and most probably will surface sometime somewhere." I didn't sleep

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that night and in the morning John could see there was something troubling me and asked if he could help. I knew I had to work it out for myself and went for a walk to think it out. I realized that yes, it might be a crapshoot, but the odds are most definitely in my favor.

Another friend called and questioned why they had taken out the lymph nodes without testing them first. She said that both her sister and her cousin had gone through mastectomies and the doctors had checked their twenty some odd lymph nodes first and found them to be cancer free therefore did not have to remove them. I saw Dr. D'Augustine and questioned him why he had not tested mine first. With a small grin on his face he said, "Because you are too big to slide under the microscope." He explained that they never know how many nodes are in the mass of tissue until they remove it and examine it in the lab and they cannot test a node until it is sliced thin and tested with certain chemicals under the microscope. He told me that each cancer is unique to the person and would not react like any other. He advised me not to listen to other people's treatments. That was the best advice he could have given me.

This is the E-mail I sent to my friends:

Hi:

The cancer spilled over into the lymph nodes under the arm. Three out of nine nodes that were removed were cancerous. I have many things going for me. They tested for different things; the kind of cancer, the speed the cancer is growing, and the readiness of the cancer to accept different kinds of treatment, etc. On a scale of 1-5, one being the most favorable, all my test came back "one". My health is very good for my age. They will plug in all the information they have gleamed from all of the tests they have taken and then we will have a meeting to decide what is the test treatment for me. I have an appointment on Jan. 9th. In the meantime, I am doing all the exercise they have given me and I feel pretty good. I'm doing all my own work, it is taking me a lot longer but that is OK. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am for all the prayers and support I have received from all of you. Please don't let up on the prayers, I have a ways to go and a big challenge to overcome. However I have a good feeling that I will beat this.

Eva

As I look back over the past weeks and to December 2nd, I think of Alma Jordan Ames, the young mammogram technician who worked with me. She was so concerned about having to take more tests and how it was affecting me. She did everything to put me at ease. Once she was sure that the tests were correct she set things in motion so that I could get answers quickly. I did not have to wait days or even weeks, wondering and worrying what was going on. I had my first surgery just ten days after the mammogram. Everyone went out of their way to show me that I was important to them and that I was not just a number. Yet I was in complete control of what procedures were to be done. They guided me but I had the last word. Since they were the experts, I relied on their judgment and so far they have not steered me wrong. I have no complaints.

Every day I receive dozens of calls from friends wishing me well. The mail brings a staggering amount of cards offering good wishes and prayers for a speedy recovery. People bring in food and all sorts of gifts to show their love and friendship. My family room and dining room table resemble spring gardens from all the plants and fresh flowers I've received. I am overwhelmed. Most of my calls are uplifting.

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My sister Rosalie called and said, "Don't forget that we have two cousins who are long term cancer survivors. Then she asked how I was and talked of other things. That made my day. I had many such calls from family and friends.

Of course, I had those who called to tell me of their friend's Aunt Matilda who had a cousin, who was married to so and so who had cancer and the terrible time this person had because they did not get the right doctors, and I would do well to go for a second and third opinions. I found that type of calls disturbing. Though these people meant well, I soon learned to tell them that John and I had done our research and were satisfied with our choices. I reminded them of the fact that we have two doctors and two nurses in the family and I could always go to them for additional advice. I must say my family have been supportive and have offered to help in any way they can, but have never imposed their opinions on me.

I follow a healthy diet and exercise every day. I set goals for myself every morning; do laundry, wash floor or a few small chores. When I have that done, I rest for a while and, if I can get more done that day, that is "gravy". This way I maintain my house and it gives me a sense that I'm still in control of my life.

Tomorrow I start Chemotherapy.

Monday January 16th: The first chemotherapy treatment.

I arrived at the center not knowing what was involved in these procedures. I was shown to a room where half a dozen people were having infusions of one kind or another. A nurse came and explained the procedure they were going to do. Then the pharmacist came and described each chemo and the effect it would have. One in particular caught my attention; if one drop of this compound fell on my skin it would cause irreparable damage to both the skin and the muscle. This was going to be pumped into my veins.

They came and covered me with a plastic sheet and covered themselves with a tarp-kind of apron. They put in the leader into my port and inserted a long needle with a six to eight inch long syringe into one of the openings and infused that chemical into my veins. That was about the most horrific feeling I ever had watching that liquid being pumped into me. It was as though I had lost control over "me". As soon as that procedure was completed, I relaxed and read as the remainder of the chemo dripped in. By the time I got home after this first treatment, I was back to myself.

I sent the following E-mail to my friends and family:

Hi Everyone:

This is an update on my chemo treatments. I had my first one today. It came with a long list of do's and don'ts. Don't take a hot shower; don't take a cold shower. (I'll solve that problem real quick; I won't take a shower). Don't drink or eat anything hot; don't drink or eat cold food; but I have to drink half a gallon of water a day!!! Luke warm water-oh joy! I am not to eat large meals but eat small amounts all day long, however I was told that food would not taste good and I may have sores in my mouth. I am inquiring if they make straws big enough to suck up mash potatoes. I have to look at the positive side. In a couple of weeks my hair will fall out, no more shampoos, and I won't have to shave my legs. I

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won't have to pay Jenny Craig to lose weight. Yea! One chemo down; seven to go. I'm going to write an article for AARP on how a baldheaded, boobless, seventy year old woman is enjoying the "golden years". All kidding aside, so far so good. I hope it continues.

Eva

Monday night I thought the top of my head was going to pop off. I have suffered migraine headaches in the past but this one outdid anything I've ever experienced before.

Tuesday Jan. 17th

I felt tired. I could sense things were working in my body, but couldn't put a finger on it. I had to push myself to do things.

Wednesday, Jan. 18th.

I woke up with a veiy puffy, red, face. That lasted all morning and slowly faded away. I was dizzy and felt tired

Thursday, 19th and Friday, 20th

They were fairly good days. I was dizzy most of the time. It went away when I rested but would come back as I got more fatigued.

Saturday, the 21st. and Sunday, the 22nd.

Two very good days

Monday, January 23, 2006,

I went to church by myself. I felt wonderful. Went to the doctors and took up all that had happen during the week. Everything looked good until they took a blood test and found that my white blood count was nil. I have to be "confined" to the house away from anyone who might be ill: that is, stay away from crowds.

I will miss going to daily Mass. I have had to let go of most of my church activities when I had my knee surgery. I loved being sacristan and truly enjoyed being in charged of decorations at St. Joseph's, responsibilities I have held for years. It was hard to let go, but I hand picked wonderful people to take my place. This gives me a sense of peace and satisfaction. Now I have to let go of RCIA. Wow! I have worked in Religious Ed. for over thirty years. But this is temporary and I will be back. Suffering can be purifying. I need that. It is also a wonderful prayer to offer God. I wish I had the courage to offer more.

I said that my mouth was sore. When they checked they saw cankers. I had a hard time brushing my teeth. I have come down with a bad case of hemorrhoids. The nurse told me that was caused by some of the chemo.

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Tuesday, January 24th

This morning I got up from a bad night of aches and pains. During the morning they got so bad I went to bed. When I got up the pain was gone.

Sue (a friend) came to visit. She brought me some books. By mid-afternoon the back pain was back. I called my doctor and after I described what was happening. She said, "That's good news. That means that your white cells are coming back in." It is funny how when I didn't know what was happening, the pain was getting to me. Now that I knew it was good news, I still had the pain but I welcomed it.

I have to rest less often, but the strange thing that happens is I can be feeling fine one moment and be completely exhausted the next. A half hour of down time rejuvenates me.

Wednesday, January 25th. Good day.

Thursday, January 26th

Blah day. I was sick to my stomach, was achy, tired, and just didn't feel good. Joline (my daughter) came to visit and brought some fresh fish. It was delicious, but after a few bites I settled for plain pasta with a bit of cheese.

Friday, 27th and Saturday, 28th

These were uneventful days, with the exception of my scalp being very sore. I can imagine I will lose my hair soon. In fact there is a lot of hair that stays on my hairbrush.

Sunday, January the 29th

This is the first time I will miss Mass during this ordeal. I am having a very hard time with this. Mass on TV just does not cut it. I have come down with a bad case of hemorrhoids. My hair is coming out by the handful.

Monday January 30th: My second chemo treatment.

I met with Sally, Dr. Erickson's new assistant. I was her first patient she saws alone. She was so nervous. I had met her before with Dr. Erickson and tried to put her at ease. She was so concerned about my having everything I needed to make my treatments the easiest they could be. She is a very nice and personable young lady. To me, it seems strange at first that all my doctors, assistants and nurses seem to be younger than my own children.

It must be part of "aging".

I was anxious because they did not know if my blood count would be high enough to give me my next treatment. As it turned out it was perfect. I spoke to them about the hemorrhoids. And they looked up my meds and one of them has hemorrhoids as a possible side effect. The treatment went well. I got

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home tired, ate a light supper and went to bed early. I wore a net over my hair because I am shedding.

Tuesday, January 31st to Thursday February 2th

Tuesday I went for my shot. I was told I could expect to do well because I was keeping my body and mind in good condition. I have to keep the net on all day. I look cute with a pink hair bonnet. Joline took one look and burst out laughing.

Today (February 2nd) is John's birthday. We celebrated on Sunday, as I knew we would have a busy day today. I gave him a digital "weather station". He is all excited about it. It is not often I can give him something. He buys what he needs as he needs it.

All has gone very well. Thursday I went for my wig. She removed most of my hair and clipped off what little was left. I am feeling well.

Friday, February 3rd.

I am suffering from gas under my rib cage. Man, does that hurt! My white count must be coming back as the backaches are back also. Not a good day!

Saturday, February 4th

More of the same: gas and backaches.

Sent an E-mail to family and friends:

I had my second Chemo and all went very well. I am suffering fewer side effects this time. My arm is getting stronger and I now can pick things up from the floor which I had difficulty with after surgery. All in all I am doing very well.

I have lost all my hair. I went for my wig. Horrors! When she put that thing on I looked just like Carol Burnet's mother in the sit-com. Then she tried a hat that made me look like Carol Burnet when she portrayed the cleaning woman. In the sit-com's, They worked to look ugly, but it came natural to me. Then she gave me a green scull hat to sleep in. I look like a giant pea with a face on it. We worked with the wig and I had her trim away a lot of the hair. It looks ok.

This is just a bump in the road. I am offering all of it to God in hopes that anyone who has lost God in their life may find their road back to Him. You have no idea how that helps to accept all that is asked of me. I appreciate all the support and prayers. Thank you again.

Eva

Sunday, February 5th

I went to Mass and sat in the balcony where no one else sits. This keeps me away from the public and therefore, minimizes the chances of catching something.

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We came home and I made a big dish of Canadian meatballs, and a big spaghetti sauce. After, I was tired, so I slept in my chair and the sauce caught bottom in the kettle. I was a bit upset. Joline came with her family. They ate the spaghetti not daring to complain too much. Andre came with Kolbe, my youngest grandchild, Pauline came also and later on, Greg came. We watched the super bowl.

Monday, February 6th

Anne came with Evan. He played so well. I hadn't seen him for a while. It was a good visit. Anne is excited about her forthcoming move to Wyoming. I got very tired in the afternoon. I think it was the accumulation of all the company.

Tuesday, February 7th

I went for my prosthesis. It feels like it weighs a ton. My hemorrhoids are acting up again and so are the sores in my mouth. I don't know which end hurts the most. I see a pattern forming.

Wednesday, February 8th.

I made myself a hat. It is somewhat what I need but I have to make some alterations. I plan to make another one in the near future.

Thursday, February 9th

This was a rough day. I consider the cancer journey a "bump in the road" but today I hit a pothole.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday, February 10-12

These were very good days.

Monday, February 13th

My Chemo went well. My blood test showed I was slightly anemic.

Tuesday, February 14th.

I have to go for my "day after chemo shot".

Wrote e-mail to my friends and family.

Update

Yesterday I went for my Chemo and it went well. My blood test showed I was slightly anemic.

Today is Valentine's Day. As we got up, John gave me a hug and wished me a happy Valentine's Day. He asked if I would be his Valentine. As I got ready for my shower, I looked in the mirror which I usually avoid doing. Here is the assessment that I made: I am bald, need glasses to read, half of my teeth are false, my wrinkles are beginning to have their own wrinkles, I have a breast missing, the other

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one sags, I'm on the heavy side, I have an artificial knee and two toes that were straighten out by surgery. Some Valentine! Jesus said that at the end of time our body would rise again. Let me tell you when I die I want a new body.

Now that the side effects of the chemo have taken on a pattern, they are doable. Not always pleasant, but tolerable, however some of the issues of having to deal with cancer can be frustrating.

I have determined that hair is nature's thermostat for the body. When you lose all your hair at once, it a shock to your system. I went looking for hats that would let me stay cool in the house and others that would keep me warm when outside. I swear whoever designed the hats for chemo patients should be shot! The turbans make you look like Egyptian women from biblical times. The knitted beanies accentuate the fact that you have no hair. They have catalogs showing just how beautiful you can look in the scarves, hats and turbans. Ha! All of the models are between 25-30 years old and in the prime of life. They are airbrushed to remove any imperfections and have enough make up on to keep a make-up factory going frill time. Let's deal with reality, most people with breast cancer are older women, have wrinkles, their complexion is more gray than rosy, and the smell of makeup makes us nauseous. Plus the fact that we don't have the energy or are too dam sick to sit in front of a mirror for an hour trying to make yourself look good. What we need is a "quick fix".

Looking for a hat was a bust. (No pun intended). So I went for my prosthesis. The woman measured me and fitted a bra. That took like two minutes. Then, she came out with this mound of flesh colored, cloth covered, jell. She put it in my hands and it weighed a ton. I asked, "Why is this so heavy?" She told me; "They had really improved them, and they are much lighter than they used to be." I asked what sadistic male came up with this contraption. No woman in her right mind would do that to another woman. Well, she gave me the lightest one they now make. The first thing that came to mind was I am small breasted and it weights a lot, what must the big breasted woman have to carry around. I have decided after this is over I am going into designing breasts and hats.

In a couple of days the sores in my mouth will get really painful and my hemorrhoid will act up again until I won't know which end hurts the most. I now know how that song got written, the one that goes 'oo, oo, ee, aa, aa walla walla bing bang'. I also know what he was doing when he wrote it. I get four or five days that are kind of rough but like I said, it's doable. I consider most of my journey with cancer a bump in the road. Sometimes on those days, it's like hitting potholes that jar the teeth. But you know, I offer it to God as a prayer and he carries me all the way. At the risk of repeating myself I cannot tell you how much your support has helped me in all of this. Thanks!

Eva

Wednesday, February 15th.

This is the day my face puffs-up red and gets blotchy. I look like a wino. It doesn't hurt but it sure looks funny. I now know that it will disappear in a few hours so I don't worry about it.

I have done my twenty minutes on the bike this morning but still have to go for my mile and a half walk. I have only missed walking a few days since Pve started Chemo. I also mark every glass of liquid I take in to be sure I drink at least sixty-four ounces every day. I have a more difficult time with the fruits as some have too much acid and it hurts my throat. I have experimented enough now that I

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know the ones I can eat without flaring up the sores in my mouth. By the time I have it down pat my chemo will be over. So far, I can't complain. I'm doing well.

Thursday, February 16th.

I woke up in the middle of the night with sever pain in my stomach. I walked around the house a bit and took a couple of Tylenols and lay down in my lazy girl (usually referred too as a Lazy Boy) chair. I fell asleep and dreamt I was giving an adult religious class. When it was over I went outside and couldn't find my car, a policeman told me it was right there beside my chair, and sure enough I looked and there it was. I said now I can sleep and did! What a crazy dream.

I had a very good day. Did three loads of laundry plus the house cleaning upstairs. I am not feeling tired. Good day indeed!

Friday, February 17,

Slept well until three a.m. but could not go back to sleep. Here I am writing my thoughts in the wee hours of the morning. Writing is always soothing for me.

So much has happened in the past three months. From the moment I agreed to certain procedures, I gave up some of the control I have over my body. The caregivers were all caring, and gentle, but the procedures were invasive and sometimes very painful, more so in the beginning than now. In the beginning, it was surreal; I felt "suspended" over my body watching them perform all sorts of things that took from what I had believed to be a healthy body and remove parts that left me scarred and in pain. I was determined not to let go. I knew that if I could keep up my spirits I would be fine.

I have come to explore who I am as a person, the meaning of life and how I fit in the greater picture. I have always come across as a strong, confident woman. That was not always what I felt or feel even now. My faith in God has always been a big part of my life. I never considered myself "beautiful". Clothes and makeup can make one attractive and fortunately I have nice things to help me look decent. At seventy, any physical beauty I might have had is long gone. Since this has happened to me, I have more people tell me that I am "pretty". Whether they are trying to be kind or if they are referring to my outlook, I don't know. I do know that I am at peace with the world, and happy to be alive to enjoy it. Perhaps this is what they see.

My relationship with God has become stronger and more personal. I can see God in everything from the pungent smell of the thawing earth to the dried leaves on the ground along the road as I walk everyday. I hear the promise of hope in the birds as they serenade me along the way. Spring is coming soon. If all goes well with my chemo I will be finish by the end of April, and then the radiation will start. Gardens, flowers, oh! I can't wait!

I think I will go back upstairs and try to catch another forty winks before its time to get the day started.

Saturday, February 18th.

I woke up at two this morning with a sore in my mouth. I felt like a fire-eater at a circus.

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I sat on the couch waiting for the medication to take affect. I can see where this cancer is a blessing (in a way) as well as a painful journey. It has made me contemplate my life in greater depth then I have dared before as I meditate on my life and my closeness to God.

I think I am learning to put things in better perspective. The pain resulting from the cancer and the after-effects of the chemo treatments has shone me that this is part of our human condition. Today, with help and good medical treatment, we often can improve or be cured from many of the illnesses. The suffering subsides and we go on with our lives feeling victorious over our battle with whatever sickness we had.

There is another type of suffering however that gets worse as it festers in our hearts and mind. That is the suffering we inflict on each other by our insensitivity to other people's feelings. How often a past hurt will arise and bring pangs of pain almost as intense as when it first happened. Even though I have long forgiven these actions, the cruelty of one of these actions still has the power to inflict pain.

On one such occasion, I was the perpetrator. A lady called to see if I would help her on a project. I was honored as this woman was a pillar in the community and for her to ask me to work with her was special. In the course of talking we were discussing who else we could include in the project, she mentioned a name of another woman. Without thinking, I said eight words that I have regretted saying; "She is nothing but a big fat slob." The pain on this woman's face was heart rending. She was a large woman herself. I apologized, but my words sounded very empty. We became good friends and that matter was never brought up again.

A few years ago she came to tell me she had terminal cancer. When she was on her deathbed, her husband called and said she wanted to see me. I was surprised, I considered her a good friend, but certainly not one of her inner circle of friends. When I got there she .was in severe pain. She held my hand and said I just wanted to tell you I love you. I know in my heart this great lady was saying, "I forgive you all over again." This has taught me not only to be careful of what I say that might inflict pain, but to also forgive those that have been careless with me. The thought that I may have knowingly or unwittingly hurt someone bothers me. It is much easier to forgive others than to forgive myself.

In retrospect, and on a more positive note, I've chuckled at something that has happened some year's age. When my hair started to gray, I would dye my hair so as to hide die offensive and unwanted color. Just before I stopped dying my hair, this woman would say to me, "If God didn't want you to have gray hair there would be no one with white hair." I never let on that I observed that she wore bright red lipstick and long dangling pierced earrings. Strange how she envisioned standards for others but not for herself.

Time to try and get some sleep.

Sunday, February. 19th

Yesterday was a horrendous day. I was so sick all day long. John even brought my food to my chair, what little I ate that is. Yogurt, Ensure, and a couple of peach slices were all I could eat all day. I didn't sleep much during the night either. Today started off rough but seems to be taking an easier course.

Sunday evening I've been fighting bouts of stomach gasses. Man! do they hurt. I take Gas-X (an otc

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medication) and walk around the house to help get rid of it.

Jesus greatest accomplishment while on earth was not the miracles that he preformed. He was one with God the Father who had created everything. Miracles were nothing to him It was the great humility that he had, to take on our humanity to redeem us. His was an unconditional, incomparable love. I hope with time I can reflect that love for everyone, not just those I believe to be my friends. I hope that material things or accomplishments become more important than people.

When we lived in Quebec City someone introduced me to stamp collecting. It is a fascinating hobby. There was a lady from our hometown of Lewiston who was trying to sell her huge worldwide collection. She had buyers in Canada but had no way to get them up there. I became the go-between. She would pay me in stamps for my efforts on her behalf. The person buying them was so grateful to get them he would give me stamps also even though he knew I was getting stamps from the supplier. It was a win-win situation for everyone concerned.

As others heard of this, they got in on it, each looking for stamps from different countries. My collection grew by leaps and bounds. John got interested and took up plate blocks of the USA and Canada plus France singles. I did singles of USA, Canada, Japan, and the United Nations. John and I had many long hours of pleasure working on this hobby.

We moved to Montreal and I and two other people from the stamp club started a children's stamp club. It was an instant success. One of the men and I worked every week with the children. The other showed up every other month or so for a few minutes and left. Our sponsor, The Lakeshore Stamp Club of Montreal, was so impressed with our work that they had a reporter come in to do a story on it. The man who rarely showed up claimed to be the leader and took all the accolades. The story with pictures of him with the kids was sent across Canada. The other man and I were so disgusted with the whole thing that we said to the great leader, "Now buddy you will have to put your work where your mouth is. You run the children's club. Unfortunately he didn't do it and in a few months the children's club floundered. I have often questioned myself what my motives were, was I doing it for the kids or was I doing it for glory.

As my collection grew in size and in value, I found myself obsessed with completing certain sets. However there was never an end to it, there was always another and better, more valuable set to get. The hobby became an obsession.

A plate block consisted of four stamps with the serial number in the corner. Some people saved all four corners. The stamps at that time sold for ten cents each. The four corners cost a dollar sixty for the set. The government put out about ten to twelve stamps a year. This was affordable and fun. Then, in conjunction with the space program, the US government put out a special stamp with a color code in the margin. Collectors bought sheets of this stamp. This was a bonanza for the Postal Service.

Within a few years they were issuing commemorative stamps to the tune of thirty to forty new stamps per year. The postage rate went up and plate blocks, color code blocks (20 stamps to a block) and double end blocks etc, mushroomed the cost to hundreds of dollars a year. Collectors became disenchanted with the whole mess and threw their collection on the market. The bottom fell out of stamp collections prices and has not recovered to this day.

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When we moved back to the states we found that we had a difficult time finding collectors to trade with. The stamp clubs were made up mostly of dealers trying to sell rather than collectors exchanging ideas and stamps. Our collection had mushroomed to thousands of dollars of catalog value. It was now realistic to consider only one third to half of that as actual cash value, depending on the quality of the stamps or collection.

Ours was top of the line quality. We too became disenchanted with the whole thing.

After long discussions we decided to sell. It took over five or six years to liquidate all of them. John and I agreed to give the entire proceeds to charity.

Since we donated all the proceeds we never had to worry that we had made a profit or had lost money. When the final check was mailed out the most powerful sense of peace came over me. I was liberated of an obsession that had taken over my life. I will never let material things become that important to me again.

Tuesday, February 21st

I woke up at three in the morning and could not go back to sleep. Praying usually lulls me into a peaceful restful sleep, but this time, nothing worked. I started thinking of my work with the Rachel Program, a program to help women who had abortions and had difficulty living with their decision. How I loved that work until the lady in charge of the program and to whom I reported to, retired.

Catholic Charities of Maine, the program sponsors, hired a replacement who had, what I consider, an agenda. She was pro-choice and had taken the job to destroy the program, so it seems. We people in the field went to the bishop and to the head of Catholic Charities of Maine, only to have our letters and calls referred to Ms. Cline, the head of the Rachel Program. A person by the name of Lynn from Waterville, was a dynamic worker. She helped so many women to heal and stopped young girls from having abortions. She was the first to get the "axe". We were all fired one after another and replaced with pro-choice people. Father Rick and Father Concannon told me to go through Pat Degrinny of Portland, a lady that knew the Bishop well. I called her and she agreed to bring my letter to him personally and explain the situation.

A year passed and I heard nothing further from Pat Degrinny or the Bishop, so I figured that he did not believe me.

One night I went to bed and was just lying there wondering what all of these changes were about. I had been working with these women who were in such pain. I knew what we did helped them. Why? Why was this happening? As I lay there, I heard a young male voice call "Mother". I became alert. I heard it again. I said, "Who is there?" All our children were away from home. I swung my feet off the bed to go see who it could be. As I looked towards the door I saw the most beautiful faces of two babies I had ever seen. They were smiling at me. Then disappeared. I was shaken to the core. Was I hallucinating? Had I dreamt this and was now just waking up? I had two miscarriages, one was a girl but I never knew the sex of the other one. Was it they who came in a dream to give me hope? I never will know. I do wonder if that is how beautiful babies are in heaven?

John said he wanted to take me on a pilgrimage of European Shrines. We had done a tour of Rome,

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Paris, Lourdes, and Fatima a few years before and he knew how much this meant to me.

I was in a spiritual turmoil over the Rachel Project affair and also the RCIA program of our parish of which I was a teacher, was going through tough time. John thought a break in pace would help me. Each day of that trip brought a surprise. To me nothing is a coincidence. Things happen for a reason. I categorized them as follows: #1 Grace, #2 Blessing, #3 A God incident, #4 Mini miracle. When these things happen I was always caught off guard.

Our first destination was Medjugorje. I had brought a whole list of petitions (prayers and requests) from family members and friends. I had a long list of my own.

At breakfast the first morning the chaplain of the pilgrimage asked that each person share with the group why they had traveled to such a desolate place. When it came to me I said, "I wanted to be where the blessed mother was appearing and to get some spiritual answers. I also said that I had worked with women who suffer from abuse and abortion. Often the two go hand in hand.

We all walked to Mt. Krizevac saying the Way of the Cross, as we went up the mountain. It was a grueling climb. At the very top there is a very large concrete cross that was erected in the year 1900 to honor the Lord's crucifixion. All of the water, cement, sand and tools had to be brought up on the backs of donkeys and the men women and children. What faith these people had. I stood in awe of their accomplishments. I placed the petitions I had brought with me in a crack at the base of the cross and in prayer I asked God to forget all my petty wants and needs and please just give me the faith of these people. I prayed for all those who had asked me to remember them on Mt. Krizevac. I descended in peace.

Later that afternoon a woman and her mother, from our group, came and asked to speak to me. She told me that she had been refused absolution from three different priests over the past ten years. Could I please help her? I was taken aback and asked her, "What do you think I can do?" The tears flowed as she told me about her three abortions. "Why won't they forgive me, I am sorry for those abortions"? I knew from experience that there is always more to the story. I personally have brought women to priest and waited outside in the church while they went to confession. The glow on their faces when they came out told me they had made peace with God. I knew by the glow on their faces that they had received absolution. It was always such a wonderful feeling that I was doing something for them and God. Her's had to be a serious reason why this woman was being denied absolution.

I gently questioned her and a life of promiscuity, adultery poured from her. A life style she was not ready to give up. I asked the Holy Spirit to use me to say the words she needed to hear to be healed. By the third meeting she agreed she could no longer live that way. I told her, "Remember, you can fool me and you can fool the priest to get absolution, but you cannot fool God. You must be sincere in what you say in the confessional."

Since John and I were leaving the next morning I gave her a hug and wished her well, I gave her my address and asked her to keep in touch.

A year later I got a letter telling me that when she returned home she lived separately from her boyfriend until they could get married. Twenty- two members of her family were brought back into the church. That had to be a God incident.

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That evening while going to Church, I looked towards Mt. Krizevac. It was bathed in a red light. I showed John. He said that it must be the sun reflecting on it. When we came out of Church the red light was still there. I showed John again and this time he said, "It must be a spotlight up there." To which I said, "But there is no electricity up there. By this time other members of the group were joining us. Half of them could see the light while the rest could not. When Father looked he could see it, but had the same objections as John. All of a sudden he said wait for me here. He took off and returned about twenty minutes later and said, "I just spoke with Father Barbaric, the pastor of St. James. He said if you see a red light up there it is not of human origin. There is no way to produce a light of that magnitude on the mountain. That explains why some see it and others don't.

It is a sign for some of the pilgrims, and not meant for everyone. I was ecstatic I had prayed for such a sign not for myself but for John. That to me was a "God" incident.

The next morning John and I flew out of Split, Croatia to Zurich, Switzerland; from there we took the train to Geneva, it was a beautiful day. We had a breathtaking, panoramic view of the Alps, lakes, and vineyards. We picked-up a rental car and headed for France.

Our first shrine was in Paray-le-Monial, where in 1685, Margaret Mary, a young Ursuline nun, had visions of our Lord asking her to promote a devotion to His sacred Heart. From the time I could read I had been saying a novena to the Sacred Heart. I was looking forward to that! We arrived there about eleven o'clock. Everything was locked up. We were traveling off-season and we were to meet up with this problem over and over again. We saw a sign that said they would open at two p.m. We decided to go for lunch and discuss if we would be able to wait. We had an itinerary to meet. The travel agency had given us plenty of time for each stop we had wanted to make, however a 3-4 hour delay would put us late in arriving at our hotel that night. After lunch we decided to walk the grounds we saw a lone nun walking towards the chapel. We caught up to her and for some reason she had come in early to get work done at the gift store. She let us into the chapel and there before me was a mural of the picture of our Lord appearing to St. Margaret Mary. It was the same picture that was on my novena booklet. I was in awe that I was standing at the very sight where it had taken place. That was a blessing.

Before we left on our trip, John and our daughter Joline had discussed the fact that we would be in the area of the wine cellars of Don Perigon. He was the monk that had discovered the art of making champagne. John and Joline shared a love for good wine and its history. It was a must see on our trip. We stopped at a restaurant on the way there. While chatting with the waiter we told him of our plans. He said that he was a student in culinary arts and that one of his goals was to visit the place, but that the company who had bought it had closed it for renovations and nobody but nobody was allowed in. We felt disappointed but decided to visit the wine company that had bought it and find out for ourselves. Sure enough what the waiter had said was true. The place was closed to everybody.

Since we had the address of the place we decided to at least drive by. As we were driving by John saw that one of the side gates was opened. So he drove into the courtyard. There stood the chapel with all the doors wide open and carpenters going in and out. We asked if we could walk the grounds and their answer was sure and you can come into the chapel and look at the wine cellars too if you like. They gave us some old tour booklets and said to take our time and enjoy. John was on cloud nine. As I walked around the chapel I came upon a relic holder. A plaque on it said, "Here lies the bones of Saint Helen of the Holy Cross." A leaflet on a stand next to the relic holder gave the story of St Helen, mother of St, Constantine, who had found the true cross. I knelt there in prayer and cried at the

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wonderful blessing we had just been given.

We continued our journey. Our subsequent stops to see St. Bernadette at Nevers; St. Therese at Lisieux; Leo Dupont, better known as, the Holy Man of Tours; the Cure D'Ars; all brought similar obstacles that were removed as though an angel was going in front of us to let us in. Each time, we were given preferential treatment. I can see this happening one time or maybe twice, but every time? Wow!

When we left the Basilica at D'Ars we headed for Grenoble. John said I am just about shrined out. I hope you don't mind if we just spend three days there resting and taking in the sights.

Grenoble is a small city nestled in the Alps in the southeastern part of France. It was further made famous by having hosted the Winter Olympic a few years prior. Since we had visited one, sometimes two shrines every day for the past two and a half weeks I thought his request was a reasonable on his part since he was more interest in history and went to the shrines to please me. What John was unaware of was the fact that I had done a lot of research on the Shrine of La Salette. I knew that it was near Grenoble, but that was as far as I could go.

As we traveled through France I would look through the pamphlet racks at the tourist centers and never was able to find anything on La Salette. When we arrived at Grenoble, I looked through the pamphlet racks while John was registering us in. There was nothing on La Salette. In silent prayer I said, "Blessed mother I promised John I would not ask to visit another shrine. If you want us to go there you will have to make it happen." After we were in our room John said, "While your getting thing settled I am going downstairs to see what is available for sight seeing." This was our usual pattern. About an hour later he came back all excited. He said, "Boy do they have some nice things to see." He started showing me folders on restaurants; museums; gondola rides up the mountain; and a whole array of touristy stuff to do. Then he said, " Oh here is something you might be interested in and the funny part about this is the person helping me can't understand what is was doing in her book. It was the only one she had. When I told her you might be interested in it, she gave it to me." There before me was a pamphlet of La Salette. I said, "But you told me you didn't want to see another shrine, and I agreed." With a grin on his face he said, "Yah but this one looks interesting." I knew full well that he was doing this for me again.

It was 90 kilometers, about fifty miles from Grenoble, so we planned it for the last day there and we did all the local stuff first. As soon as we left Grenoble, we found ourselves on narrow twisting roads. We finally came to the foot of a huge mountain. I said to John as I looked at the road going up that mountain. "I'm glad we are not going up there!" Well, that is exactly where we went. What was really scary was there were no guardrails!

It took us four hours to travel the fifty miles from Grenoble to the shrine. Everything was breathtaking, but it was so cold as we visited the site of the apparitions that we did not visit the grounds. When we went into the Basilica, we were told the last Mass of the season would start within the hour and if we wanted any books we should get them right away at the gift shop as they were closing for the season. We bought a couple of books and then we were led into a chapel with floor to ceiling glass windows on three sides. It was difficult to concentrate on the Mass.

The lush green mountain meadows were dotted with tiny yellow flowers. The sky was an incredible

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shade of blue. Clouds rolled in with snow squalls on one side while the sun shone on the other side and then in a few minutes the reverse was true. The Mass was in French as was expected.

I had let my thoughts run over the past three weeks and in prayer I asked, "Blessed Mother, please ask Jesus to let me know what he wants from me. I have tried so hard to do his work, working with the women who have had abortions and teaching adult Ed, but it seems like the devil is winning." I was brought out of my thoughts when the priest said, "For our closing hymn please open the hymnals to page so and so and we will sing." There in English in big bold letters was the title: "Go And Teach My People." Tears ran down my cheeks. Why in this deep French territory would they sing an English hymn with that title? Was it coincident or God incident?

When we got outside it was raining and it was close to freezing. We debated if we should risk going down the curvy mountain road that might be icy with no guardrails or wait for a better day. Who knew when that would be? If we stayed we would miss our connections and possibly our flight home. We decide to risk it. John drove and I prayed. We made it down the mountain without incident.

Upon our return to the states, I was eager to see Father Rick, our pastor, to tell him of all that had happened. Before I could say anything to him, he said, "Eva, I have good news for you. I received a letter from the bishop in answer to the letter you sent him a year ago. It would seem that a friend of Pat, the woman you gave the letter to, went to Ms. Cline for help with an unwanted pregnancy and Ms Cline made arrangement for an abortion. Pat remembered your letter. She brought it to the bishop telling him the whole story. Ms. Cline was history. That, to me, was a mini miracle! I was called to see if I would be interested in getting certified and working with the new head of the Rachel Program, which of course, I did.

As I look back on some of these events that have happened in my life I see where God has always answered my prayers. It was not always how or when I wanted it done, but I always got an answer. I am beginning to see our life journey as preparation for the final exams. I hope I have a lot of traveling to do because I sure as heck am not ready to go yet and have many lessons to learn.

Wednesday and Thursday, February the 22nd and 23rd

These two days were "ok", but I had very low energy.

Friday, February 24th

I feel more like myself today. The Dents are coming today. I am looking forward to their visit.

Saturday, February 25th

Best day in two weeks. Kathy (our neighbor) called and wants us to go for supper so I can get out of the house. That will be nice.

Sunday, February.26th

I feel good but there is so much flu going around John wanted me to stay home from church this morning.

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I am feeling fine.

Monday, February. 27th

I go to church to receive Holy Eucharist before going for my chemo treatments. This morning I called Father Mike and told him I was going for my chemo session at ten o'clock. I asked him if I could go to confession. After we spoke for a few minutes. I told him I thought that God was trying to teach me how to trust him. Lent was my favorite time of the year. For many years attending daily Mass and getting the church ready as both sacristan and head decorator kept me involved in the liturgy. I felt very close to God. This year all of that has been taken away. I told Father Mike I used to tell God what I was going to do. Now he is showing me I have to do things his way. Oh how difficult it is to accept. He chuckled and said, "Knowing you as I do, you are properly still telling him how things should be done and that you have everything under control."

I went for my fourth and last chemo of the first half. To me this is a milestone. I met with Dr. Erickson. She told me what the next set of treatment would be and what side effects I might experience.

E-mail up date

Hey, Hey, Hey, I am at the half way mark in my chemo sessions! Next time they are going to switch me to a different kind of chemo. I hope my body can tolerate it.

The good news is my arm is just about back to normal. The only time I feel anything is when I reach way over my head. My assrhoids, (my nick name for hemorrhoids) not to be mistaken for asteroids, although mine felt like they were the size of one and as hot as one making an entry into the hemisphere, are gone completely.

This past week I have received so many cards, books, hats and food, from friends and family that it is hard for me to absorb all the kindness extended to me even after three months into this disease. Anne, my youngest daughter, has knitted me the cutest hat out of silk yarn so that my head won't sweat. It is blue and I love it. It is so light, I forget I have it on. Neighbors have also brought hats in for me to be able to switch every so often. What a help they are.

What do I have to look forward to this week? If the pattern runs true to form I will have 3-4 good days. Then the sores in my mouth will make me feel like a fire breathing dragon lady. Then the gas attacks. Oh, that is so painful! The gas has to be eliminated.

I use Gas-X and then I start walking, all the while burping and passing gas. The first time this happened John was startled by the loud sounds resounding off the walls. I guessed he never thought his darling had it in her. I sounded like a cross between a drunken sailor and an old nag. Anne called during one of these attacks. I grabbed the portable and kept walking. All of a sudden she said, "Mom I HEARD that!" Lesson well learned. Do not walk and talk at the same time during one of these episodes. I also learned that I am a "creature of habit": When I get into the shower I reach for the shampoo, pump myself a handful and proceed to polish my bald headed dome.

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I thought I would share with you a poem I wrote for a friend A few years ago:

Cancer

*A mere facsimile of its self
Stands a mighty oak tree
Dead branches and leaves scattered
Where cool shade used to be*

*Infinitesimal tunnels they burrowed
Tiny parasites invisible to the eye
A cancer begins to grow
These mites will make the giant die*

*Hurricanes failed to blow it down
Its massive trunk standing tall
It wore its leafy canopy like a crown
Green in summer, gold in the fall*

*Families picnicked in its shade
Lovers carved initials in its bark
In the pages of their lives
The old oak tree left its mark*

*Like the mighty oak
I too had been strong
Cancer threaten my life
God, what have I done wrong?
A quiet moment to meditate
My life passed in review
What had I accomplished?
What had I failed to do?*

*A life full of choices
Some not so good
I placed my trust in God
I knew He understood*

*With care and medication
My life has been renewed
Cancer is not the end
Life is just a preview*

Every moment is a gift

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*My life has been enhanced
Looking at life differently
Since given another chance*

*Oaks dotting the landscape
From fallen acorns they grow
It began with the majestic oak
How many we'll never know*

*We are all part of God's creation
Whatever role we played
But my soul will live forever
For in his image I was made*

Eva Labonte
July 23, 2001

Tuesday, February 27th

I went for my shots by myself. I then went and picked up a few groceries and came home. I cooked up a storm. I prepared all kinds of meals for the freezer in case I have another bad week like I did last time. That worked out just fine. Very Good Day!

Wednesday, March 1st

I had a couple of hours of pain during the night but today I feel good. I got my ironing done and the cleaning upstairs done. I am taking a break and hope to wash some floors.

Last night I remembered how, when I was a little girl at home on the farm, I would fall down, Dad, slightly over six feet, covered with muscles from years of hard farm work, would scoop me up in his arms and say, "we have to find out who did this to my little girl and give him two black eyes." I would say, "But daddy I fell down." Then he would say, "You did this to my little girl! And we would tussle as he would try to take my tiny hands away from my face as I was hiding my eyes so he could not give me a 'black eye'"

I do a lot of thinking in those wee hours of the morning when sleep evades me. My journey of life has led me to areas of faith that is leading me today. I can see now how certain events have led me to the person I am today.

I was thinking of how, when I applied to train for the Rachel Program, I was such a self- righteous witch. I went there to work as a volunteer who was going to teach those women how wrong their choices had been. The training program lmocked that notion out off my head real quick like. Our job was not to teach them anything. We were there to give support in their troubled times. I learned the true meaning of compassion.

My first client had her first abortion the day after her sixteenth birthday. Her mother had taken her to the abortion clinic. Another client didn't know if her father or her brother was the father of her child.

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Her father is the one who took her to the abortion clinic. I had a few who had three and four abortions. They all had one thing in common. They were all told that the fetus was only a "bunch of cells". Yet, they could not forget the children that they had aborted.

The scary ones, were the ones I got calls from who said they wanted to commit suicide. Those were tough. I was always so afraid to lose one of them. Thank God I never did.

I would always pray to the Holy Spirit to help me say the right things to them before working with them. Many had been to councilors for years without getting any relief from their pain. When they learned to renew their relationship with God, to believe in his mercy and accept his forgiveness, then they learned to forgive themselves. The healing process could then begin.

When we listen to these poor suffering women who have been duped by the media and their doctors, our heart aches. Abortionist become rich not only by performing all the abortions but by selling the by-products of these heinous killing of innocent unborn babies. The stories we hear are horrendous, but since we are sworn to secrecy to protect the rights of the women we are working with, we cannot divulge anything that we hear.

God took one woman, Mary, and kept her immaculate from the moment of her conception. He raised her higher than any of his creatures, even higher than the angels.

He made her womb a tabernacle for His Word. In Mary's womb the Word Incarnate enrobed itself with her flesh and became Man. Jesus took on our humanity to redeem us. Her womb became the symbol of life, a safe haven for new life. God the Father is Spirit. Our soul is spirit created in the image of God and will live forever. We as human beings reproduce flesh, but the soul is a gift from God at the moment of conception. We did not create the soul, therefore should not destroy that soul's body before birth. Only if you do not believe in God can abortion make sense.

I remember one very sad case. This girl was just a teen when she had her first abortion. She went on to finish school, got married and had two children. When she got pregnant for the third time, she thought they could not afford another child at that time and told her husband she wanted an abortion. He told her it was her decision to make.

She made an appointment at the clinic and went for the dilation. Then, she had a change of heart. She told the doctor she changed her mind and wanted to keep the baby. He told her that was ok but since he had started the procedure she had to pay him seven hundred dollars. She said she did not have that kind of money, so he told her that either she halt the abortion and let the insurance pay for it or give him the cash to keep her baby. She pleaded with him to no avail. She went through with it.

That night she had stomach cramps and started bleeding. She had twins and the doctor never saw the second baby. She lost that baby. The baby was large enough for them to see its arms, torso, legs and head. The couple realized it was not just a bunch of cells.

She now had aborted three babies. The pain this couple went through was unbelievable.

I "walked" with these women for many years. Held them as they cried, encouraged them to hang in there when they wanted to end it all by suicide, hugged them when they made a breakthrough. It has

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been the most rewarding work I have ever done.

In the Bible, all sex outside of marriage is considered illicit. Fornication, adultery, and homosexual sex are considered intrinsically evil. Today, the arts, media, ACLU all portray this as normal and pleasurable. Lust, enjoy, destroy is the new code of living. It would seem the mother's womb, instead of the safe haven it was meant to be, has become a tomb for so many unborn. Since it is so unnatural to nature and natural law it has sent many women to the verge of suicide. Some are inconsolable. Some heal after much pain. Many have hardened their hearts to the fact that they have killed their own child but somewhere down the road it will hit them hard. I have seen cases where it was as much as forty years before they realize the unrest they felt was due to the abortion they had had. God is a God of mercy and no matter what your sin is, if you sincerely repent you will be saved.

I cannot believe God had chosen me to witness his great mercy for these poor suffering souls, and to be part of their healing. It has humbled me more than anything I have experienced.

Thursday, March 2nd and Friday, March 3rd

I had two good days. Joline came Friday and we had a good visit.

Saturday, March 4th

I was awake with pain most of the night. Saturday morning I went back to bed and slept most of the day with chills and sweat.

Sunday, March 5th

This is the first week of lent. This was usually a time where I tried to focus on my spirituality. I was very involved with the liturgy, and decorations at church. I tried to pray and meditate and to change my life for the better during this time of year. Today I had to stay home because of my chemo "after effects" acting up. I sat in front of the TV to watch the Mass on EWTN and fell asleep. I woke up when Mass was nearly over. I feel I have been reduce to a spiritual nothing. I have to trust that God has permitted this to happen for a reason. St. Augustine said something to the effect that God created us for himself and our souls would be restless until we rest in God.

God in His infinite knowledge knows my being, better than I know myself. He knows the groaning of my soul and the suffering of not being close to him at this point. My inability to concentrate on my prayers is something I cannot seem to overcome. He knows the suffering I have in my heart because of some family member's denial of sin, and the inability to forgive has pushed them away from God. I offer my suffering for their conversion back to God.

Archbishop Fulton J Sheen said of prayer; "People use prayer like pilots use a parachute. When flying, they keep one with them at all times. They are there if they need them but hope that because of their expertise they will never need them."

Monday, March 6th

Today started out well but ended with me in tears from pain. I had a good visit with Pauline, my oldest

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daughter, and I sent her home with home made bread, soup, liver pate, and a few things from the freezer. She is doing well. I baked bread, made pea soup and had a good all around day until evening. Oh well I guess that is to be expected.

Tuesday, March 7th,

Morning started awful! Then like as if by magic I started feeling better and so far I am doing well.

Wednesday, March 8th

During the night I woke up with my mouth feeling like it was on fire. I had all I could do to swallow pain meds. In the morning I went to the hospital and they gave me a rinse to take away some of the pain. When the nurse looked in my mouth she said I had a lot of ulcers but none were bleeding so that was good news. My sores were not yet at a stage where they would consider using the stronger medication. All I could think of was, "You mean it gets worse than this?"

I stopped to reflect on how many children are suffering faiths worst than death. There are so many people every day who are in constant excruciating pain. There has to be a reason for God to permit this kind of suffering. I have to remind myself that he permitted His only son to suffer torture and crucifixion. I have to learn to trust that there is a purpose for my suffering and so I offer it to God in prayer.

Thursday, March 9th

I had a fitful night but slept late and feel rested. I did my mile and a half walk this morning, while I felt good. I am doing housework at a leisurely pace.

I was thinking about something that happened a few weeks ago in the lab at the hospital. The lab technician asked me my date of birth. I told him, September 12, 1935. He said, "You are seventy?" To which I replied in the affirmative. The next question out of his mouth was, "Are you pregnant or think you might be pregnant?" My answer was, "I haven't had a period for a while and every time that happened I was pregnant. I guess there is that possibility." The Lab technician looked up at me, startled, and said, "I'll take that as a sarcastic no." I said, "Well you have that one right." The nurse was bent in two laughing. She said, "By law, we have to ask this question, but this is the best answer I have heard so far."

Friday, March 10th

I developed a yeast infection. Ouch! Joline is on her way here and will pick up a prescription for me at the pharmacy. When she got to the pharmacy, at about 10 a.m., they told her the prescription was not ready. The prescription was called in by the hospital at about 7:30 a.m. They told her it would be another three hours before they could get to it.

Four hours later, they said it would take three or four more hours before they would get to it and since they would be closed by then who knows when I would have been able to get my prescription. We

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went elsewhere. What has happened to customer service and the needs of a patient? Upon inquiry, it appears they were having personnel problems.

When I wake up during the night and can't get back to sleep, I come downstairs to write or to reflect on events that happened in the past. I try to understand the meaning of my life.

I have blue eyes that change from very light blue to a deep blue-green. I also have what I call negative/positive vision. If I look intensely at an object or person for a few seconds, when I close my eyes, I will see the negative of what I was looking at. If the person is dressed in red I will see that person in green. I can also see the "electric aura" that surrounds everyone. I remember the first time I spoke of this in a group of people, they looked at me as though I had two heads. I thought everyone could see it. Fortunately for me there happened to be an eye doctor in the group who explained that this was not as unusual as people think, and that people like me take it for granted, which of course, is what I had done.

I am a Eucharistic Minister and when Father Rick was unable to put the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance for adoration, he would ask me to do it. I always took this to be quite an honor and felt very humbled by it. We have an exceptionally beautiful monstrance at Saint Joseph. It seems to bring out the beauty of the Host. One morning, I placed the Host in the monstrance and, as was my custom, I would back away and kneel in adoration looking at the beauty of it all. I closed my eyes and was startled to see the Host surrounded with blood and it was dripping on the sides. I opened my eyes and looked at the Host in the monstrance, everything was normal. I closed my eyes again and the whole scenario repeated itself. Shaken, I got up and went to sit in pew to pray.

Though I looked at it the same way over and over again, the scene was never repeated. I know I did not imagine it. It was too vivid. Even to this day I can mentally visualize what I saw. I have no idea what it meant nor can I explain it.

I cannot say how often I was surprised when I closed my eyes and saw an odd shape. I would open my eyes to see something in my line of vision that my eyes had absorbed but I had not done so mentally.

Father C came to visit. I was pleased to have him over. He has been a good friend of the family for a long time.

Joline, Eric and family came over. It was a good day.

Monday, March 13th

Today I started my first series of Taxol Chemo. I started by going to church to receive communion. I asked God to help me accept whatever he wanted of me and prayed that all would go well.

My meeting with Dr. Erickson went well. She is pleased with my progress. My blood work indicated that I was ready to start phase two. The girl next to me in the treatment room was trying an alternative to Taxol. She had had a bad reaction to Taxol the week before. She had a bad reaction to the new alternative also. We all felt bad for her. She was so disappointed. This will delay her progress. It also made me more anxious. But all went well and I did not have a reaction at all.

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With the first series of chemo the effects were more difficult for the first week but once gone they were done and finished with. With this series (Taxol) the side effects are not as hard on the body at first but can accumulate and be permanent.

Tuesday, March 14th

I had a good night sleep. I woke up once, but read for a while and then went back to a restful sleep. I woke up with a red blotchy face. Other than that, I am feeling good so far. During the day I developed a sharp pain in my stomach, apparently from the gel caps of the many Glutamine capsules I had to take. I was told to take them out of the gel caps and mix the powder with water.

Wednesday, March 15th

I had a very good nights sleep. I feel rested and my face is still puffy but the red rash is gone. We will see how the day develops.

As I was washing up this morning I could see the big changes that have taken place with my body. Last year at this time I was a sixty nine year old woman that, other than a painful knee, was very healthy. Less than a year later I have had four operations and the looks of my body has changed drastically. I have an artificial knee. I have a breast removed. I am temporarily bald, and certainly do not look my best. I had a difficult time associating the image in the mirror with me. It did not look like what I have always seen in the mirror before.

Wednesday evening: the pain is excruciating. Every joint, every muscle hurts. Tylenol doesn't touch it I fear it will be a rough night.

My mind is still the same. My body is nothing but a shell for my being. My soul, my mind, my intellect are what counts. My body will die but my being will live for eternity. When I was younger my looks were important to me. I chose my clothes with care and dyed my hair. I watched my weight. I wanted to look younger than I was. I still want to look my best, but somehow looks are not as important as they were. My focus now is to be the best that I can be.

I still have plans and though I know I will have to modify many of them, I plan to go on living. I have also looked at the possibility of death. Strangely that does not scare me. As I have been looking at my total journey through the years I realize that we are all on a path to death. If we believe in eternity with God that prospect is not scary but a welcome new beginning for our being. I firmly believe I will remain the same. My choices on earth will determine how I will live after death. I trust in God's unconditionally love and rely on His mercy to forgive the wrongs that I have done.

Thursday, March 16th

I had to take two kinds of pain meds and I barely got through the night.

Friday, March 17th

Today would have been my mother's birthday. For a long time, I thought I was Irish because my mother's birthday was on Saint Patrick's Day and she got so many cards wishing her a happy St.

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Patrick's Day or Irish Birthday. I prayed to Mom to help me through the night.

I had a very hard day. The pain traveled throughout my body. It has left me weak and discouraged. I went upstairs and cried. I dare not cry in front of John. He gets nervous and calls the doctor. It seems whenever I think it can't get worst something comes along and I hit a new low. It has to bottom out soon.

Saturday, March 18th

Mark brought me the host this morning, and that always helps me to feel better. The pain is less today but the fatigue lingers on. I tried to walk but did not have the energy to do so.

Sunday, March 19th

I went to Mass today and then we went out to breakfast with friends. It felt so good to have a bit of normality back into my life. One girl said that she wanted to make a pack with the others that they would all pray so that I would no longer have any pain. I said that I preferred that they pray that I would have the strength and the courage to endure whatever God sent me. I told them that I have offered all my pain for the souls in purgatory and for those who have no one to pray for them. Afterwards I felt kind of funny having told them that. It is the truth but I did not want to sound like a martyr.

One's faith is personal and often difficult to share.

After breakfast we went to Wal-Mart to get John some work shirts, then we went home. I went for my mile and a half walk. When I came back from my walk, I laid on the couch to rest and fell asleep. Pauline came over for supper with her friend and I let them do the dishes. I get tired so easily. Right now it is 8:30 and I am going to bed.

Monday, March 20th

I went to see Sally today and had lab work done. All seems to be in order. I told her I was not happy with not having been given pain meds to control the horrible pain on days 3, 4, and 5. She explained they never know with the first of any series of treatment how the chemo will affect a person. She told me I should have called the office and they would have given me something stronger to ease the pain. She did give me a new prescription for pain meds. The personnel at the center are very much in tune to our needs and do all they can to help us.

Tuesday, March 21st

I did a large ironing today, gave John a haircut and went for my walk. So far the day has been good.

Wednesday, March 22nd

I got a lot accomplished today. I can feel myself getting stronger. I have some side effects that are annoying, such as a dry cough, I drool at the corners of my mouth, and my nose is forever leaking. I had sores in my mouth and a yeast infection, but both are healing.

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I still "crash" easily. I had some of those back pains that tell me the white cells are coming back. I was talking to Anne when I felt myself getting very weak. Had all I could do to get myself ready for bed.

Thursday, March 23rd

The day has started well. I'm expecting Mark to bring me communion this morning He is working downstairs with John. They're building an oak cabinet. Eveiytime he comes up he brings the Host. It is so good to be able to receive. John and I bought him his Pix. We just got it today, he will be so happy to have one of his own.

I'm having minor back pains this mid-afternoon.

Nancy Leblanc came to see me yesterday. She gets a month's supply of reading material from my library whenever she comes. Two of her six children have had cancer. She has had it rough. She was asking me how cancer had changed my life.

I really have to ponder that question. I know what used to be important to me in the past is not the same as what is important to me now. Having had to watch my body change so fast has made me stop and really contemplate the use of the body in comparison to my intellect Our mind is something we change ourselves as we gain knowledge and wisdom. It is who we are. We form our faith, our actions, and our relationships by our intellect. We have full control over what we say or do. We have some control over our bodies by what we eat and exercise etc. I realized our body could be hit by sickness or disease over which we have no control. The only thing that we have control over is how we react to what is dealt to us.

Friday, March 24th

Friday morning I called the cancer office to tell them that I still had my yeast infection.

I was told that Dr. Erickson said for me to use Monistate Seven. Friday evening I felt pretty good so we went out to dinner. It was the first time I went out to eat in the evening since my operation on December twelfth. It felt good to be out of the house.

Before going to bed I applied the Monistat Seven suppository. I woke up at two o'clock in the morning in pain. My private parts felt like they were on fire. I called the doctors office and the doctor on call said the Monistat Seven should have helped if it was a yeast infection. There was not much she could do to help me over the phone without seeing me. She said it might not be a yeast infection but something else, so she suggested I go to the emergency room at CMMC. I was not too happy about that but had no choice at this point.

We arrived at the ER at about 3 a.m. and I was not seen until about 4:30 a.m. When the ER doctor came in he let me know that there were many sick patients that needed his attention. He was very brisk with me. I guess he thought a yeast infection didn't warrant his expertise or his time. I explained to him that I was on chemo and that one of the meds was giving me severe yeast infections. He told me I needed to give them a urine specimen. Then he came back with a nurse and said, "I will have to check to see if there is any redness." The nurse covered me with a sheet while I took of my pants and under garment. He motioned to the nurse to lift the sheet. He said in a surprised voice. "Oh my, I am not

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touching you." The nurse said, "My gosh doctor she is not red, she is raw!" The doctor's demeanor changed completely. He apologized over and over again. He sent the nurse for medication. I was not impressed. Anyone who has ever had a full-blown

yeast infection knows it's like having acid poured on your skin. To have a doctor poop- poop it before seeing my condition was upsetting. However, he seemed sympathetic from that point on.

Saturday, March 25th

Today is the Feast day of The Annunciation. Today is also the anniversary of my consecration to Mary. We went to Lewiston to get a new exercise bike and I went to church to receive the Eucharist. We came home and I felt good all day long. I did a lot of little odd jobs around the house. I am feeling stronger all the time

Sunday, March 26th

I went to church and sat in the balcony so as not to be near crowds. There as is a lot of flu going around. I would hate to catch a bug and miss my chemo treatment. It would delay the whole process. I am anxious to have this all over with. Father Mike came over to see me and heard my confession. That always lifts my spirits.

Monday, March 27th

I went for my Chemo this morning. I had a long meeting with Dr. Erickson. She checked out all my symptoms, problems, and made sure that everything was on track.

She is very thorough and I feel secure in her care.

When I went into the treatment room, I looked at the chair in the comer, it was taken and so I moved towards one against the outside wall. The lady sitting there said would you like this chair and I replied that I could take one by the wall. "Oh but I am leaving, I was just here for a few minutes visiting my husband and I will be leaving soon." she said.

I said, "In that case, thank you, I will accept your offer as the chairs against the wall get cold after a while, and since my chemo is a two to three hour session I appreciate the offer." She sat in the chair against the wall. After a few minutes she said, "you know it is chilly here, the cold seem to come right though the wall. I'm glad I don't have to sit here for three hours." I thank her again and we chatted for a few minutes before she left.

That conversation brought back to mind the first day I went into the treatment room some weeks before. I was told to go there with John so that a nurse could explain to us what I could expect the following week when I would start my treatments. She led us to the room and told us to sit down and she would be right back. John said that he would go to the rest room. I sat on the only chair that was empty and pulled up a stool for John. A woman sitting in a comer chair asked if that was my husband, and when I said that he was she told me that he was not allowed in the treatment room. She went on in

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great details to explain that only the patients were allowed in there. John returned just as the nurse came in to go over the procedures with us. Then John and I left.

The following week I returned and there, sitting in the corner chair, was the same woman. John came to see if I was all right and said he would return later. The woman gave me the same spiel about my husband not being allowed in the treatment room. It was then that I noticed that she was not a patient but was with her husband. I didn't say anything but noticed that every week she was always sitting in the corner chair when I got there.

On the third round of chemo one of the nurses said, "Oh my, all the chairs are full in both treatment rooms." Another nurse said, "Come with me." We went into the treatment room and the nurse said to the woman who was always in the corner chair, "You have to leave, this woman is a patient." I haven't seen her since.

Tuesday, March 28th

I went for my day-after shot today. My face is bloated and red.

I walked my two miles and did my ironing, washed my floors and cleaned the porch. I know the next three days may be rough so I am prepared to take it easy.

Wednesday, March 29th

Last night I had a small bowl of ice cream. Right after that I started having severe pains in my stomach. I did not sleep most of the night. My feet itched so much, I got up and rubbed them with skin lotion. I dozed off in the early morning. I got up and took a shower, rubbed my feet again with ointment and now they feel better.

Thursday, March 30th

I slept very well last night until four a.m. and then the pain woke me up. The pain meds helped but I couldn't fall back to sleep. This morning I went for my walk. It was so nice outside I hated to come back inside.

Last night Debby Beauchesne called to get pointers about the decorations for Holy Week. I helped her all I could over the phone. How I miss being there.

I remember when I first started to decorate at Holy Cross many years ago. I was only allowed to bring in the cut flowers. Even though I brought the flowers I was not allowed to help arrange them. I could watch and that was it. I remember thinking how can people do that to others who want to work for God. That was over thirty years ago. When I became in charge of decorating at Holy Cross I never turned any one away who wanted to help. Since then I have been in charge of decorating at three churches and on many church projects. I have never turned anyone away who wanted to volunteer their talents for the love of God. I have had the most wonderful experiences and have learned so much from people who have volunteered. Many of them made me see things I never would have thought of by myself.

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I love decorating the churches and found it challenging at times but always rewarding. I decorated Saint Peter and Paul for over twelve years and Laurette took over when I left. She refused to solicit the people like I had done. She was smart, I should have refused but I did what I was told to do. When I left SS Peter and Paul, we had a wonderful assortment of vases, tools, all manner of equipment and decorations to work with. When I started to work at Saint Joseph's Church it was like starting all over again. The big difference was I was now working for Father Rick. He was great to work for. The church made two collections a year to pay for the needed decorations materials.

Being both the head sacristan and the head decorator I was able to incorporate decoration and the liturgy. Father Rick had wonderful ideas. The volunteers loved working for him. We had a large pool of people to choose from. I felt sad that no matter how I tried to show that it was due to the talents of the many volunteers that the decorations were always spectacular; I was always given the credit. Whenever I could I would point out to Father and others, "So and so did this or that."

I prayed at the Tabernacle before starting any decorations. I offered my hands to God and told him to use me in any way He chose. I made up with prayer what I lacked in talent. How often I let pride take over only to fall flat on my face-I think God is showing me how little my accomplishments meant to him. These past few weeks I feel I have accomplished something by just making it through the day.

Thursday, March 30th

I had pains in my joints and the itching on my hands and feet just about drove me crazy. John rubbed my feet with Gold Bond ointment. That and the pain meds helped. I slept most of the night.

Friday, March 31st

I felt so good today I worked outside and cleaned two of my flowerbeds. WOW!

Saturday, April 1st

John went to a Home Show in Lewiston with Andre, and I stayed home to do odd jobs. I went outside and started to clean the crescent flowerbed. It is a good feeling to be able to do my own work. If all goes well I want to start washing my windows Monday.

Sunday, April 2nd

I went to Mass this morning. Chandra and Ben came up in the balcony to sit with me. Pauline was supposed to come for breakfast but canceled out because she overslept. Andre and Jennifer came with the Kids and Joline came with her children. I made them chocolate chip cookies and popcorn. They played well together. Joline brought me another book to read. She brought me a big bouquet of flowers and LOBSTER! Yum, Yum.

Monday, April 3rd

At four o'clock this morning I woke up with severe cramps in my left leg. I was saying "ow, ow ow." John jumped half way to the ceiling and said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I have cramps in my leg, can you rub it?" John rubbed it until the pain subsided. My legs ached all day. I changed my sheets, did the

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laundry and washed the windows on the porch. I went for my walk, and then I came home and crashed on my chair. I made supper and just vegetated the whole evening. All in all, it was a good day.

John messaged my leg before I went to bed.

Tuesday, April 4th

I suffered from my yeast infection again last night. This morning, it seems to be better.

If it acts up again I will call the office. My feet are semi-numb. I was told to expect that I might get neuropathy in my hands and feet, but it still worries me. I use my hands for delicate needlework. I would hate to lose the use of my hands. I also walk a lot so that is also a concern. I have a whole month to go. A lot can happen in a month.

Carol Cohen called from Montreal last night we talked for over an hour reminiscing about when we lived in Beaconsfield as neighbors. She is one year younger than I am but our kids are much older than hers. We spoke on the importance of friendship. I remember her as having a hard time because her husband left her on their tenth wedding anniversary. She came over crying because she had no food or money to buy anything. He told her to go to work and support herself and the children. I asked her if she had credit cards in both their names and when she said that she did. I told her go shopping and buy everything that she needed for the children for summer and to start school in the fall. I told her to buy everything that she could foresee needing in the next three or four months as that is how long it would take for the courts to settle on the child support and alimony issues. I told her to max out her cards if she had to. He would be equally as responsible for the cards as she was and the judge would probably side with her. I helped her sell furniture and the clothes her children had outgrown so she could have money for food. I had forgotten about that but I guess she had not.

Friends are important to me. I have always tried to choose people who are down to earth. People who laugh easily usually love life and enjoy other people.

Wednesday, April 5th

Yesterday I baked and cooked in the afternoon. I made onion soup and chocolate oatmeal cookies. Today, I did the spring-cleaning in the washroom and in the mudroom. After lunch John went for a walk with me. When we got home I laid on the couch for a while. My neck hurts from being in a propped up position.

Thursday, April 6th

I washed the windows and did the spring-cleaning in our bedroom. It took me most of the day. Joline took the furniture out after I had wiped it down. Then we quit and I went for my walk. Joline said I was walking faster than the last time. That is good to hear, I thought. After lunch, I oiled the bedroom floor and let it dry. John brought the furniture back in. I feel well but I know that my breathing is different. I had a few back pains telling me the white cells are coming back. Not serious, but annoying. I will take it easy the rest of the day.

Friday, April 7th

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I have a rash that is giving me some discomfort. I didn't sleep well last night because of it. I took some Advil and finally got some rest.

Judy Dent called and we talked for a while. The framework for their new house is up. They are so excited.

I finished the spring-cleaning upstairs. Pauline came for a visit and then I went for my walk. I think I overdid it. I am tired. I have the white cell back pain again. My joints are a bit sore.

Saturday, April 8th

It was cold today, so I did not do windows nor did I go for my walk. I felt well. We went shopping for the children's Easter baskets and went out to eat.

My rash bums whenever it gets wet.

Sunday, April 9th

I went to church today. It is Palm Sunday. I cannot believe it is Holy Week already. I love this time of the liturgical season. Holy Thursday is special. If I am feeling well I am going to try and attend Mass.

Monday, April 10th

Today I had my seventh chemo treatment. The Taxol seems easier than the first series. I came home and spent the afternoon doing housework and then in the evening, Faith and Carl Anderson came over for a short visit. It was Carl's first outing since he broke his leg. He managed the stairs pretty well with his crutches. We are both looking forward to July when all of this will be behind us.

Tuesday, April 11th

I went for my day-after-shot and visit with Sally. She did not like the fact that my yeast infection is hanging on. She thinks the rash is part of it and has doubled my meds for it.

I went down by myself because I wanted to do some errands. Everything went well but I was a bit tired when I got home. After lunch I went out to see John, he was working on a stone base for a new tool shed. I helped him level the line and then walked down to the rock pile. When I came back I could barely make it up the hill. I went into the house to rest and slept for almost two hours. I woke up and drank a small bottle of power water. That is when the pain hit me. I called to John to get me some pain meds. A few minutes later the gas in my stomach started. It took over an hour for it to subside. I ate a few crackers for supper. I don't dare have anything else. My feet itch like crazy and my right hand went numb for a while but seems to be alright now.

Wednesday, April 12th

This has been an unusual day. I don't feel well, but cannot pinpoint what is wrong. It is a "blah" day. I washed the four glass doors in the sunroom but had to quit because I didn't have the energy to do more. Anne and Joline both came to visit. That was really nice. Irene called to see how I was and to ask

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me about dahlias. She just bought a couple of packages of them and wanted to know when I planted them. I have them by the bushel basket from last year's garden. I told her to come and take all she wanted. Today was her eightieth birthday.

John touched me on the shoulder and by just touching me, it hurt. My feet itch, I am not digesting well. I think I will call it a day.

Thursday, April 13th

I got up late today. I was fatigued even before beginning the day. I had breakfast and rested, now I seem to feel better. My bones and muscles hurt, I don't think I will undertake too much today.

Here it is holy week and I don't feel I have done much spiritually.

By midmoming the pain came with a vengeance. This is day four and therefore right on target. I offered it up for the souls. I have done so little this lent that being able to offer this was a blessing. Mark said he would bring me the host after Mass tonight. I can't wait.

Friday, April 14th

It is Good Friday. I woke up at 4:45 AM, rolled over and went back to sleep. It seemed I woke up every fifteen or twenty minutes. I just could not stay awake or asleep for that matter. I was restless. I got up past seven thirty. I ate a very small breakfast, cleaned the dishes and sat in the chair trying to read the Passion of our Lord but had difficulty staying awake. At Quarter past eleven, Father Mike came to bring me Holy Communion. What a blessing that was! I am feeling much better now. The pain has subsided and my energy is coming back.

Saturday, April 15th

I have done my exercise and taken my walk. It started to rain almost as soon as I got home. I cleaned the freezer in the kitchen refrigerator. Little by little I am getting my work done. My joints hurt. I have taken some Advil and hope that the pain subsides pretty soon.

I felt better in the afternoon so we went out with the neighbors for supper. It was a fun evening.

Sunday, April 16th

Easter is here. I always feel down on Easter. Lent is over and I failed to take full advantage of the beautiful season of repentance. I could have done so much more. I had the time to meditate and didn't do much of that. I had the time to pray and didn't concentrate. I had the time to read but did very little of that also. I remember when I was very busy, I would say, if I ever I have the time I will do all those things. Well, this year I had the time and didn't do any of them. Time is not the issue. My "will" is weak.

The church is beautifully decorated. They did an outstanding job and I missed being there. For thirty years I was in charge at one church or another. People would ask,

"What are they going to do when you stop being the head decorator?" As I would leave one church to

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go to another, other people would take over. The churches were always well decorated after I left. Today, I got my answer, which I have known right a long.

Life goes on without you. Am I sad about the outcome? I am happy the people with whom I have worked over the years were able to do such a good job and hoped that I was able to instill in them a zeal for excellence. Oh, but how I miss being a part of it.

Today John and I are going to make the "tour" of our family. I made Easter baskets for the children. I hope they enjoy them.

Monday, April 17th

I had a full day! I did three loads of laundry, got all my dahlia bulbs in pots, with the help of Matthew and Christian, made them lunch and hot chocolate chip cookies for a snack, and took a shower. The shower had not been scrubbed down for some time so I did that. I always wipe my shower each time I use it so the soap scum does not build up fast.

I can't wait to get into my gardens. I have started to weed, but that is not like planting.

Tuesday, April 18th

My feet were burning so I soaked them and John massaged them before I went to bed. He saw a blister the size of a quarter below my big toe. I must have injured it while walking but my feet bum so badly all the time I never knew I had a blister. It was a rough night. My feet hurt and Advil did not even touch it. I finally went to sleep about three a.m. I did not go for a walk today to give the blister time to heal.

I am concerned about my feet. I called the office to let Rena, one of the nurses know what was going on with my feet.

Wednesday, April 19th

It is 3:00 a.m. and I cannot sleep. I took pain meds before going to bed so my feet don't hurt. Even though I don't feel nervous, it could be nerves that are keeping me awake. My mind seems to travel all over the place.

I feel like a spiritual drop out. This should be a time where I could be closer to God. I never question God's love for me. It is my love or lack of love for him that bothers me. If I truly loved him it would seem I could take this period of trial in my life with joy and use it as an example of faith for others. God who can see in the smallest corners of my heart can see who I am. I preach forgiveness but I am the first to get upset at an insult and feel justified to lash out or share the so-called injury with others, before I forgive. Is that true forgiveness? Get a couple of good punches in first. I doubt that's what God wants from us? When our children were growing up and got into a fight or disagreement with someone, I would tell them, "How they act is a reflection on them, how you react is a reflection on you." It is time I practice my own advice.

I have never been one to hold a grudge. It takes too much energy to feed hate and it gives the perpetrator too much power over me. If I give in to hate every time I think about what that person did

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I would be hurt all over again. It is so much easier to forget it and move on. God is the great equalizer.

I think God is using this difficult time to show me to accept what is being doled out, without fanfare. God sees though me like a pane of glass. It is time I look at myself in the mirror and let the true reflection be seen. I wonder, do I have the courage to do that?

Thursday, April 20th

I just came back from my daily walk. I love to walk in the backcountry roads. This past week, it took a concentrated effort on my part to get from point "A" to point "B." My feet hurt so I could not enjoy the beautiful nature all around me. I would tell myself, I can get to the telephone post, and then I would aim for the next post or a mailbox etc. When I reach the halfway mark I would say all I have to do now is get back home.

Yesterday and today my feet were better in the morning, but by nighttime they were burning again. I washed windows and did tons of laundry. I was on my feet most of the day. I imagine that has something to do with it.

Friday, April 21st

I got up and did the dusting and mopping upstairs before coming downstairs. It felt good to have my work started. Ah, but things went downhill from then on. The man to empty the septic tank came early and the hours reeked with the smell. The phone kept ringing off the hook. A woman was supposed to come at ten o'clock, never showed up until eleven o'clock.

After lunch I went for my walk and the black flies were out in force. And I saw my first snake of the season. Something you have to expect living in the country, but it is not my favorite creature.

My feet are slightly better today, still numb from the toes to the ball of my foot. But they don't bum as much today.

Saturday, April 22nd

I didn't sleep from midnight to 3:15 am. It makes for a very long night. My feet were burning and itching. I washed and rubbed them but nothing helped. This morning I am very tired. Today my feet feel a tad better and I was able to do my walk without too much effort.

I managed to do a couple of loads of laundry and my ironing. This afternoon I baked bread and made muffins. The bread came out light and fluffy. I have been making bread since I was eleven years old. I made twelve loafs every other day.

My muffins were a different story they never rose and were hard as bricks. I threw them out for the birds to peck at them. John said the poor things might never fly again. I fear he might report me to the Audubon Society for cruelty to birds.

Sunday, April 23rd

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I went to Mass and sat in a regular pew instead of in the balcony. This was the first time since I started chemo. Everyone I knew came over to welcome me back. It felt good to be back and to be made welcome.

We came home and I made breakfast, did the dishes and read the paper. I laid on the couch for a second and woke up an hour and a half later.

Joline came with her family. We celebrated Tessa's birthday. Joline brought me a bunch of pussy willows and a huge pink Hydrangea. She is forever bringing me things. I know it pleases her to do it but it's embarrassing. With a young family I know she could use the money for them instead.

I made the kids macaroni and cheese and steak subs for the men. We had strawberry shortcake for Tessa's birthday.

Sue came over and we had a long quiet talk. She is doing her masters in theology. She wants to become a counselor. She will be good at it. She has borrowed many of my books for research. I have given many of my research books to Mark.

Monday, April 24th

I went for my meeting with Dr Erickson and she decided that the side effects of the chemo was too severe and canceled my last chemo session. I was not too unhappy about that decision! My radiation treatments will start earlier, plus I will get rid of my port. Hey and a side benefit! I may have hair by the end of summer.

I walked around my flower bed and got a thrill every time I saw sprouts of a plant peeking out of the ground. If we did not have winter we would not experience the joys of watching nature returning to life. It is exciting to watch plants sprout and blossom before your eyes each in their own time, shape and color.

Sickness is much the same. A person who has never been ill or suffered severe pain, often take good health for granted. Some people who have never suffered may have only apathy for the suffering of others. While a person who has suffered, will have empathy from a person who has or is in pain. That of course, is not always the case. Most people in the health care profession can empathize with their patients suffering.

Tuesday, April 25h

We got up early this morning to go have breakfast with Bob and Judy Dent. I was feeling on top of the world. When we came home I started feeling shortness of breath. I kept sitting down but as soon as I started working or walking the shortness of breath returned. I took a long nap in the afternoon. I feel better but not a hundred percent better, but just "better."

I will be having my port removed on Monday.

Journey with Cancer--Phase 3

I didn't have my last chemo treatment because of the severity of the neuropathy in my feet. My toes are numb and the bottom of my feet burns like fire. One more treatment might have caused serious, permanent damage.

I went for my first meeting with the radiologist. As the doctor was explaining to me all the procedures of the radiation treatment, she mentioned that I was going to have extra radiation because the cancer had spread to the muscles. I said, "Back up a minute, I was never told that the cancer was in my muscles." She then proceeded to make an outline of my cancer from beginning to the present time. The cancer had spread into the muscles both under the arm and in the breast. I will have to have thirty-three radiation treatments instead of the usual twenty-five. This will put me at risk for radiation pneumonia and lymphedema. I still have an 85% chance of being cancer free after the treatments. If all goes well I should be done by the end of June. It was a shock to me to find out that the cancer cells had spread to the muscles but I have put it in God's hands. I only ask for the courage and strength to accept whatever comes.

I am feeling well, with the exception of my feet. When I am in my flower gardens my feet do not hurt at all! Amazing! John's pocketbook hurts when I go to the greenhouses. There is always some plant that would fit perfectly somewhere. John jokingly threatens to put me on a "plant budget", but after forty-eight years this May, I don't take that threat too seriously. I think he enjoys the flowers as much as I do.

I am catching up on a lot of odds and ends that I was not able to get done during the Chemo treatment period. I guess I cannot complain, I see so many that are much worse than I am. Thank you for your prayers, they have helped me more than you can imagine.

Friday. April 28th

I know why they call it "the golden years" after you've reached age fifty-five; It takes a ton of gold to pay for the doctor, hospital and treatment bills. Next month, I have to go for radiation every day (Monday through Friday) for 33 days plus the dentist, optometrist, and the orthopedic surgeon. I will be glad when all of this comes to an end.

I was disappointed to learn that the cancer had spilled over into the tissues. I wish they had told me everything at the time the cancer was discovered. It would have been easier to be told about it all at once rather than bit by bit over a period of time. When you think you have everything under control and then you learn there is a new twist to your illness, it's a letdown. I had to bring myself up to a better mindset after this unexpected setback.

I told my sister it was like being hit over the head with a two by four and when it stopped hurting you get hit again. After a while you want to yell "that is enough," but you have no choice in the matter.

If this cancer has taught me anything it is to trust in God. In a way, it has been a blessing because it has brought to light all that we have been taught as Catholics but we take for granted. I have to turn to my faith to get through this. I have so many people praying for me. I have been blessed in so many ways. I have been able to care for myself and have kept up with my household duties. That was good for my

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morale.

The chemo was rough, but doable. There are so many people who are much worse off than I am. I thank God for every minute. I am enjoying the "beauty" of living. It is difficult to explain how this has changed my outlook on the way I want to live the rest of my life.

My gardens are coming up beautifully! I feel so refreshed when I have been out looking at the new sprouts and shoots coming up from the ground. New Life! I never cease to be amazed at the beauty of God's nature.

Each day I pray and offer my suffering for those who have asked me for prayers, those who have no one to pray for them, the souls in purgatory and that God's will be done. I have put my trust completely in God. When things are rough I ask the souls to help me and they have never let me down. Family and friends have surrounded me with all kinds of support.

This cancer trip has caused some very different, and sometimes funny, experiences. We had some friends visiting and when they were leaving I accompanied them to the door and we stood on the patio talking for a few minutes. As a gust of wind came, I quickly put my hand up to hold my hat on my head. The wind inverted my hat over my hand and I stood there with my baldhead shining in the sun while the hat neatly covered my hand.

I have now sewn elastic bands in the back of a couple of hats so that they stay on my head even in the wind.

This week, John and I celebrated our forty-eighth wedding anniversary. We decided to go out for dinner. I was wearing my regular bra. Most days, I do not wear the prosthesis because it is cumbersome. I have special bras with pockets that hold the foam form in place. I decided to just slip the form in my regular bra. We had a nice time and the meal was superb. It was chilly in the restaurant so I kept my jacket on.

When we got home we had company. We sat in the sunroom and started to talk when I said out loud, "What the heck is this?" My foam form had worked its way out of my bra and was "peeking" out of my blouse. They asked me what was the matter and I said, "Oh my false boob wants to come out" all while I pushed it back in where it belonged. Everyone laughed and teased me about it.

Spencer made his First Communion and Confirmation last Sunday. I dressed up for the occasion. But when it came time to put on my shoes, I knew that with the neuropathy I would be in trouble with heels. So, off I went with a pair of LL Bean Clogs.

Tomorrow, May 9, I'm going to my second pre-radiation visit and Wednesday I start my radiation treatment.

Today, I planted twenty new perennials. I wanted to be sure they got in before I started my treatments. My dahlia bulbs are all growing in pots at this time. John said he would help me plant them if I couldn't do it. What a sweetheart, and after 48 years! Wow!

Friday, May 12th

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Today, the "neighborhood girls" went out to celebrate Kathy Additon's Birthday. We were all chatting away having a good time when Lois Hathaway got up and picked up a large parcel. Kathy is always doing nice things for everyone so I thought that they had chipped in to give her something. Was I ever surprised when she put the package in my lap! They had gotten together and made me a quilt. I was shocked, dumbfounded, and overwhelmed all at the same time. They have all done so much for me as individuals and as a group. I just couldn't believe they had done this for me.

The quilt pattern is a large star in the center, which represents me, with sixteen small stars around the border, one for each of the girls who were part of my support group. On the back there is a square on which each girl wrote a message to me. Every time I read them it makes me want to cry. What a wonderful group of friends we have.

Friday, May 19th

I finished my second week of radiation. I don't have any side effects as yet. They keep telling me I will have blisters from radiation bums. I am trying to get as much of my garden work done before that comes along.

My hair is nothing more than fuzz at this time, so white that I still look perfectly bald. I swear if I don't get hair pretty soon I am going to take colored markers and color my fuzz different colors and go around with a spotted head. Right now, what bothers me the most is the rash on my head caused by the neuropathy? It itches to the point of driving me nuts.

I sent an e-mail to Sister Laura Filipas Hi Sister Laura:

The flooding is mostly at the very southern part of the state. We live in the south central part of Maine. We also live up on a hill. I would say we're about 250 feet above the river. It is neat being that close to the river and not have to worry about flooding.

I got the anointing of the sick this morning. The radiation is going well so far but the neuropathy is not improving at all, it has caused a rash on my head and groin that itches like crazy. The burning in my feet is not as bad as it has been but the pain is now going up my legs. I feel this more during the night.

I went for an eye examination and the doctor said I have lost a lot of my vision and it will not come back. The chemo has really done a job on my body. But it is an old body and I have no children to care for, just myself and John, so God was good in the fact that I think I can handle it ok at this point in my life.

I'm not looking forward to the next few weeks of radiation as they say I most probably will suffer bums and blistering under my arm. Oh well, I might as well empty purgatory. The only thing is, it keeps filling up again. Dam! Maybe it's my own purgatory I am working on, who knows.

Eva

I am one third of the way through my radiation, and I am feeling fine. The doctor thinks my

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"numbers", whatever they are, are very good.

The nurse was writing down all that happened to me medically this week. She asked about the itching and wanted to know if the medication they had given me was working. Then she looked at my nails. I have one toenail that is almost falling off and I told her that freaked John out to see that. She asked me if he was one that got weak in the knees at the sight of blood. When I told her that he was she said, "My husband is a big strapping guy and he's the same way. It must be a man thing." Just as she was saying that the door opened and Dr. Mandell came in. She asked, "Were you two talking about, men?" I replied, "Oh I was just telling her how I have to chase them away all the time, it is so tiring." She cracked up. I said, "She is laughing at me. She does not believe me." She quickly replied, "Oh no, I am not laughing at you, I am simply reminiscing." To which we all had a good laugh.

Saturday, May 20.

I have been thinking over what Dr. Erickson asked me a few weeks ago about the possibility of having my journal on my cancer journey published. I have mixed feelings about this, and so I thought I would write to three friends, namely, my niece, Theresa, and two friends, Janet Callahan and Sister Laura Filipas for their opinion. The following is the e-mail I sent to my niece after she read my letter:

Dear Theresa:

Thank you for taking the time to read my journal and for being candid with me. I sent it to two other people, a friend who works with the church, Janet Callahan and Sister Laura Filipas, a nun who teaches adult education in Illinois. Their opinion was pretty much the same as what you said.

I truly believe that our daily life prepares us for the greater sacrifices God wants from us as we near the last miles of our journey on earth. We must take the time to listen to what He is trying to teach us along the way. I am comfortable sharing with you God's interactions with me, and for that matter, all of us, because I know you understand how God works through us. I do not feel like a martyr, nor did I even when I was in pain. I felt blessed that I was permitted to share his love through suffering for the souls. Strange as it may sound, whenever I offered my pain to God for the souls I felt so at peace. It did not take the pain away but made it more bearable.

I know the last few weeks of radiation are going to be hard but I also know God will be with me. I also know the support I have from everyone helps. I shy away from having my journal on this published for fear some people might mistake my accepting what God wants from me, and thinking I am better than who I truly am. It's one thing to share your feelings with someone you know that shares your faith, but it's altogether another thing to have strangers who have a different view or lesser view on faith read about my own struggles with this. It is difficult to tell how much God loves us and how much we love God without "coming across" as putting on a show of being "holier-than-thou." Do you understand what I am trying to say?

If I thought for one second it would help someone, I would let them read it in a heartbeat. I have met so many people in the treatment rooms who could benefit by getting closer to God. All I hear from them is what the church has done wrong. It breaks my heart. I have tried to tell them they are the church and the priests are human just like they are, but they blame all their pain on the church-never do they look at their own actions.

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Thanks again I will have to think about this some more.

Aunt Eva

Memorial Day weekend: May 27-29

It is Memorial Day weekend and I have just finished planting my gardens. It feels good, now I have to keep them weed-free.

Last week a woman that I met when taking chemo treatments came to visit. She was originally from Germany. She told me that when she was just a toddler, the Russian soldiers came to occupy her homeland. They searched her parent's home and broke anything of value they could not take with them. Her mother had buried the family heirlooms, such as the china, silverware, and jewelry in the backyard. The soldiers would thrust their bayonets into the ground searching for such treasures. They found the china and proceeded to stomp on it to break it. Five pieces survived the trampling. She mourns the lost of these family heirlooms by such senseless destruction.

Shortly after her visit, I was relating this story to a friend, who said " It is difficult to have sympathy for such a small matter when her nation was responsible for such horrific crimes against humanity."

I pondered on that for a long time. First, my friend from Germany was too young to know about the war crimes of her people at that time. I am sure the school history books in Germany view Hitler's action much different than we do. They most likely justify his actions to some degree. Even so, if the Russian soldiers had been kind instead of destroying out of hatred, imagine how different her story would be. Forgiveness would have broken the chains of hate.

I also thought of what she had lost in the terms of material things. The china that was broken is listed among the most expensive china ever made. It was indeed a senseless act. However their lives were spared.

After the war, many of her countrymen were killed as easily and senselessly as the china was broken. Her family lived in West Berlin and they were in constant fear for their family who lived in East Berlin. I am sure her relatives living under the communist rule would have readily given up all their earthly possessions to escape their plight

Sometime during my illness, I lost a rosary that had been given to me by a friend. I loved that rosary. Engraved on the larger beads were all four of the "mysteries" for that decade. I carried it with me everywhere. When I realized it was missing, I searched everywhere, but to no avail. It is not to be found.

I loved shoes. I had a pair of shoes to match every color outfit. I had foot surgery and can no longer wear high heel shoes. I was proud of having nice nails. Now my nails have ridges and they split so I have to keep them trimmed very short. The list goes on. It seems that many things (material) that I have held dear has been taken from me. It seems that God is trying to tell me that material things are not what counts in life. But I still get attached to things, such as the rosary.

What I learned from that is the prayers said from the heart on wooden beads are more beneficial than

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mumbling dozens of distracted prayers on a beautiful set of beads. It is the quality of the prayer, not the value of the rosary that count. But! But! But! I keep thinking quality prayers on a nice rosary wouldn't hurt. I have a feeling I am going to get hit on the side of the head again.

My shoulder has been hurting me at night. I don't know if it is a side effect of radiation or from overuse of my arm while doing my gardens, or maybe a little bit of each. I am "babying" it today.

Tuesday, May 30th

I had radiation treatment number fourteen today, nineteen more to go. Tuesday is "doctor day." We all have to visit the doctor after our treatment to be sure that everything is going well; I found out that the itching on my head means that my hair is coming back and the follicles are putting up a fuss at having to go back to work. Nasty little things aren't they; and the pain in my shoulder was due to overusing it.

After my treatment I went to visit my daughter Anne. She gave me slips of plants I didn't have in my gardens. Since she is moving to Cheyenne Wyoming on July 8, I wanted to get them before she left and while they were still in the growing stage, they do a lot better before they bloom.

Wednesday, May 31st

I had my artificial knee checked at Dr. Moody's office today and everything is fine. The pain I am having stems from the chemo. What a relief to know that my replacement knee is fine.

While at the doctor's office, I was led from the main waiting room to the x-ray waiting room. It is nothing more than a corridor with chairs facing each other. You're sitting there, almost knee to knee. The people are mostly old and need someone to help them get from one place to another. Everyone speaks in whispers to the person they are with.

I was asked to update my medical records. I was reading some of the questions out loud to myself. One question was, "what illnesses did your parents, grandparents and siblings have?" I looked at the lady across from me and said, "I am the youngest of eleven, I could easily check every one of these boxes." She said, "Yes we all have to die of something." The next question was, "do you suffer memory loss?" I said, "I don't remember." Just about then a nurse came into the room said, "Oh aren't we sharp today, come on we have to go get x-rays." That took only about 4-5 minutes. The nurse told me to go back to my seat. I said, "Seat? What seat? Where?" Well she burst out laughing.

When I was back in the room, the woman I had been talking with said, "What did they give you, a running X-ray?" I guess she felt I had not been gone long enough to get the X-rays. By this time, everyone was listening to the other lady and I and adding their two cents worth. The room that was full of anxious patients was now full of people laughing and having fun. When the nurse came to get me to see the doctor they all wished me luck. This has happened so many times. I never go in with the idea of being funny or even wanting to talk to others. It just seems to happen.

Somehow this has become a time of contemplation for me. I spend long hours trying to understand life and what is expected from me. I fear I shall fall far from the mark. Sometimes, after long hours of meditation, I am still confused. The only thing I am sure of is God's unconditional love for me. I try to understand why I have been led to these different crossroads in my life and the decisions I made

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throughout my life. What would I change? What would I do the same? Am I being judgmental? What would Jesus say if he was here today? Many times I have gotten into hot water for speaking out for what I thought was right. Although I have spent the last thirty years of my life studying and teaching religion I feel I do not know it very well. My faith is not just "a religion", it is a way of life. It affects every aspect of my life. I would have it no other way. Much as I love my faith it is not always easy. There are a lot of gray areas.

When I was on the operating table having my port taken out a few days ago, I was given local anesthesia so I was awake. To keep me relaxed during the procedure the surgeon started making small talk. He asked me if I was going to see the movie, "The da Vinci Code", the movie. I said, "No, it is fiction, and poor fiction at best." He asked me why I thought that and I said, "Brown took Jesus, Son of God, and made a mockery of his sacred life. It is against all the Church teaches and frankly I don't want to waste my time and money on junk." He kind of chuckled.

The nurse said, "When I was young, the church taught me things that were not true, some say the Gospel of Thomas could prove what Brown has written to be true and the church kept it hidden. And, look at the priests today they have a lot to answer for." I replied, "The church did not keep the gospel of Thomas hidden. It was written in the second century and is not really about Jesus. You say that you are Catholic, if that is so, you believe in the Bible being the sacred word of God. You also know that it was inspired by God therefore the Holy Spirit inspired the Church fathers as to what writings were to be accepted and which ones were not. As for the church being corrupt, don't forget the church is made up of human beings. The priest, bishops and even the popes are human as all of us who belong to the church. All religions have people who have gone astray. Remember we have all made mistakes." There was dead silence in the operating room.

A close priest friend of ours has a saying that goes like this, " When you find the perfect religion join it. The minute that you do it will no longer be perfect."

It seems that whenever there is any controversy, the people will automatically think the church is wrong. The media make all kinds of false statements. They don't take the time to find out the truth. They want the Catholic Church to change to keep up with the times. The church is not a democracy. It cannot be change by popular vote. The Church is the guardian of the word of God. Truth is truth. Truth cannot be changed.

In the treatment room some women were talking about their religion and how, if they did not like one pastor, they would simply change churches like someone would change coats. One woman made a couple of snide remarks about the Catholic Church. At first I said nothing but after a while I thought she was having too much fun putting the church down I simple said,

"I'm Catholic, and have been so since birth, I never experienced any of the things you are saying. I love my faith, but I respect yours." She mumbled something to the others; the other women looked very uncomfortable and changed the subject.

I cannot separate my faith from daily life. I try to live by faith while respecting other people's religions. People who interact with me soon know by the way I speak and act that I will not compromise my faith. I look to my faith during my cancer journey to give me the strength and courage to go through it.

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Sunday, June 4th

John and I went to a cancer awareness day at Lost Valley in Auburn. It was celebrated nationwide. The speaker was terrific! I bought one of her books. She has an 80% chance that her cancer will come back. I could relate to her emotional swings, her humor, and her need to put on a happy face in public. She expressed her appreciation for her husband's support and for the people who prayed for her. She was an independent person who didn't want to put people out, but found out that her family needed to be part of the healing process to stand the pain they were going through, seeing her so sick.

They had a lovely lunch after the speakers. They had a pig roast. It was delicious.

How many times did I go for a walk or up to our bedroom to be alone, so I could cry unseen? I felt my world had collapsed around me. John offered to do everything for me, but I insisted in doing it myself knowing I needed to do it myself. It gave me the sense that I was still in control of my life.

I have been a volunteer in different places for over thirty years. I love people and I enjoyed giving. Now that the tables had been turned around I did not like being on the receiving end. I found it difficult to be gracious.

Tomorrow, I'm taking radiation #18! I'm over the halfway mark. I feel well and my energy is good. When I have a bad moment I go outside into my gardens. It washes away all my anxieties. I come into the house feeling refreshed. I am not experiencing any pain. The neuropathy is still there as is the itching. They are more of a nuisance than anything else. Tonight I feel good inside.

Monday, June 5th

This morning, John came with me to Mass because he had an early appointment also. I got to the radiation center early. I was sitting there talking with another woman waiting for our treatments. From where I was sitting I could see the door but she couldn't. In walked two men in operating room garb looking in the changing cubicles. I said, "I think those two have lost their patient." She asked, "Why, do they look upset?" I said "no, but they might get upset if they don't find their patient pretty soon." They left the area and after a few minutes came back in repeating the same routine. Just then, a nurse came in and she too looked in the cubicles and then they all took off down the hall. It kind of makes you wonder what happened to the poor patient. I hope they found him or her. The logical answer, of course, would be that they were probably looking for a piece of equipment, but that is not half as intriguing.

After my treatment on "the couch", I have to take my left hand to help bring my right arm down from the awkward position the technicians have placed it in for radiation. Today, a young new trainee saw me doing it and asked, "May I help you with that?" I replied,

"Oh heck no, I do this all the time. At my age, if it doesn't hurt it doesn't work. I'm so used to it I don't even think about it." She asked, "is that what I have to look forward to? Laughing, I said, "I am not complaining, it's better than the alternative."

I don't know if this is a side effect of the chemo and radiation but for the past few days, I've have bouts of being melancholy. I've never been a person to dwell on sadness. I have often been called the lady

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with the smile. I generally love life and people. I don't like this feeling. I find working in the garden usually dispels these feelings.

Tuesday, June 6

The doctor said my skin is starting to breakdown. I have to put more aloe gel to help heal it.

As I leaving the center today one of the technicians said, " I like the way you wear your hats." I said, "Thank you, when I feel sassy I wear it at a slant and if I don't want to see someone I pull it low over my eyes," demonstrating as I was speaking. "If you see me coming in with it down you know I'm mad at you for torturing me." We had a good chuckle with that one.

I went for an eye exam this morning. During my last visit, the test had shown I might have glaucoma. Today, upon further testing, he said all was fine. That was good news!

I hope I can sleep tonight. Living in the country sometimes has it drawbacks. Our bedroom faces south and a dirt road that is lined with wetland and a neighbor's pond. As soon as evening approaches, the frogs, thousands of them, start their mating call. It is a high-pitched rippling screech. When you have thousands of these lovesick males vying for a female it can create quite a din. This goes on most of the night and dwindles down as the morning approaches. They must be exhausted by morning. I know I am tired just having to listen to them. The din is so intense at times that I wonder if those dumb frogs even take the time to do anything "creative."

Going to the cancer center every day is an eye opener. There are so many sad cases. One lady came in by ambulance. The attendants took her off the gurney and sat her in a wheel chair. She was bent over and her hair was shaved and she had stitches that ran from one ear over the top of her head all the way to the other ear. In another case, a man in a wheelchair said, "I am so thirsty but I know if I drink I will have to go to the toilet so I will wait until I get back to the nursing home." Apparently it is a monumental chore for him to go to the toilet under his condition so he prefers to skip over it now and wait until later when he is in the comfort of his room.

When I see this sort of suffering I feel guilty for even thinking of being sorry for myself.

I have a couple of male friends from church that had surgery for prostate cancer. They both stayed in the hospital for a week. Woman that have a breast removed are sent home the same day or the next morning. Either the women are tough or men are wimps, humm, I wonder?

Tuesday is "doctor day". After our treatment we all have to visit the doctor for a brief check up. As I came out of the treatment room there was an elderly man sitting in the waiting room. He asked if I had had my treatment. I said, "Yup, they put you in the microwave, zap you on one side, turn you over and zap you on the other side before spitting you out." Somebody else must have told him something similar because he said, "Oh I heard that was more painful than radiation." I was so surprised. I said, "Oh no, I have radiation just like you I was only joking." A look of relief came over his face. I repeated, "Really I was just joking." I don't know what was told to him but the man believed there was no such thing as a microwave treatment.

Radiation is all computerized. Once I lay on the treatment table I am measured to be sure I am exactly

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in the right position to the nth degree. My right arm is put in a slot and my hand in another holder. My left hand is always placed at the same spot over my abdomen. My legs and feet fit over a molded form. My head is in a cup-like holder and I have to turn my head towards the left. Then I have to remain in that position without moving until all four of the treatments are given and some times they take x-rays as well.

They move the table and machines each time to an exact degree for each shot of radiation. Brad, one the tech, calls out the numbers to Mary, the other tech, who is at the controls of the equipment uses lasers to adjust it. The first call is; 110 degrees on the couch. Of course, as soon as I'm in the proper position, my nose or chin itches. I can't move even between shots. One day as I came in, I told Mary, "If you were going to call that thing a couch," as I was pointing to the treatment table, "you had better get another upholster, because that thing is hard." She laughed and they went about their usual procedure to get set up. The next day I came in and the routine proceeded as usual.

When it came time to call out the degrees on the couch, Brad said, "110% on the torture table" Mary said, "Good one, Brad." I could hear them laughing as they left the room.

The next day, Brad said, "110% on the bed of nails." This time, the new trainee was there. She said in surprise. "What did you say?" Brad said, "Seems that our table does not qualify as a couch." He knew I could not say anything. I could hear him laughing all the way out the room.

Friday, June 9

I have "bums" on my chest and underarm. They gave me a prescription for a zinc ointment that I have to spread on with a spatula. It looks and has the consistency of frosting. It helped sooth the burning.

It has been raining most of the time today. I can't wait to be out in the gardens. We lost our Weeping Alder, a small ornamental tree. It budded out this spring but then died. I just loved that tree. We will have to find something hardier for that spot. I hate to see any plant die, except for weeds- they never seem to die. When I walk among my flowers I always get a thrill to see new shoots coming out of the ground. It's like welcoming an old friend who's been away for a long time.

Monday, June 12

Today, after my radiation treatment, they measured me for my eight booster treatments. Those will start on Thursday. My chest and underarm are red and blistering. I have to put aloe gel on every couple of hours to keep it from drying up. I found out today that everyone has a different dosage of radiation. All those in the treatment room were getting only one or two shots of radiation. I am having four every day. No wonder I am burning up. When I asked the radiologist why I was getting more than the others he told me that is because my cancer was more extensive. I wish they had told me all of this in the beginning.

Radiation is a nuisance because I have to go every day and the bum areas are sensitive. But it's a piece of cake compared to chemo. I am not sick or in pain like I was with the chemo and I have energy to do all my work. I cannot complain. It is not over yet, but so far, so good.

If I were to start over again, I would make the same choices about chemo. However, if this does not

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eradicate the cancer I doubt I would go through this again. If the cancer has spread, then the chemo did not stop it and at my age I don't think I want to spend time repeating a procedure that didn't work the first time and would only serve to prolong pain and misery. As I understand it they now have new treatments for breast cancer (it was in the news recently) that are much better that have been developed in the passed few months. However, I shall not dwell on the negative but will believe I am cancer-free.

John caters to me. It would be so easy to give in and take advantage of him, but that would not be right for him or for me. The more I do, the more my energy level stays up. John and I have always been in love and care deeply for one another. We have had our differences and arguments, we may not always have been of one mind, but knew that we were truly one in heart. We retained our individuality while being united in love. It is at a time like this that we really appreciate our life commitment. Our oneness was manifested in our love for one another and in our children. Our children have been a great source of support and comfort also. I love our five children and they have blessed us with wonderful grandchildren (all thirteen of them).

Tuesday, June 13

I started the morning by visiting my gardens. I can't go in the gardens without doing some weeding.

We had tons of company yesterday. Charlotte and Bob Decker, Jennifer's parents, came for a visit. Anne called and brought us some spaghetti for supper. While we were eating, Matthew came over from mowing the neighbor's lawn and he joined us for supper. Then Lois and Sonny, neighbors, who had borrowed loading ramps returned them and stayed to visit a while. It was a busy and delightful day.

Today I watered my new transplants in my garden. So far they are all doing well. Then I went for a walk. It is a dirt road with wetlands on the sides. The most beautiful array of ferns grow along the banks on the side of the road, from the smallest, delicate, lacy specimens to some that have three to four foot fronds. Sometimes I stop to examine their intricate designs. Nature is so beautiful.

John usually stops work at about three o'clock in the afternoon. We sit and relax before taking showers. While we were talking the sky opened and we had a downpour. Oh well if I hadn't watered my plants, it would not have rained.

While I was taking my shower, I noticed the hair on my legs was coming back. Well, let me tell you I shaved that off real quick. There is no way I am going to have more hair on my legs than on my head! I'm glad I didn't have to shave under my arms. I had to put "that ointment" with a spatula, it smarts like the dickens for about twenty minutes and then it cools the burning sensation.

Tomorrow is the last of my regular radiation! We are making progress. When I met with Dr. Mandell, she said, "Your area is nice and red, that's the way we like it. You are doing a good job keeping you skin moisturized, it is looking good. I see your starting your next phase of radiation on Thursday. Boy that went fast." I said, "For you maybe, you're just looking at the bum. I am feeling it! Let me clue you it isn't going by fast enough."

Last week I saw Kim at the Celebrate life day at Lost Valley. This event was hosted by CMMC. We spoke about my journal. I told her I would drop what was written to date for Dr. Erickson. Kim is the

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type of person that is essential in every office. If something needs to be done quickly or if someone needs to know something, they turn to Kim. She does it with a smile and makes you feel you're important.

Wednesday, June 14

Hey! Hey! Hey! I'm all done with radiation under the arms, upper chest, and back. Those areas are red and burning. The next eight treatments will concentrate on the incision area. That will get worst but the rest of me will heal.

Three times I started out for a walk today, and all three times it started to rain. I decided to weed in my garden and it never rained the rest of the afternoon

Thursday, June 15

I got my first booster shot today. That was quick and it is giving my underarm a chance to heal. Yesterday, it was burning so much I went upstairs stripped down to my waist, piled on the aloe gel and walked around topless for a while (Where was John?). Just the weight of cloth on my chest was painful. Having a mastectomy puts a whole new dimension on "going topless." I don't believe it will ever catch on.

I went to work in the garden but the burning under my arm was too intense. I came in and pattered about the house

Friday, June 16

This morning, coming out of Mass at Sts Peter & Paul's, Sister Nicknare asked me how I was doing. She told me that one of her brothers had gone through chemo and radiation. She has two brothers who are priest. Then she asked me if it burned. I told her that it did. Then she said, "Oh, my brother said that it burnt also. I shall pray for you." I said, "Oh, but it is better to bum here than in hell." She laughed and said she agreed and was going to tell her brother that.

I did some mowing with the walk-behind mower this morning while John was mowing with the Cub Cadet. It took the place of my walk. I came in at noon, got lunch ready then I did some house cleaning. By 3 O'clock I was tired. I laid down on the couch and fell asleep, but then the phone rang. It was Pauline. She wanted to tell me about having a garage sale.

Saturday, June 17

In the first part of April, I had ordered a hat from the Cancer Society. I got it today, two and a half months later. I was anxious to get it as it showed in the catalog illustration that it had mesh around the sides and on top. Well, when I looked at it I saw that they had lined the mesh. I took a pair of scissors and cut out the lining around the sides. I told John there is a conspiracy about my keeping a cool head. I cannot go outside without a hat for fear of getting sunburn on my head. The doctor had told me to line my straw hat. I don't think most people understand what a problem it is to be hairless. A hat makes you perspire. If you go without one your head gets cold or if it's hot and you want to go outside you have to protect yourself against the sunrays. That is to say nothing about your looks.

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This week I told Faith, my neighbor, about shaving my legs while in the shower because I didn't want the hair on my legs longer than the hair on my head. Today she brought me a pink safety razor pasted to a get-well card.

Monday, June 19

Yesterday, all the children came to see John for Father's Day. Pauline and Anne came in the morning. Joline, Mark, and Andre plus families came in the afternoon. I cut up fresh fruits and made popcorn. Some of the children played ball outside while others played board games. For dinner, they were all going to their respective homes for Bar-B-Q's. After they left John and I cleaned the house and I made John a steak sandwich.

The bums from radiation were painful yesterday. I can't seem to cool the heat. I imagine it will get worse before it gets better. I dread each morning. I feel it burning as soon as I get the radiation. I put the aloe gel right there before dressing up and that helps some.

On Sunday, June 11th, at the morning Mass, the second reading was from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans. In part he said, "We are Children of God, and if children of God, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him." Christ said, "Pick up your cross and follow me." Many times in the Bible we are taught that suffering is purifying. Yet, I for one would not have asked to suffer like this on my own. I am accepting it and trying hard to make the best of it, but it is sometimes difficult. I have a lot of support from John, the family and many friends, which tends to lighten the cross, but in reality, I have to do the suffering alone. The "cross" is on my shoulders.

The people at the radiation center empathize with me when they see how red and raw my skin is from the radiation treatment. They give me prescriptions for ointments and show me how to care for my treated areas. But they have a job to do and that is to keep giving me the treatments to get the required affect. It makes me think of when we were little and one of us would get hurt, after they were sure the person who got hurt was ok the others would chant, "We feel for you but we can't reach you."

Tuesday, June 20

I had my last visit with Dr. Mandell today. She examined my incision area as well as the areas that I had radiation. She said if ever I needed her, even after the treatments were over, to not hesitate to call her. She is one special lady. I assured her that I would call her if necessary however, I didn't think that I would because I was feeling fine. She said, "I don't think you will either, you're a rock, an absolute rock." She gave me a hug and it felt good to know my doctor is so compassionate. It also meant I am almost finished just four more radiations to go!

On my walk today I stopped by some dead trees and admired the mushrooms growing from the trunk, they are beautiful. Nature is absolutely amazing. I see something new every time I walk up that dirt road.

I've started to gather all my hats and wigs to wash and get them ready to give to the cancer center. People gave me hats and scarves when I first started to loose my hair. It was such a help and comfort to me.

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I have not worn my wigs much because they were not a style I was used too. I kept telling the lady that fitted my wig that I did not like it. She could not find the picture she had taken of me before I lost my hair. She was adamant that I just was not used to a wig and that it looked fine.

The first time I wore it to church Mark burst out laughing when he saw me. A few friends joined in. I was not happy. The second week a woman came up and said, "Oh I did not recognize you in your-your aaah, hair™." I said, "You mean wig." She started to laugh, and said, "Well it's not how we are used to seeing you with such short hair." At John's insisting I tried it one more time when we went out with friends to a restaurant. The outcome was no better. I asked my daughters what they thought and they were not enthused over how the wigs looked. I threw them in a drawer where they have been ever since. I have been wearing hats and have received many compliments and I feel more at ease with them.

Sunday, being Father's day, all the children and grandchildren were over to see John. It was a very hot day and since I now have a bit of hair I decided not to wear a hat. Little Ben came up to me and said, "Memere, you look better with a hat." The only good thing that has come out of this, besides my hair, is the fact I don't have any "bad hair days."

I had placed my two wigs and a hat in the bathtub with the intention of washing them. One of the wigs was on a head-shaped mannequin. Judy Dent came for a visit and when she saw them there she said, "Eva, If I hadn't seen you before coming in here I would have thought someone had beheaded you." Judy and I had a nice long visit. It will be fun when she moves to Maine at the end of the year. Of course we share grandchildren so we have a lot in common.

Friday, June 23

I've finished my last full week of radiation. I will have my last one on Monday. I couldn't wait to get home to put more aloe gel on the treatment area. It bums like fire. For the rest of the day, I wore just an old, soft, t-shirt and spent the day in my gardens.

The peonies are in full bloom and the fragrance is out of this world. Whitting's, the greenhouse where I usually get my plants and flowers, had a sale. Of course, I just couldn't pass up such good bargains. I want to create a wild garden appearance at the driveway entrance. It is coming along pretty well. I had to move one of the plants as I found out the deer love it too. They snipped the top that was just starting to bloom.

Saturday, June 24

When I got up this morning the radiation treatment area was burning. I tried going braless but the gel kept sticking to my shirt. If I put on a bra, the band rubbed against the burnt skin and that was indeed painful. I decided to pin a twill tape to extend the band, then I pinned an old shoulder pad under the band over the burnt area to stop the friction. Then I pinned another pad smeared with aloe gel over the burnt area. Aha! I had solved the problem or so I thought. Not so. Every time I moved, the straps fell off my shoulders. So I took another piece of twill tape and had John pin it to the straps in back to hold them in place. Finally, I found relief. I bless the person who invented safety pins. I am happy I don't have to pass through airport security. I chuckled at the fact that I need a bra more for the breast I don't have than for the one that I do have.

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Kathy Additon and I went to Cecile for a "flower swap." We met some wonderful people there and I got a few plants I did not have, which is always fun.

In the afternoon the rain had stopped so Cameron, Christian, and Matthew came to help us with the mulching of the gardens. They got a lot done. I still have two gardens left to do but they need my personal attention as it is late in the season and I have many seedlings just coming up. Only I know where and what they are. The flowerbeds look so nice after being freshly mulched.

Monday, June 26

I got my last radiation treatment today!!! Wow! I am all done. It bums like crazy but I can deal with that knowing it will get better now. John came with me today to help me bring in a few gifts for the staff. I brought in a bouquet of flowers from my gardens and a large cheesecake for everyone to share. I had taped a large "happy face" on my chest so when I took off my robe there it was. Brad got quite a chuckle when he saw it. He said I had to take it off for the radiation treatment, as I knew he would, so, I waved it at them on camera while they were administrating the treatment. Then he said he was going to tape it to the machine for other patients to enjoy. Mary blew "soap balloons" as I left the treatment room.

Thursday, June 29

I went to Dr. Erickson's office for a check up today and also to begin my last phase of this cancer journey. I will be on Femara for the next five years. The possible side affects are numerous. Some more serious than others and some more annoying than others, however, if it prevents the cancer from coming back it will be well worth some inconveniences. Perhaps I'll be one of the lucky ones and have no side effects at all.

Dr. Erickson made a facial expression reflecting pain when she saw my radiation bums. She reiterated the need to care for it carefully so it doesn't get infected. She said in two weeks it should all be healed. I'm to have a CAT scan to see if the cancer has possibly spread into other areas. In two months, I will return to see her to see how I am tolerating the meds and to get the results of the scan. It is comforting to know that everything possible is being done to prevent a recurrence of cancer.

It was good to see everyone at the Cancer Center. I stuck my nose in to see the nurses. They were very busy but took a minute to say Hi and ask how I was doing. They always make you feel that you are important to them. I brought the staff a cheesecake--they work hard and this was just a token of appreciation to say thanks. I hope I can begin to get back to a normal life.

In the beginning, back in December, events surrounding my cancer happened so fast it all seemed surreal. I often felt I was outside my body looking at a stage play. The actors were hovering around a person who looked like me, but everyone knew it couldn't possibly be me. Then there were times during chemo when a minute seemed to drag on for hours. As I look back I feel I could write volumes about things I have learned about this disease, yet I feel I know very little about it. The most important thing I learned is each cancer is different and each person will react differently to the treatments given. Attitude, exercise, prayer, support are important in ones recovery.

My gardens were a real therapy for me. Every time I worked in them, I came in refreshed. I planted

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new plants in abundance. I kept telling myself, "I need to get well so I can take care of them next year."

My biggest asset is my husband. He is a rock, gentle, patient, loving and always ready to do anything that he thinks will help me. I am so blessed.

This week I washed all my hats and wigs, getting them ready to bring to the cancer center. Hopefully they will bring comfort to other cancer patients. The wigs looked like furry little animals nestled in the box. The hats brought a mixture of memories as I arranged them between tissue paper so they wouldn't wrinkle. I remember the frustration of trying to find a hat that looked nice on me but wouldn't make me sweat. Each hat has its set of memories. The pea green one I wore to bed, the pink, shower cap I wore when losing my hair not to leave a trail of hair everywhere and the knitted wool toques to keep me warm outside. Many of the hats were given to me; those bring wonderful memories of friendship and caring. I received many compliments on my array of hats. Those always made me feel good. I still have to wear hats outside as my hair is only about half an inch long, but soon I won't need to think of hats!

This journey has shown me just how fragile life is. When a sickness hits you, it changes your life completely. I was enjoying good health and suddenly my whole life was turned upside down. All my plans had to be set aside so I could concentrate on getting well. I was housebound for almost four months because my immune system was low. I went through a knee replacement on May 3rd' 2005 and two operations for cancer December 12 and December 22 of 2005. Two minor operations to have a port put in and then taken out after the chemo treatments were over. I had chemo and radiation treatments. All this took place in a little over a year.

Things that I took for granted in the past now became a concern. I had to count the ounces of water I drank every day and record it. I had to force myself to eat. I had to space my work to have enough energy to complete everything.

My hair loss was traumatic for me because of the ways I had to cope with it. If I wore a hat I would perspire and beads of sweat would roll down my face. If I didn't wear one I would be cold. The lady I went to for a wig did not get the right wig and rather than admit to a mistake tried to sell me on the fact that it was me that was not used to wearing a wig. She had taken a picture of me before I started chemo to send to the wig makers. This was all part of her service. When I told her that the wig just didn't look like my own hair she said, "I will get your picture and show you just how much like your hair it really is." She left to get the picture, but came back saying that she couldn't find it. For some reason this stirred-up anger in me. To be taken advantage of when your emotions are on a roller coaster, in my mind, is inconsiderate. The \$785 she charges for her services is high to begin with, but added to the fact that, in my case, she did not deliver the goods "as advertised" I found this abusive, especially where my hair loss was an emotional ordeal for me.

It made me humble to have to depend on others to wait on me. They were all so gracious in the way they offered their help. I'm afraid I was not as gracious in accepting their assistance-"Independent me" had to prove to myself I was still in control, and could do it myself.

From all the books I have read the type of cancer that I had has a high percentage of being cured. I also learned that once you have had cancer it is like a crap shoot, it can come back and sometimes in a more aggressive form. I do not plan to dwell on the negative but will live each day to the fullest.

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I see the journey like having been through a hurricane, like a tree that is bent in the wind. The ground may be littered with leaves, twigs and even braches from the tree, but it has survived the storm and will live on. I was tossed about and parts of me were ripped out, but hopefully the results will be that I have weathered the storm and I am cancer free.

Writing about my journey especially when I was unable to sleep at night helped me sort out the meaning of my life. When I was in pain it helped to relive the many good memories that I had before I was diagnosed with cancer. It gave me the fortitude to overcome the suffering and the resolve to get well so I could make more good memories.

Changed Life Plans

Notes to "Changed Life Plans"

There are two versions of "Changed Life Plans". They are slightly different; however I felt that there were enough differences to warrant including both in this book on your Mother.

She used this article, basically a sum-up of her cancer journey, to give a talk at some meeting sponsored by the CMMC Cancer center. The first version that you see following is that talk. The second version is as she had written it some time prior to this talk.

Changed Life Plans (Version one)

I was born the last of eleven children. I grew up on a farm during the depression years. Although we always had plenty of food and warm clothing there was very little money for extras. My father a carpenter and cabinet maker by trade, lost the four fingers of his right hand, there were no artificial limbs back then, so Dad forged himself a steel claw, attached that to a leather form, with this he could hold his tools and was able return to work and support his family. We all learned at a young age to make do with what we had and also to have faith in God. Being depressed at the lack of material things was not an option, if we felt sorry for ourselves, we were quickly told to change our attitude. It became a point of pride to face adversities as a challenge. We always came out of these challenges not only stronger, a little bit wiser, and with the ability to see the humorous side of overcoming a seemingly impossible situation. It also taught us to appreciate what we did had..

Little did I know how well this lesson would serve me later in my adult life and especially when I had to face the fact that I had breast cancer.

Tonight, I thought that if I would take excerpts from my journal, you would get an up close view of what I went through during my bout with cancer.

It is safe to say that those of us who have been diagnosed with cancer remember that exact moment in time. Those three words, "You have cancer" sends a sick feeling to the pit of your stomach. From that moment on you are associated with cancer. You either have it, you are in remission or you're a survivor.

My date is December 2nd 2005; I have great plans for the day. First, I have an eight o'clock appointment for a routine mammogram, and then I have a couple of errands to do. Later my best friend will meet me for lunch, after that, we will spend the afternoon Christmas shopping, plus celebrating the fact this was to be my first big shopping event since my knee replacement a few months ago.

When the radiology technician calls me for a second x-ray, I am annoyed at the loss of my precious time. Now, she is calling me for a third test, and I know something is amiss. Shivering in the imaging

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room, I face the mechanical monster that takes delight in flattening women's breasts to the thickness of a French crepe. From there I go to the treatment room for a biopsy. I finally leave the hospital at four thirty in the afternoon. I am numb. My head is reeling. I hate driving but I drive aimlessly around town, not wanting to go home and face the reality that I have breast cancer.

After studying my x-rays, Dr. D'Augustine, a surgeon at the cancer center, advises me to have a mastectomy. The cancer is a level one and the prognosis is good.

Doctor appointments, tests, four operations, and more tests replace well laid out plans for the holidays. My family and friends rally around me.

My dinning room table looks like a spring garden, while the rest of the house is decorated for Christmas. My refrigerator is bulging with gourmet meals, and a table near my "lazy girl" chair is piled with cheerful cards and gifts. I can't answer the many phone calls, so I write updates on my computer and send them to everyone via e-mail.

During the operation the doctor takes out two lymph nodes to see if the cancer has spread. The lab tests confirm those nodes are cancerous. Six days later, I am undergoing another operation to remove the lymph nodes under my right arm, three of which are found to be cancerous. That operation is very painful and so is the rehabilitation therapy. I have to do ten of about 7-8 different kinds of exercises. John helps me with the exercises and counts 5-6-6&1/2 -6&3/4 _7 always trying to get me to do a few more. He is a real slave driver.

We are in a winter blizzard, when Dr. D' Augustine calls me, telling me that the grading level of my cancer had changed from a one to a three plus. Then he tells me I have to have a surgical port put in. He asks if I was okay. I tell him, "You hit me over the head with a two by four and then proceed to ask how I am doing?" Give me time to digest what you have just told me.

I hang up the phone, put on my parka, and go for a walk on a lonely country road in back of our house. The snow mixes with my tears, and the wind drowns out my moans and groans as I try to make sense of the blow fate has dealt me. I pray and decide I must trust God. Do I remember my father words? I have to honestly say no, but the lifelong lessons of facing life head on, kicks in because I return home; determine to fight the beast that is invading my body with all the resources available.

In the first few weeks my emotions are all over the place. I am angry one minute and blase the next, I start crying for no reason or burst out laughing at some silly thing.

Dr. D'Augustine comes to visit me in my hospital room. As he bends over me to examine my incision, I can smell his aftershave; however, his hands exude the scent of antiseptic soap. On him it's not offensive but rather reassuring.

Dr. D'Augustine asks me how I am feeling. I tell him I am fine. He asks me how John, my husband, is handling it, and I tell him that John is very supportive and that there are no problems there. He asks, "How does he feel about you losing a breast?"

I said, "I am not big breasted, and so didn't lose much, but John is more concern about my well being, and my feelings than he is about my losing a breast." For some reason he keeps asking me how I am

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doing emotionally and is there anything I want to talk about with him. Finally I say, "There is one thing that has me very upset." Concern replaces the smile on his face.

I continue, "You doctors have a way of messing up a girl's life. Dr. Moody did a knee replacement, he did a wonderful job, but the scar messed up my Betty Gable leg so bad I have to cancel my Legg commercials, then you come along and take away one of my breasts, and I have to cancel my Playboy centerfold contract. But I still have one good side, and I have high hope Victoria's Secret will be able to take side shots." The most incredulous look crosses on his face; he shakes his head, I could hear him laughing as he was walking down the hall. .

Dr. Erickson, the oncologist, enters the consulting room wearing a mini skirt and an even shorter lab coat. She crosses her legs as she perches on a stool, exposing legs that one would associate more with a model than a physician. The first thing that runs through my mind is that this attractive young woman is going to examine this old, mutilated body!

She holds my charts that testify to the extent of my cancer. She explains the different treatments available to me, and recommends that I start chemotherapy immediately, to be followed by radiation. She is concern because I am past the age that they give certain types of chemo for breast cancer, but on the other hand I am an active, healthy person. At age seventy I am not on any medications. With her guidance and recommendations, I decide which treatments I will take. We opt for the big guns. She stresses that a good mental attitude is vital to a quick recovery. She tells me to write a journal, that it will help me to keep events straight in my mind. At first I find writing in my journal a drag, but as time goes on, I learn the value of it. First, whenever any medical personal need to know when and how I react to certain medication, I can refer to my journal. The most valuable part is when I can't sleep at night I get up and write. This tends to take my mind off my discomforts. First I write whatever transpired that day, my feelings, and then whatever thoughts race through my mind. It sorts of puts everything in prospective, plus it sooth my nerves and I am be able to get back to sleep.

A parade of nurses and technicians come to take information vital to the treatments I will undergo. They all look so young, beautiful and healthy. Suddenly it's like I'm in an out of body experience. I am looking down on my very, very old scarred body. I am watching as they take blood samples, an EKG, etc. I am thinking, "Is this really happening to me?"

They bring me to a treatment room, where the resident pharmacist explains the possible side effects of chemotherapy. He tells me that one drop of the drug will do irreparable damage if it touches my skin.

I feel alone in a surreal world. All around the infusion room are nurses dressed in protected tarp-like ponchos that flow as they move about. They are administrating different chemo potions to patients. One nurse is seemingly levitating towards me, smiling, she says, "I have good news for you, your blood count is good, and we can start your chemo now. The most horrific sensation comes over me as the nurse starts to insert the needle into the leader of my port, and I can see the red fluid being pumped into my veins. They are pumping this lethal stuff into me! My first instinct is to run, to get out of there, but I'm frozen to the chair and can't move.

I put on a brave front, but I am sure the nurses sense I am apprehensive about the unknown qualities of chemo, and do everything they can to dispel my anxieties.

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I honestly believe that the prerequisite for a nurse to work in the oncology unit is to be cheerful, patient, and most of all, compassionate. They are professional in their work, but place the patient's feelings and concerns first.

It is extremely important to have confidence in the medical staff who is working with you. I am fortunate to have, what I consider the best. I don't have to worry about my care, plus they are there twenty four- seven if an emergency arises.

My first chemo session comes with a long list of do's and don'ts: don't take a hot shower; don't take a cold shower, don't drink or eat anything hot; don't drink or eat cold food; but do drink half a gallon of water a day!!! Luke warm water-oh joy! I am not to eat large meals but eat small amounts all day long. However, I am told my food will have a metallic flavor and I may have sores in my mouth.

I think to myself, I have to look at the positive side. In a couple of weeks my hair will fall out, no more shampoos, and I won't have to shave my legs. I won't have to pay Jenny Craig to lose weight. Yea! I'm going to write an article for AARP on how a baldheaded, boobless, seventy year old woman is enjoying the "golden years."

One chemo treatment down, seven to go!

Once I make up my mind to fight the monster "cancer" I know I have to keep a positive attitude. I start work on a quilt for my granddaughter. It keeps my mind occupied and the time flies by. I don't have time to dwell on the negative aspects of chemo.

My second Chemo is going very well. I have fewer side effects. My arm is getting stronger, and I now can pick things up from the floor, which I had difficulty doing after surgery. All in all, I am doing very well.

I realize that John is suffering emotionally even more than I am and needs me as much as I need him. I see him walking toward the house, his face shows deep concern. He enters the house and as he goes by me I spin around and hug him. I say, "Clunk, For Pete's sake John, will you stop going by me. You're like a magnet. How do expect me to get any work done?" We both laugh and know that we are in this together.

It has been less than a week since my last chemo, and I'm losing all my hair, so I go for a wig. Horrors! It looks like a freshly clipped poodle. When the hair replacement specialist puts that "thing" on me, I look just like Carol Burnet's mother in the sit-com. She insists that is how I looked in the picture she had taken of me before I lost my hair. When I ask to see the picture, she leaves to go get it, but of course, returns saying she can't find it. How convenient. Then she has me try on a hat that makes me look like Carol Burnet, playing the cleaning woman in her show. Le coup de grace comes when she gives me a green scull hat for bedtime. I look like a giant pea with a face on it. The people on the Carol Burnett Show worked hard to look like weirdoes; she has me looking ridiculous without even trying.

Now that the side effects of the chemo have taken on a pattern, they are manageable. Not always pleasant, but tolerable. However, some of the issues of having to deal with cancer can be frustrating. While in the infusion room we patients share the effects of chemo that we are experiencing. Some leave the treatment room and go right to work! I ask the nurse, how they could do that. She explains

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that everyone is different. Some have smaller amounts of chemo, others have different kinds of chemo that have different side affect some are nauseas other aren't, some lose their hair while others don't, and some are younger and can tolerate the chemo better. I think she is trying to tell me I am old. Hummm

A good attitude is vital to a prompt recover. Every day I get up shower and dress up. I can't wear makeup or perfume as the smell makes me sick. I choose clothes that are comfortable but also attractive, like I am either expecting company or going out. This makes me feel like I am not ill, but part of a normal life. Every morning I set goals for myself, such as get the laundry done, do some cooking, or do some housework. I must say there are days when I don't meet my goals, but manage to get some of it done. Most of the time, I meet my goals. This gives me a sense of accomplishment, and makes me feel I am still in control of my life. I rarely sit and do nothing. I try not to go to bed during the day. If I must rest I sit in my big comfort chair and take small naps. I try to keep my life as normal as possible.

I have determined that hair is nature's thermostat for the body. When you lose all your hair at once, it's a shock to your system. At least in the winter time. I am looking for hats that will let me stay cool in the house, and others that will keep me warm outside.

I have a bone with whoever designed the hats for chemo patients. The turbans make me look like an Egyptian woman from biblical times. The knitted beanies accentuate the fact that I have no hair. They have catalogs showing just how beautiful you can look in the scarves, hats and turbans.

Ha! All of the models are between 25-30 years old and in the prime of life. Professional make-up artists airbrush them to remove any imperfections. Let's deal with reality. Many women with breast cancer, like me, are past middle age or older, have wrinkles, our complexions are more gray than rosy, and the smell of makeup makes us nauseous. Plus we don't have the energy or are too dam sick to sit in front of a mirror for an hour trying to make us look good. What we need is a "quick fix." And hats that will make us look beautiful, even if we were not beautiful to begin with.

I have since learned that a group of women from Leeds Maine called, The Church Mice, make very attractive chemo caps. They are stylish and fit beautifully. In all fairness there are some attractive, stylish hats in the latest cancer society catalog.

Yesterday I went for my third chemo and it went well. My blood test shows I am slightly anemic and the white blood count is low, thus lowering my immune system. I have to stay away from crowds and sick people. Being exposed to even a slight sickness can land me in the hospital. Because this is the flu season, I stay home. You could say I am quarantine for my own safety.

As we get up this morning, John gives me a hug and wishes me a happy Valentine's Day. He says I am beautiful and asks if I will be his Valentine. That pleases me, but as I am getting ready for my shower, I look in the mirror, which I usually avoid doing. My face is beet red and eyes swollen to mere slits; I am bald; I need glasses to read; my wrinkles are beginning to have their own wrinkles; I have a breast missing, and the other one sags.

I have more bridges in my mouth than the Androscoggin River, I'm on the heavy side, I have an artificial knee and two toes that were straighten out by surgery. Some Valentine! Oh, everyone should

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be seen with the eyes of love.

The doctors strongly suggest that I walk or exercise every day. I love walking and do so daily, so that's fine with me, but then come the days when the chemo really kicks in. There are days when I count the telephone poles as I go, pushing myself to make it to the next pole and then the next, until I have reached the end of the dirt road. I have even counted how many steps there are between poles. I must admit I always feel better after my walks. On a good day I walk 2 Vi miles on tough days 1 1/2 miles.

I consider most of my journey with cancer a bump in the road of life. Sometimes, on these days, it's like hitting potholes that jar the teeth. If the pattern runs true-to-form, I will have three or four good days. Then the sores in my mouth will make me feel like a fire breathing dragon lady. The mere sight or smell of food makes my stomach go into convulsions. My hemorrhoids, (I have nicknamed them asstroids), will act up until I won't know which end hurts the most. I now know how that song got written, the one that goes "oo, oo, ee, aa, aa walla walla bing bang." Ha, I also know what he was doing when he wrote it.

Then the gas attacks. Oh, they are so painful! The gas has to be eliminated. I use Gas-X and then I start walking, all the while burping and passing gas. The first time this happens, John is startled by the loud sounds resounding off the walls. I guess he never thought his "darling" had it in her. I sound like a cross between a drunken sailor and an old nag. My daughter Anne calls while I am having one of these attacks. I grab the portable phone and keep walking. All of a sudden she says, "Mom, I HEARD that!" Lesson well learned. Do not walk and talk on the phone at the same time during one of these episodes. I also learned that I am a "creature of habit": When I get into the shower, I reach for the shampoo, pump myself a handful of shampoo and proceed to polish my bald headed dome.

I wake up with my mouth feeling like it is on fire. I make a strong effort to swallow pain meds, but can't do it. I can't even swallow my saliva and I am drooling like a baby. I have to go to the hospital and they give me a rinse to take away some of the pain. When the nurse looks in my mouth, she says I had a lot of ulcers but none are bleeding, so that is good news. My sores are not yet at a stage where they will consider using the stronger medication. All I can think of is, "You mean it gets worse than this?"

I am finished with the first round of four chemo treatments, and now I go on to, Taxol, another kind treatment. I swear they must brew this potion in a witch's caldron. The new chemo affects all my joints. Sometimes the pain is almost intolerable. After three sessions of the new chemo (I was to have four), the oncologist stops my treatment because the effects are too severe. That is such a relief. Dr. Erickson tells me that the neuropathy may ease within a few months or could be permanent. Now that the chemo sessions are over they want me to rest for a few weeks before I start the next phase.

Spring is upon us and I spend a lot of time in the flower gardens. I must wear a hat for fear of burning my scalp. John watches me like a hawk. If I so much as mention that I am going outside he make sure my head and arms are covered. I am feeling so well, my energy is back to normal.

In a few weeks I will have radiation treatments every day for seven weeks.

The lab technician, in the hospital lab, asks me my date of birth. I tell him, September 12, 1935. He says, "You are seventy?" To which I reply in the affirmative. The next question out of his mouth is, "Are you pregnant or think you might be pregnant?"

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I reply, "I haven't had a period for a while, and every time that happened I was pregnant. I guess there is that possibility."

The Lab technician looks up at me, wide eyed, and says, "I'll take that as a sarcastic no."

I say, "Well you have that one right."

Chuckling, he says, "By law, we have to ask this question even if you are seventy years old."

It been two months now since my last chemo treatment and I'm taking my shower, I notice the hair on my legs is coming back. Well, let me tell you, I am shaving that off real quick. There is no way I am going to have more hair on my legs than on my head! I'm glad I don't have to shave under my arms.

I start my radiation treatments. First I go to Mass at St Joseph's church, and then I. rush across the street to the hospital for my treatment. I receive four- radiation zaps everyday, after which I do errands or visit with friends before going home. Now starts eight days of booster radiation treatments.

I drive straight home, but by the time I get home tears are running down my cheeks, the pain is so intense. I have to put on a thick, medicated ointment with a spatula on the radiation bums. It smarts like the dickens for about twenty minutes, and then it cools the burning sensation. Layers of skin peel off leaving raw flesh under my arm, back and chest, pretty much like a bad sunburn. The Doctor looks at my bums and is pleased with the way they look. I tell her you might be pleased with the way they look, but I'm not happy with how they feel.

I go upstairs, strip down to my waist, and walk around topless for a while. Just the weight of clothes on my chest is painful. Having a mastectomy puts a whole new dimension on "going topless." I don't believe it will ever catch on. I cannot do any work, because just moving is painful. I spend a lot of time meditating and praying. Without my faith I have no idea how I can get through this. On the last day of treatment I plaster my chest with happy faces from Wal-Mart. The surprised look the techs faces was percious.

My treatments are over. Now I have to concentrate on regaining my strength.

I see the journey like going through a hurricane, like a tree that is bent in the wind; the ground may be littered with leaves, twigs and even branches from the tree, but it has survived the storm and will live on. I've been tossed about and parts of me have been, ripped out, but so far the results are that I have weathered the storm and I am cancer free.

That all happened almost three years ago. There is a positive side to all this and that is I see life a gift and I enjoy each day to the fullest.

This passed year my oldest daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer. She is going through much the same treatments that I had. She is also receiving the same wonderful care and compassion from the CMMC staff. Because of early detection, I am confident she also will come out of this stronger and with a better outlook on life, much as I have.

I cannot emphasize the importance of early detection through mammograms.

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Thank you

Eva Labonte

Changed Life Plans (Version two)

Today is December 2nd' 2005; I have great plans for the day. First, I have an eight o'clock appointment for a routine mammogram, and then I have a couple of errands to do. Later, my best friend will meet me for lunch, after that, we will spend the afternoon Christmas shopping.

When the radiology technician calls me for a second x-ray, I am annoyed at the loss of my precious time. Now, she is calling me for a third test and I know something is amiss. Shivering in the imaging room, I face the mechanical monster that takes delight in flattening women's breasts to the thickness of a French crepe. From there I go to the treatment room for a biopsy. I finally leave the hospital at four thirty in the afternoon. I am numb. My head is reeling. I am alone in a surreal world. I hate driving but I drive aimlessly around town, not wanting to go home and face the reality that I have breast cancer.

Doctor appointments, tests, four operations, and more tests replace well laid-out plans for the holidays. My family and friends rally around me. My house looks like a spring garden, my refrigerator is bulging with gourmet meals, and a table near my "lazy girl" chair is piled with cheerful cards and gifts. I can't answer the many phone calls, so I write updates on my computer and send them to everyone via e-mail.

After studying my x-rays, Dr. Gregory D'Augustine, a surgeon at the cancer center, advises me to have a mastectomy. The cancer is a level one and the prognosis is good. During the operation the doctor takes out two lymph nodes to see if the cancer has spread. The lab tests confirm those nodes are cancerous. Six days later, I am undergoing another operation to remove the lymph nodes under my right arm, three of which are found to be cancerous. That operation is very painful and so is the rehabilitation therapy.

We are in a winter blizzard when Dr. D'Augustine calls me to tell me that the grading level of my cancer had changed from a level one to a three plus. Then he tells me I have to have a surgical port put in. He asks if I was okay. I tell him, "You hit me over the head with a two-by-four and then proceed to ask how I am doing?" I hang up the phone, put on my parka, and go for a walk on a lonely country road. The snow mixes with my tears, and the wind drowns out my moans and groans as I try to make sense of the blow fate has dealt me. I pray and decide I must trust God. I return home, determined to fight the beast that is invading my body, with all the resources available.

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I continue, "You doctors have a way of messing up a girl's life. Dr. Moody did a knee replacement and messes up my leg so badly I have to cancel my Legg's commercials, then you come along and take away one of my breasts, and I have to cancel my Playboy centerfold contract. But I still have one good side, and I have hope Victoria's Secret will be able to take side shots."

The most incredulous look crosses his face; he shakes his head and burst out laughing.

Dr. Nicholette Erickson, the oncologist, enters the consulting room wearing a mini skirt and an even shorter lab coat. She crosses her legs as she perches on a stool, exposing legs that one would associate more with a model than a physician. The first thing that runs through my mind is that this attractive young woman is going to examine this old, mutilated body! She holds my charts that testify to the extent of my cancer. She explains the different treatments available to me, and recommends that I start chemotherapy immediately, to be followed by radiation.

A parade of nurses and technicians come to take information vital to the treatments I will undergo. They all look so young, beautiful and healthy. Suddenly it's like I'm in an out- of-body experience. I am looking down on my very, very old scarred body. I am watching as they take blood samples, an EKG, etc. I'm thinking, "Is this really happening to me?"

They bring me to a treatment room, where the resident pharmacist explains the possible side effects of chemotherapy. He tells me that one drop of the drug will do irreparable damage if it touches my skin. All around me, nurses in tarp- like gowns are administering different potions to patients. One nurse is coming towards me, smiling, she says, "I have good news, your blood count is good, and we can start your chemo now. The most horrific sensation comes over me as the nurse starts to insert the needle into the leader of my port, and I can see the red fluid being pumped into my veins. They are pumping this lethal stuff into me! My first instinct is to run, to get out of there, but I'm frozen to the chair and can't move.

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these attacks. I grab the portable phone and keep walking. All of a sudden she says, "Mom, I HEARD that!" Lesson well learned. Do not walk and talk on the phone at the same time during one of these episodes. I also learned that I am a "creature of habit": When I get into the shower,

I reach for the shampoo, pump myself a handful and proceed to polish my bald headed dome.

I wake up with my mouth feeling like it's on fire. I make a strong effort to swallow pain meds, but can't do it. I can't even swallow my saliva and I am drooling like a baby. I have to go to the hospital and they give me a rinse to take away some of the pain. When the nurse looks in my mouth, she says I had a lot of ulcers but none are bleeding, so that is good news. My sores are not yet at a stage where they will consider using the stronger medication. All I can think of is, "You mean it gets worse than this?"

I'm finished with the first round of four chemo treatments, and now I go on to Taxol, another kind of treatment. I swear they must brew this potion in a witch's caldron. The new chemo affects all my joints. Sometimes the pain is almost intolerable. After three sessions of the new chemo (I was to have four), the oncologist stops my treatment because the effects are too severe. That is such a relief. Dr. Erickson tells me that the neuropathy may ease within a few months or could be permanent. Now that the chemo sessions are over, I will have radiation treatments every day for seven weeks.

The technician, in the hospital lab, asks me my date of birth. I tell him, "September 12, 1935." He says, "You're seventy?" To which I reply in the affirmative. The next question out of his mouth is, "Are you pregnant or think you might be pregnant?" I reply, "I haven't had a period for a while, and every time that happened I was pregnant. I guess there is that possibility." The Lab technician looks up at me, wide eyed, and says, "I'll take that as a sarcastic no." I say, "Well, you have that one right." Chuckling, he says, "By law, we have to ask this question even if you are seventy years old."

It's been two months now since my last chemo treatment and as I'm taking my shower, I notice the hair on my legs is coming back. Well, let me tell you, I'm shaving that off real quick. There is no way I am going to have more hair on my legs than on my head! I'm glad I don't have to shave under my arms.

I start my radiation treatments. First I go to Mass at St Joseph's church, and then I rush across the street to the hospital for my treatment. I receive four radiation "zaps" everyday, after which I do errands or visit with friends before going home.

Now starts eight days of booster radiation treatments. I drive straight home, but by the time I get home tears are running down my cheeks, the pain is so intense. I have to put on a thick, medicated ointment with a spatula on the radiation bums. It smarts like the dickens for about twenty minutes, and then it cools the burning sensation. Layers of skin peel off leaving raw flesh under my arm, back and chest, pretty much like a bad sunburn.

I go upstairs, strip down to my waist, and walk around topless for a while. (Where is John?). Just the weight of clothes on my chest is painful. Having a mastectomy puts a whole new dimension on "going topless." I don't believe it will ever catch on. I cannot do any work, because just moving is painful. I spend a lot of time meditating and praying. Without my faith I have no idea how I could get through this.

My treatments are over. Now I have to concentrate on regaining my strength.

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I see the journey like going through a hurricane; like a tree that is bent in the wind; the ground may be littered with leaves, twigs and even branches from the tree, but it has survived the storm and will live on. Pve been tossed about and parts of me have been ripped out, but hopefully the results are that I have weathered the storm and I am cancer free.

At Last It's Over

I have been asked to share the journal I wrote while undergoing treatments for cancer. I wrote it as a mental "release" from pain and anxiety. Often, I wrote during the night when I could not sleep. Mostly it reflects my thought and feelings at that point in time.

When I received my last radiation treatment at the end of June, I decided to put everything that had anything to do with cancer behind me and move forward. That was not to be. Healing from the radiation took well over two weeks. My hair was slow coming back and months from my last chemo, it was only about a half inch long-it is still very short. I still have some side effects from the chemo and I will have to live with them. I learned that once you have cancer the word is forever linked to you. You either have cancer, you are a survivor or you are a victim of it.

Some people think that now that I have had cancer, I am an expert on the subject. I learned that cancers are like snowflakes; there are no two alike. I don't even remember the names of the type of chemo or the medicine I had to take. The different kinds of cancer multiplied by the kinds of medication available plus the combinations of medicines given, multiplied again by the reaction of the people to the medication makes the variations mind-boggling.

I learned that each person's cancer is personal and unique to that person. I never was nauseous, but had a lot of pain. Sometimes I was down, other times I got angry. I thank God that most of the time I was able to see a humorist side of the situation. Knowing I could not change what was happening, I decided to make the best of it.

I also learned rather quickly that when most people ask you how you are, they really don't want to hear the answer, unless it is positive. Not because they don't care, but many do not know how to handle a negative response. They are uncomfortable with another person's pain and suffering. When I say "I feel great" people will smile and give me a compliment about how well I look. They then ask me more in depth questions about my battle with cancer. Knowing that you're okay makes them more at ease to talk about it.

Everyone I knew and many I did not know supported me. I am still in awe at all that was done for me. Every so often my neighbor Kathy brought over whatever she was having for dinner that evening. That was such a treat not having to cook. Sometimes she would drop by for a few minutes just to talk and to see if I needed something.

Pat, another neighbor, kept bringing me all sorts of hats and scarves. She knew what a difficult time I was having trying to deal with not having hair. Trying to keep my head warm without sweating or having to tolerate something tight or heavy on my head was indeed an arduous task. My daughter, Anne, knitted me two silk hats that made wearing a headpiece more tolerable-I did not sweat in them and they were light. She kept sending things she thought would brighten my days.

Some people brought desserts, flowers, books etc. Everything was appreciated and what helped most of all was the knowledge that they were supportive. They cared and showed it. I got cards from people

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I had not heard from in years. Most included prayers or verses to cheer me up. How wonderful those were.

My family was there for me. Joline came once a week to visit and bring me flowers and fish, two things I enjoy very much. Pauline called almost every day. Mark would drop in whenever he was in the neighborhood and sometimes even if he was not in the neighborhood. Andre came to visit a few times but his kids had lots of colds during the period of my treatments and since my immune system was down he had to stay away.

All the time I was sick, John did not want to leave me alone even for a minute. He was so attentive. After the first session with chemo, we learned what to expect, and on what days the after effects were likely to happen. When I said I was going to crash I would make a beeline for my "Lazy Girl" chair and he would cover me with blankets. I would shiver anywhere from a few minutes to an hour. Then slowly, one by one, I would toss off the blankets. The crisis was over. At first this was frightening to both of us, but as time went on we knew how to handle it and took it in stride. The chemo gave me sores in my mouth. John bought me all sorts of soft foods so I could eat and keep up my strength.

John traveled to and from the chemo treatments with me. I felt guilty taking so much of his time but he never complained, in fact, he would tell me he wanted to be there, that way he did not have to worry or wonder if I was ok. He kept telling me how beautiful I was. I wasn't pretty before taking chemo treatments. You can imagine what I looked like during the treatments. I was a mess. I know he was looking at me through the eyes of love. I am so lucky.

Faith played a big part of my quick recovery. I was born and brought up Catholic, although I grew up in a predominately protestant community. All my friends were protestant. My youngest son married Janice, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. We were very close until she was killed in a car accident. I was taught to respect all faiths. We all worship the same God. We have taken different roads.

During my illness, the community prayer groups where I live and in New York where Janice's parents live, was praying for me. They sent me cards every month to remind me that they were praying for me. My own church group did a lot for me also.

Hobbies would distract me from my illness. I sew, quilt, do needlework, cook, and I especially love gardening. Watching all the new plant "pop out" of the ground this spring was like a tonic to me. These plants needed my attention. I love flowers and having fresh flowers in the house added life and color to my life.

Most of all, I love living life to the fullest. Taking a walk on a nearby country road just to feel the wind in my face is exhilarating. I try to savor each moment as it passes by because it will never return for me to enjoy a second time.

Whenever I am asked what to say to a person who has cancer or to their caretakers, I say, "My best advice is, "Don't give advice." but Listen, Listen, Listen."

A visit is welcomed as long as you call first. There were times when I was experiencing so much pain, I did not want to see anyone nor did I want anyone to see me in such a state. If my journal helps others to understand the daily "drama"; the ups and downs, the fears, and the anger one goes through with

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this awful sickness then maybe something good will come from all I went through and be of some help to others.

Eva Labonte

Ps. One year later (September 24, 2007) I am still cancer free and many of the side effects of the chemo and radiation are gone or have diminished greatly. My quality of life is great.

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Suffering with Christ & Changed Forever

Notes on two poems written by Eva:

Mother's chemotherapy and radiation treatments ended at the end of June 2006. On July 20, 2006 she wrote the poem "Suffering With Christ". On November 3rd. 2006 she wrote "Changed Forever". Both are worthwhile reading.

Suffering With Christ.

Pain made me contemplate
Life and its meaning
Why was I created and
The reason for my being

From the beginning
So the story is told
God wishing to share his love
Made nature unfold

From the heavens
A river of graces flow
Sea and land were separated
Focus to earth below

To dissipate the darkness
He hung the sun up high
The moon control the tides
The stars fill the sky

All manner of life
Created from above
In beauty and abundance
A sign of his love

In this vast universe
Great as these elements are
My soul created in God's image
Is greater by far

Intense suffering brings me
To the darkest of nights
The spiritual battle
Often the hardest fight

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Suffering can be lonely
People truly care
But the actual pain
No one can share

The pain went on for hours
Hours turn into days
Weeks, months go by
Still the anguish stays

The extent of suffering
Only to God is known
I pray by my agony
My spirituality has grown

On this painful journey
I did not despair
I was not alone
Jesus was there

When I offered my pain to Christ
It lightened my cross
I gathered treasures in heaven
Not a gem will be lost

I offered everything in prayer
I put God in control
In atonement for my sins
And to purify my soul

The universe will pass away
Time will stand still
But my soul will live forever
By decree of God's divine will

Eva Labonte
July 20, 2006

Changed Forever

*Like a perfect sailing day,
Morning filled with fun plans,
One annoying appointment,
Get a mammogram.*

*Facing the monster that takes pleasure,
Flattening my breasts into pancakes,
A positive means negative results,
Sends the cosmos in disarray.*

*Like a sudden violent squall,
Rogue waves hits the ship,
Sending it floundering in the sea,
Confusion replaces serenity.*

*I have Cancer.
Gashes in the keel,
Scraps and burses on the bilge,
The superstructure is in jeopardy.*

*Tears are salty on my lips,
I need to assess the damages.*

*I start chemo treatments,
The storm intensifies,
Wave upon wave bashes the ship broadside,
Slapping, and slashing at the sails,
Lashing until they hang in tatters.*

*Sending the ship into convulsion,
I'm no longer in control of the helm,
I'm like the ship listing on its side,
Struggling, trying to stay afloat.*

*The storm abates leaving the ship far from shore,
Becalmed on the vast ocean.*

*Radiation treatments feel like I'm
Stretched and held on the deck,
While the relentless blazing sun sears
The once colorful jib sails,
Until only white sheets dangled on the broken mast.*

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*Layers of skin peel and hang,
Like ragged canvas sails.
Ointments soothes the burning sensation,*

*I have to go topless.
A mermaid I am not,
At last, land is in sight,
Limping in on a sail and many prayers,
I have weathered the storm.*

Eva Labonte
November 3, 2006

Cancer Journey "Life Goes On"

Notes on "Life Goes On"

Mother's awareness of breast cancer began after a mammogram done on December 02, 2005. From that day on, life would never be the same for her again. For the next three years and four months until her death on April 8, 2009, she would live in fear of dying from cancer.

During that period, she had a "sense of urgency" that manifested itself in her daily activities to be in a rush to get many things done as if tomorrow, she would not be there. This sense of urgency was particularly strong and visible, more so than usual starting in November of the year 2008. Why this was so, I don't know.

This article, "Life Goes On", was written by her on September 11, 2006 following a report on a visit to the CMMC lab and a visit with Dr. Erickson which took place on August 24, 2006. It always took a long time to get reports from Dr. Erickson's office, sometimes as much as three weeks and then only after many phone calls. This particular report she was able to obtain by phone eighteen days after the lab tests.

Mother would become very worried and concerned when she got such reports, as you can see from the first few paragraphs of this article. Her nervousness and unhappiness shows clearly in that this article has her "jumping around" on totally unrelated subjects that had nothing to do with her condition at the moment.

In spite of her concerns, worries, unhappiness, nervousness and somewhat depressed mood, she manages to throw in some humor as you will see when she talks about "mosquitoes and black flies" and how she relates with God as well.

On November 22, 2006, after a visit with Dr. Erickson to discuss the lab tests of August 24th and follow-up tests taken in the latter part of October, she added to this article, the second part which starts on page three and reflects even more nervousness than the first part written on Sept 11th.

This paper then, covers the period from August 24, through November 22, 2006.

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Sept. 11, 2006

Life Goes On

Today, I received word from the doctor that my "liver count" is high. Medically, I have no idea what that means except that it is not good. I feel wonderful and my energy is good but after hearing that report I have to go for another blood test in two weeks. I will then meet with the doctor to find out just what they mean by a "high count." My cholesterol was elevated but the report said I was still at low risk. Hopefully, I can bring that down some.

I had this sense of urgency to finish all my little projects. That would take a lifetime as I always have dozens of projects going at any one time. Then I went for my walk. As usual, I took the dirt road through the farmland (North Line and Additon Roads.) The sky was clear blue with a soft breeze. I stopped to look at some new wild flowers along the way. Some I had never seen before. They were small, bell shaped soft pink flowers about the size of an eraser head! There were about two-dozen of these delicate blossoms on each stem. Not far from them was another kind that had a large tuft of maroon velvety ridges in a tight clump. Gorgeous thing! Strangely enough there was just one of those. I stopped to pick some blackberries under the power lines that cut a swath through the fields and ate them as I trudged along.

I've found that whenever I have to sort things out, a walk clears my head and I can get a handle on things. Being in a field or backcountry road where nothing I see is manmade, but everything is part of God's creation, makes me feel very close to God. It's like I'm in his giant cathedral. I cannot imagine anyone not believing in God! Every bit of nature is so intricately interwoven and perfectly balanced. Even the minutest organism is complete onto itself.

God created earth to sustain humanity, but the human race thinks it's in control and proceeds to abuse the earth's natural resources. Much of the abuse is done in the name of progress but if the truth were known, greed is most often the motivating factor. I get upset when I see trash lining the road. John goes out every so often to clean the trash along side of our road.

One has only to take the time to look at nature as it evolves, the sunrises and sunsets, the seasons as they slip one into the other. The wild animals left alone will maintain a balance to survive. When man starts to interfere, we have entire species that disappear while others become overpopulated and cannot subsist in the area designated to them.

The only thing that is not perfect is the mosquito. For the life of me, I am hard pressed to find anything good to say about a mosquito. Its sound drives me nuts when it buzzes about my head. Worse still, when it is quiet, I know it is attacking and sucking up my blood. As if that is not bad enough, it has to leave some of his venom that will make me itch for days.

As if mosquitoes are not bad enough, black flies "bombard" with a vengeance. Those nasty little creatures come by the millions. They creep into your eyes, ears; all along the hairline and drive you crazy. Any skin that is exposed is fair game. The next day, red welts appear looking something like chicken poxes.

Every day, I read the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel. In part, it says, "Defend us in battle against

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the wickedness and snares of the devil." Further on, it says, "By the power of God, cast into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits who wander the earth seeking the ruin of Soul." I would like to add to that request, all mosquitoes and black flies. I sometimes have a mental picture of the little demons attacking my souls, much like the dam insects who attack my body.

Walking gives time to meditate. Sometimes I look at my past life and how it has brought me to the present. There are times I meditate on the great wonders of God and the role he plays in my life. It never ceases to amaze me how he is aware of my innermost thoughts better than even I am. I get so frustrated with myself for not measuring up to his expectations. With all the graces he has bestowed on me I should be a saint. Alas! I struggle every day just to get a toehold in purgatory.

Walking through the forest, I thought how our soul is like a young sapling. It grows in the shadow of its parents. It feeds from the soil enriched by the leaves that drop from the bigger trees each year. To make it on its own it must have sunlight, water, and space to grow. Many of the new saplings never make it; the brambles choke them out. If they are too close to one another they vie for space and nutrients and become spindly; none of them become strong and healthy. When a mature tree dies, either by harvesting, forest fires, or old age, it makes room for young trees to grow. Fires caused by lightning also clean out the bramble making for a healthier environment.

We are much the same. We are born from the seeds of our parents. We take nourishment from them but there comes a time where we need space to develop properly. We can still learn from their good counsel but must make our own decisions. We must clean-out the "bramble" of minor infractions, such as little white lies, gossip, impatience, anger etc. When our soul is clean, it can receive the light of God and grow in holiness. God has created us in his image but with a free mind to use our intellect. God is always there to help us, but never controls us.

Man is the only species that can create new things; however any and all matter that he uses had its origin in a substance already in existence. A good example of this is the stem cell research situation. The purest cells are the stem cells. Is it so amazing that these are in unborn babies and in the umbilical cord? The greatest form of life is a baby created in the image of God. Today we have people who will sacrifice these innocent lives for research. Oh yes, it is for the betterment of mankind. Isn't the child who is aborted part of humanity? What kind of woman would kill her own child? One question that is rarely asked is where are the fathers of all these babies? Why are they not held responsible?

The new morality is very liberal; sex without responsibility; enter into relationships without commitment; and instant gratification. How can anyone feel safe in a land where the laws do not protect the unborn and where thousands of babies are sacrificed on the altar of self-indulgence every day?

Wow! I am glad I was born in a time where families cared for one another and life was based on the Ten Commandments. I hope I have instilled that in my children also.

Today the blackberries were plump and juicy and I still have blueberries. Yum! I also got some raspberries. They are the kind that produces twice a year.

I got the report that my liver count is still high, in fact a bit higher. When I questioned how high was dangerous, I could not get a straight answer. I feel I'm between a rock and a hard place. If I keep taking

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the medication, my liver is being affected, if I don't, the cancer may come back. Not a very good spot to be in at the moment. They don't seem concerned but are keeping an eye on it.

I am working on the last piece of my quilt and then I will start to assemble it. I'm happy with the flow of colors with the exception of the last color. I've gone everywhere to look for a blend and have bought so many different pieces of cloth that I have enough cloth to make ten more quilts, but I still have not found the perfect match. Oh well, what is perfect?

I started to winterize my gardens. I have some major work to do after the frost hits but the flowers are still so pretty I hate to pull them up. Some of the plants are getting too big so I have to split them. I have neighbors who are thrilled to take the cuttings. I'm going to change some to a different place, as they are not compatible with the plants around them. They are like kids; you have to separate them when they don't get along. I call them my babies for a good reason; they are a joy but need a lot of attention. Some are bullies; they take up too much room and hinder the growth of the surrounding plants. Some have too much sun while others need more sun, so I switch them around and watch how they will do the following year. This year was an amazing year for flowers. The gardens were the most beautiful I have ever seen them.

I picked the last of the blueberries today. They have produced more than I expected this year. I picked a quart of raspberries and they promise to have quite a bit more. I love them fresh. They are so good!

Our writing class has been canceled due to illness. Bummer!

A new acquaintance came to visit. All she talked about was the size of her rings, her strands of pearls and all her other jewelry; the cost of her china, their expensive cars and how bright her children and grandchildren are. If I said anything about any subject she could do it better or knew more about it. She seemed to have a grand time. After a while I got bored.

When we moved here I got rid of so much stuff. I don't want to be encumbered with stuff just for the sake of saying I own it. I hope I'm remembered for who I am and not what I owned.

The pope said a quote in one of his homilies and the world is in an uproar. They want him to apologize for telling the truth. They called him a Vatican dog and that is ok. No one asked them to apologize to him.

Eva A. Labonte Obituary

Eva A. Labonte 1935-2009

Lewiston-Mrs. Eva A. Labonte, 73, of Greene passed away Wednesday, April 8, at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center. She was born in Chisholm, ME, the youngest of eleven children of Charles and Eva (L'Italien) Castonguay. Eva was educated in Livermore area schools and continued to take other courses in higher education.

She married Jean Paul Labonte of Lewiston in 1958 at St. Rose of Lima Church in Livermore Falls. In the ensuing years they lived in Maine and Canada returning to Maine permanently in 1976. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in May of 2008.

Eva was a person of deep religious faith who dedicated her energies to the service of two local Catholic parishes. For several years after her return to Maine, she decorated SS Peter and Paul Church and later St. Joseph's Church until about four years ago. In more recent years, she developed a keen interest in apologetics and religious self studies. She has written numerous articles on various moral and religious topics.

At home, her greatest pleasure was gardening. She happily tended to her ten or more flower gardens and a vegetable garden. Her gardening skills are well known in the neighboring areas of Greene. Other interests she was active in are needlepoint and quilting. Over the past few years she made a quilt for each of her fourteen grandchildren.

All of these activities however, were secondary to the love she had for her family. She enjoyed cooking and preparing for family gatherings and special occasions and holidays. She was a loving and devoted wife, mother and grandmother who will be dearly missed.

Surviving is her husband, and her five children and spouses;

Mark C. Labonte and spouse Lisa-Marie of Lewiston; Pauline Lynch of Lewiston; Joline G. Lindsley and spouse Dr. Eric Lindsley of Bath; Anne Dramko and husband Dr. Joseph Dramko of Cheyenne, WY and Andre Labonte and wife Jennifer of Scarborough. Also surviving are their fourteen grandchildren; two sisters, Laurette Bilodeau of Lewiston and Rosalie St. Pierre of Fayette ME; one brother, Lionel Castonguay and wife Louise of Livermore and many nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by five brothers, two sisters and a daughter-in-law Janice Dent Labonte.

Funeral Notice: Labonte, Eva A. 4/8/09. Visitation Fortin/Auburn Mon. 2-4 & 6-8 pm. A mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at St. Joseph's Church Tues. 10 am. Committal St. Peter's Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations to Eva's memory can be made to either of the following charities:

St. Mary's Food Pantry 208 Bates St. Lewiston, Me 04243-7291

Or

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Catholic Relief Services (CRS) P.O. Box 17152 Baltimore, MD 21298-8452

The Dynamics of our Family

(The social, intellectual, or moral forces that produce activity and change in a given sphere.)

Every family has "natural forces" which shape the relationships of its members. Who is viewed as the family "leader"; toward what member or members do any one of many views or talents gravitate in his or her direction? Why is one member seen as leading in a given area whereas another member takes the leadership role for something else? Initiative, knowledge, confidence, character, education, reputation, personality and probably many other factors or talents intermix to form the dynamics of a family. All of this occurs without any deliberate, active or knowing decisions by any one individual of the family-they just happen. Our family is no exception to this Phenomenon.

Some of these natural gravitations in our family (for example) would be:

- Mark seen as the person to go to for anything to do with landscaping, plants and the like. Additionally, everyone tends to go in his direction if a need exists for use of his trucks for the transportation of large objects. Etc.;
- Andre seen as the person to go to for anything electronic, also of anything to do with investments;
- Myself seen as the person to go to for advice on insurance, investments, woodworking, tools, business advice, etc.
- Eric and Joline (Doctor and Nurse respectively) seen as the pros for medical advice.
- Pauline as seen as the expert in her ability to handle residents of nursing homes or the like.
- Anne seen as the artistic one.
- And other dynamics exists among family members, perhaps too numerous to list.

I have purposely left out of this list the family "social gravitation" of the past and the present because this paper is the main reason why I am writing it. Prior to Eva passing away in April of 2009, the bulk of the social events were hers: Easter, Thanksgiving; Christmas and periodic social gatherings at the "homestead of mom and dad" either at the Germaine St. home or "The Hill". These were intermingled with some social events hosted especially by Joline at her Bath home and sometimes by Andre and Jennifer in Scarborough and Mark at his place in the summertime. These were the dynamics of that era.

Since April of 2009 after Eva passed away, these "social events dynamics" have evolved and have naturally gravitated toward Joline and to a much lesser degree towards Andre and Jennifer. With Andre's family move to the Fishkill area of New York, they have now fallen to Joline alone. Again, the forces behind this are numerous: Her initiative at leadership, her reputation as a (gourmet) cook, her cheerful personality, Eric's pleasant and welcoming personality and her home which lends itself to social events have all contributed to this trend-all naturally.

That Joline would resent this is understandable; after all, she didn't volunteer or ask to have this role; she never agreed to any of this. The "whole-ball-of-wax" falls on her shoulders and with justification

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she resents the fact that no family member ever offers to help at any of these gatherings. That latter point needs to be examined more closely.

Thus are the "Dynamics" of our family today.

What to do?

- Refuse to accept this "evolutionary natural force" unwittingly dumped on Joline. Or
- Realize that it's a natural phenomenon and accept it. Or
- Find a meaningful way to make it work by effectively getting family members to contribute to its success.

By J. P. Labonte (2012)

The Engagement Ring

I would imagine that most young people, particularly young adults, spend a good amount of their leisure time daydreaming about various present and future events that they anticipate encountering in their lives--- becoming rich, meeting the “perfect” girl or boy, owning a mansion with thirty-two rooms, traveling to distant exotic places on a cruise ship, piloting jet fighters, etc. This practice is probably more prevalent with boys than with girls. I was certainly no exception to this. However, my upbringing was such that I would always come back to reality or “come down to earth” you might say, whenever some important decision had to be made.

When, in September of 1957, I decided that I would want to spend the rest of my life with Eva, I dreamt of being rich and getting her a beautiful 5 karat diamond solitaire and imagined the look on her face and in her eyes when I would slip it on her finger. As the time came closer for me to ask her to marry me, my senses told me to look at this dream in a more realistic way. With “minimum wage” earnings at my job, it was obvious that I would not be able to get anything more than a small diamond ring without getting myself into debt----a no-no for me. I shopped around at the local jewelry stores and settled for a quarter karat diamond solitaire. Very much to my disappointment the ring would not be ready until Tuesday October eight.

I went out with Eva on Saturday and managed, with great difficulty, to say nothing about a proposal, wanting to wait for the ring. However, on Sunday, I could no longer wait and proposed to her. She readily accepted and I told her the ring would not be ready until Tuesday. She was pleased. I was disappointed that I could not afford more but resolved to get her a ring that would be closer to my dream and to what I felt she deserved at some time in the future when our finances would be better.

We married on May 3rd 1958 and began our life together. About eight

months after our wedding, I accepted a job offer with a large insurance company as a sales person and my earnings changed drastically. The thought of a diamond ring for Eva was always in the back of my mind but I knew we needed to wait because of greater immediate financial obligations--- Mark was born shortly after I started on my new job and we also felt that getting our own home was a priority and so the “dream” was put on hold. More children came in the few years thereafter. It would not be for twenty more years before I could consider a ring for Eva, after all, the immediate needs of the family were more pressing.

We had been married almost twenty-one years when I celebrated my twentieth anniversary with my company. It was customary at that milestone to present the employee with a diamond ring or other award if the employee so chose. One of those alternate choices was a woman’s diamond ring or pendant. I broached the subject with Eva and she quickly dismissed the idea saying she was very satisfied with the “original” ring, small as it may be, and that it was more meaningful to her than a “commercialized” award given to me for twenty years of service. I suddenly realized that it had been a mistake on my part to offer such a meaningless item for something as meaningful as what represented our commitment to each other--- Lesson learned!

With only four more years to our Silver Anniversary, I resolved to broach the subject of a diamond ring again at that time.

In the early months of 1958, before we were married, Eva and I had agreed that we would not make any major expenditure without the consent of both. When I approached her again and expressed to her my desire to get her a nice diamond ring just before our twenty fifth anniversary she objected to the idea again saying that the original engagement ring was all she wanted and that we could better make use of that money for the payment of Andre’s upcoming higher education (Andre was only ten years old at that time) and also that we should further invest in our retirement plans. Not wanting to displease her, I reluctantly agreed. To my great disappointment, the “ideal” opportunity had been lost---when would another favorable occasion present itself and how would I be able to overcome her

reasoned objections?

The years went by. Andre got married and graduated from the university and went on to Purdue working diligently for his PhD. By the turn of the century, he was no longer our responsibility and a few years more and we would be celebrating our fiftieth anniversary. My thoughts returned to my long sought desire to give Eva a nice ring. This time, however, I would be well prepared.

I had twenty-five years to think about my next, and probably last, attempt. Over the years I rationalized that the agreement Eva and I had of not spending large sums without agreement by both was made after we were engaged and therefore did not apply to anything which originated prior to that time. Somewhat of a feeble defense, but it was worth a try.

In October of 2007, six months before our anniversary, I declared to Eva that I was getting her a diamond ring for our fiftieth, explained to her that I had this “dream” since before our engagement and that the only choice she had in this decision was to decide if she would accompany me in choosing the ring. I indicated to her that I would prefer that she come with me to select a ring of her liking but if she didn't I would do it on my own. Eva attempted to object but I again reiterated that her choice was either to come with me, my preference, or not. I sense that the tone of my declaration convinced her it would do no good to resist further and she agreed to come with me.

We visited jewelry stores for the next few weeks and finally came upon a 1.52 karat diamond solitaire that she liked. Eva lost no time in showing her new ring to family, friends and neighbors and wore it at every occasion she could----it was obvious that she was well pleased with her ring.

It had taken me over fifty years to bring to reality a dream or fantasy I had in the month before our engagement.

John

Labonte & Castonguay Family Stories

December 20, 2011

Labonte & Castonguay Family Stories

John's Early Years

To: Mark; Pauline; Joline; Anne; Andre From: Dad

Enclosed with this letter are two additional "writings" by your mother:

- "John's Early Years". A biography of me up to the time your mother and I met in June 1957
- "John's Bike". An essay by your mother.

Mother wrote the biography of me as if I had written it. She started working on this project in March of 2007, on and off, and made the final copy in August of 2008. She put it on my desk one evening as I was working on some papers and said "that's what I've written on you, do what you want with it". She sounded displeased. Being preoccupied with whatever I was doing at that moment, I did not take the time to find out why she did not seem happy with the writing on my life (early years). I intended to question her on this in the near future. However, I never got around to it. I can only guess as to the reason or reasons for her apparent displeasure; she may not have been pleased with her writing of my bio; and/or she found my life in my early years not interesting enough and she could not "dress it up" enough to make it interesting or colorful.

Mother's biography (the Mom book), depicted a much more lively and colorful life in comparison to mine. She was raised surrounded by nature on the farm. Her life was by far more colorful than mine would have been having been raised in the city. Although we were both raised in poor families, her family was much poorer and faced many more hardships than my family. All of this made for a more interesting and vivid story for her to write about when she wrote her bio. Perhaps that is why she was dissatisfied with her writing of my life before we met-she could not find enough "colorful" events in my life that would make a good story. (Note that 11 of the 22 pages she wrote are of my four years in the U.S. Air Force, looks like she was grasping for something more interesting?) I strongly suspect that that is the reason for her displeasure. We will never know for sure. Perhaps for that reason, my bio, as she wrote it, is not the best or even near par as compared with some of her other writings.

In any case, this is what she wrote and this is what I'm sending you to add to the "Mom" book. Please insert these two writings at the end of the "Mom" book.

It should also be noted that I've added some wording in John's Early Years in order to clarify some subjects-these are in parenthesis (xxxxx).

Mother wrote religious articles, religious courses, poems, her bio (Mom book), and various essays. You now have her poems and the Mom book. At some point in the future, I will see if I can make some copies of her various essays that she wrote over the years. If you're interested in the religious articles and courses, let me know and I will e-mail them to you.

Dad

Labonte & Castonguay Family Stories

John's Early Years

My Father's Family

My Grandfather, Paul Labonte, was born in the Province of Quebec (St. Lambert), in Canada in 1848. In 1868 at the age of 20, he married Odile Duquet. They had a child, nee Josephine. For the next four years the records are vague. The next entry shows that Paul married again in 1872 to Adeline Dion. Back then, divorce was unheard of in Catholic families. It is safe to assume that Odile died. Childbirth was one of the most serious causes of death for young women in those days, and since she was so young and had a child, we could presume that is what happened, but we have no official records.

My father, Charles H. Labonte, was born April 14, 1882 in St. Lambert, in the province of Quebec. Paul and Adeline now had seven children plus Josephine. Life for the large French families centered mostly on farming. Many of the French children went only to grammar school and then they stayed home to help with the farm work. It was not uncommon to find two and sometimes three generations working on the same farm at the same time, but the farms could support only so many people. As the children grew up and married they either had to buy farms of their own or move to the cities to find work. Since their education was limited, so was their chance of finding meaningful employment.

In the late 1800's until about 1935 the American (textile) mill owners (in New England) encouraged Canadian families to come to work in their factories. The French had a reputation of being honest hardworking people. They (the mills) were paying fifty cents a day! There were no child labor laws then. It was not unusual for children as young as eight or nine years old to work in the factories. A large family working in the mills would pool their wages and live comfortably, that is, more so than the mere existence they experienced on the farms. These people had a history of living frugally. They managed to save from their meager earnings. As the years passed more and more of the children went to high school and a few lucky ones went on to college.

In 1885, Dad's family came to the United States looking for work in the mills. Dad was three years old when his parents decided to move to Dover, New Hampshire. I know practically nothing about my father's family or about his early years. He married Alice Boulanger (in 1906) in Dover and moved to Boston. He stayed there for eleven years.

He didn't like the 'cold ambiance' of a large city. He said, "You can live next door to someone all your life and never know them." From there he moved to Maine and worked at the Bates' mill. He worked his way up to be the foreman of the leather shop. All the big weaving looms and associated machinery were run with leather belts; his was a very important job. He did all the buying not only for the Bates Mill, but supplied all the five big textile mills located in the Lewiston area. He loved working with leather and often invented new ways to mend and extend the life of the worn belts.

I remember when I was a very young boy, I used to go down (to the mill on Saturday) to meet my Dad after work. If I was early, I would wait in the guardhouse. When the watchman at the guardhouse got to know me well he would look around to be sure no one was looking (as it was against the rules to let a non-employee in) and say, "You know your way to your Dad's shop, why don't you go on in?" I felt so important as I flew in to see Dad.

Dad and his first wife, Alice, had four daughters: Elmire Fernande, who died in infancy; Marie Alexina;

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Jeannette and Adeline. Alice died when she was forty-four years old.

Dad had been a widower for five years when he met Regina Beaumont.

My Mother's Family

My mother, Regina Beaumont, also came from a large French Canadian family. Her ancestors have a colorful and interesting history.

Guillaume Couillard left France in 1613 to travel to Quebec City, and settled on the southern banks of the Saint Lawrence River, northeast of Quebec City. In 1654, Guillaume was designated "Anoblis by Louis XIV of France". One of his sons, Charles Couillard was named the first "Seigneur (lord) de Beaumont". The Couillard's were an affluent family and held a place of prominence in the area.

In the early 1800, Fabien Couillard de Beaumont's son, Thomas, dropped the name Couillard from Couillard de Beaumont and kept the name Beaumont. There is a town of Beaumont on the south side of the St. Lawrence River. Thomas was my mother's grandfather.

Mom's parents, Joseph Beaumont and Mary Tetu, had sixteen children. Their first child, Willie, was born February 26, 1893 and died five years later. That is the reason for a second child named Willie at a later date. The last child, Mariette, lived only one year. Eight of the children lived to adulthood and were married.

Some of them had old French names that really cannot be translated to English.

Willie the 1st, Yvonne, Freddy, Ubald, Willie the 2nd, Regina, my Mom, Uleric, Lorenzo, Lucienne, Adjutor, Germaine, Estelle, Gilberte-Eugenie, Robert, Mariette.

As youngsters Stella and I learned to pronounce their names in French from our mother. However, the fun started when we tried to translate their names into English.

Unlike my father, my mother kept in close contact with her family through letters and yearly visits. We became very close to some of our cousins.

There was no work in Canada for most of the uneducated French, so many came to the New England states to work in textile mills.

My Mother was in her later twenties when she came down from Canada. The depression was in full bloom. Mom lived in a boarding house run by Idelda Jalbert, who was also of French Canadian decent. Soon, Mom became friends with Mrs. Jalbert's sisters and brothers. This friendship lasted the rest of their lives. When I was growing up, the younger children called members of the older generation aunt and uncle. Many of them preferred that designation, to being called Mr. and Mrs., it made for a close friendly community.

The French lived in clusters and looked out for each other. The people walked to work, to church and to the corner grocery store where they bought only what they absolutely needed. In the evenings the women sewed or did household chores while the men kept the houses in good shape. The people had

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two or three outfits of clothing for work and one nice one for Sunday. They were poor, but extremely clean. Weekends, they would gather in each other's home, and play cards and just socialize. It was at one such gathering that Regina met this handsome widower.

Dad had been a widower about 4-5 years when he met Mom. They were married May 14, 1932. There was eighteen years difference in their ages.

At first my half sisters lived with them, but they resented my mother and did not want to share Dads affection with a woman who was closer to their age than to their fathers.

Mom got pregnant right after she and Dad were married Stella was born Dec. 11, 1932. She was premature and was a colicky baby. It was nip and tuck for a few months before she was out of danger. Still a bride with a cranky baby and being a stepmother to three teenage girls, who did not like her, made for a tense, unhappy atmosphere. The youngest, Adeline was eighteen by this time and working. Sizing up the situation, Dad asked his daughters to live on their own. Dad stayed close to his girls and visited them often. Two years later, I, Jean Paul Laurier was born Feb. 2nd 1935. My father was fifty-three years old when I was born. Dad finally had a boy!

We lived in an apartment on Androscoggin Ave (in Lewiston). When I was two years old, Mom and Dad built a two story apartment building on Beacon St. They rented the two upstairs' apartments and we lived on the first floor. It became difficult to make the payments on the mortgage, so Dad partitioned off the two back bedrooms, put in a door from what was my bedroom to the hallway, put in a bathroom, and finished a kitchen with a living area in the basement for us. That permitted them to rent the four front rooms of the first floor apartment.

Dad had a good job at the Bates Mill. He was the foreman of the leather shop, but it was still difficult to make ends meet. My mother went to work at the Peppered Mill, better known as the Bleachery. Stella was taken out of St. Peter's school and sent as a boarder at Saint Joseph's home for orphans, a section of the Marcotte Home. I went to board at the Healey Asylum. In the summer months I stayed on a farm. After work on Friday Mom and Dad would come and get us for the weekend. We would go back Sunday evening. After a few years Stella was transferred to the Ave Maria Convent in Sabattus. She loved it there, while I hated the Healey Asylum.

Healy Home

Back in those days, many young women went into the convent, not because they had a vocation to the religious life, but because they didn't get married and it was better there than being an old maid. Some young girls were pressured by their parents to become nuns. Whatever the reasons for entering the convent, those girls should never have entered the religious life. Many had little or no training in taking care of children and were not happy with the jobs given them. After Vatican II, many of these women realized that they were not meant for the religious life and left the convent.

One evening at the Healy Home, I was only about four years old, I was sick, I went to the toilet, but vomited on the floor. When I came out I passed the door of the sister in charge of the dorm. She had a private room adjacent to the dorm. She called to me and asked who it was. I told her my name. She asked if I was all right and I said yes and went to my bed. The Sister got up and when she saw the mess in the bathroom she came to my bed and beat me up. I was so frightened I was gasping for air, I could

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not breathe. It woke up the entire dorm. She left me to go clean up the mess. I became so afraid of doing anything wrong and of being beaten again. I will never forget the abuse I received by that nun. On the other hand, a Sister Philip who also worked at the Healy Home, was a real angel. She liked me and looked out for me, but the memory of that beating and my fear of being beaten again, overrode the good that Sister Philip did. I told my mother what happened and she saw how the event had affected me, she spoke to the Mother Superior. No such incidents occurred again.

School

I started my schooling while at the Healy Home. I always liked school and did well in my studies and got good grades.

It was the first day of the first week of September and I had started my second grade. I was sitting at my desk when a sister from the office came to the door and said, "Jean Paul, come with me." I looked at my teacher who just nodded her head for me to go. I got so scared. What had I done wrong? Where were we going? Anytime someone was called to the office it was for something serious. We walk up the long flight of stairs, down a corridor, to the third grade room and she told me to sit in a certain seat, she went over to the teacher and spoke for a few minutes, then left. I still didn't know why. The teacher turned to me and told the class that I was going to join the class and introduced me to the children. That is how I found out that I had skipped a grade.

Every Sunday afternoon, as the time for me to go back to the Healy Home neared, I would sigh, trying not to cry. Mom understood how sad I was and decided to take me out of the Healy Home. Mom got Mrs. Roy, an elderly woman to baby-sit me.

I attended the fourth grade at Saint Peters school. Like the Healy home, the entire curricular was taught in French with only one class in English. I learned to speak a few words and could understand some English from my playmates. When I finished the fourth grade my mother thought it would be wise for me to learn English, so she enrolled me at Saint Patrick's School, whose entire curricular was taught in English. Talk about culture shock! Sister Anne, My fifth grade teacher, did not like me because I was French. She would say nasty things to me such as, "You are nothing but a dumb Frenchman." "I hate you. You're stupid." If I tried to ask a question she would yell at me, "Oh shut up, you're nothing but a stupid Frenchman." I suffered the year in silence. At the end of the year she flunked me. I told my mother of all the things she had done to me. My mother took me to the Mother Superior, and had me repeat to her what I had said. Mother Superior listened and then called Sister Anne to the office and asked her if what I said was true. To my surprise, Sister Anne admitted to all she had done to me. My Mother asked for a transfer to St. Peter's School. (At St. Peter's), they gave me a test and I passed (and was assigned) to the sixth grade. I was a quiet child and the injustice I received at the hands of those two nuns left me scarred for life. I kept thinking, if that is what a religious is, what good are they? I lost all respect for them. Though there were many religious who were good, a child will remember the abuse, the fear, and the pain. I was no different

After graduating from the eighth grade I attended Saint Dominic High School.

Canadian Trips

One of the highlights of our quiet life was our yearly trip to Montmagny, Quebec, to my mothers

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homestead. My mother's family was still all living there. It was like a "(yearly) pilgrimage." We stopped at all the aunts and uncles, and the whole family would get together at least once while we were there. Stella and I got close to Uncle Pete's kids. They were our age and we had a lot of fun together.

On one such trip, I was about five and Stella was eight years old, we had what could have been a disastrous trip. After much preparation and last minute checks by both our parents we were off on our much-anticipated eight to nine hour trip. Dad had checked and rechecked the old Nash (1938-39 vintage). It didn't have a trunk but had a luggage rack on the back that snapped into place and our suitcases were tied to it. Dad had fashioned long wide leather straps and secured our luggage to the rack. There was a box of sandwiches, fruits and drinks and a few treats to keep Stella and I happy through the long hours on the road. Mom took a few toys and games to keep us occupied, but it didn't take us long to get bored with them. Like all kids, the more we irritated each other the more we got on our parents nerves. Every so often threats of turning around and returning home kept us quiet for all of two minutes. My solution was to leave Stella out on the side of the road and hers was to very quietly strangle me. Fortunately our parents didn't resort to either of our suggestions.

In the late thirties we never would have ventured far without an extra tire and tube. On a trip such as this, we were assured of at least one or more flats before reaching our destination. After each flat we would stop at the next service station to have it repaired.

Heaven forbid that we would have two flats before reaching one of these stations. With the exception of a few towns along the way we were on country roads. About twenty- five miles past Skowhegan, we got to the small town of Bingham and then the Forks, beyond that we were in the wilderness until we reached Jackman. My Mother dreaded those forty-two miles through the Jackman woods, as that stretch of the road was known. She always breathed a sigh of relief when we could see the tower of the filling station on the last hill before entering the town of Jackman. Dad always filled up the car there and from years of traveling that route, we got to know the owner pretty well. He anticipated and looked forward to seeing Dad every year.

The rough mountain road was full of curves. The scenery was about as spectacular as you could find anywhere in the country, but on this trip, it was raining too hard for us to see much beyond the road. Seat belts were an unknown at that point in time and we could move around the back seat at will. I knelt on the seat to look out the back window. I told Mom that the road was covered with clothes. The straps had gotten wet and snapped; the luggage hit the pavement spewing our clothes into the rain soaked countryside. The wind blew stockings, shirts, skirts and lingerie through puddles and deposited them in the ditch or hung them on brambles. Mom and Dad told us to stay in the car while they raced over a half- mile of the mountain road trying to gather their possessions. Stella was crying and I just stared at the whole surreal scene. Dad must have had rope because they plunked everything back into the suitcases and retied them to the rack. Mom was always meticulous about her clothes, and arriving at her brother's house with piles of dirty wet laundry was difficult for her. Tucky for us that we were permitted to move about at will in the car or I would never have seen the clothes in the road. Better to have rain-soaked clothes that could be washed, than to have no clothes at all!

On the road in the Jackman woods (in the mountains) we had hit "air pockets" (as my Father called them), and the radiator was hissing and boiling over. We pulled over to the side of the road to let it cool and filled it with water before continuing on our journey. I think my Mother prayed all the time we were going through the Jackman woods, until we got to the town of Jackman.

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Sandbox Toys

Mom was extremely frugal about everything. We had all we needed but never anything in excess. I can remember having two toys when I was young. One was a metal pickup truck and the other was a fort with a facade of a castle with a drawbridge. It came with about a dozen hard rubber soldiers, tanks, canons, and various forms of artillery.

Maurice Beuparlent, the kid from across the street and I, waged many famous battles in my sand box. I believed we defeated Napoleon, Attila the Hun, Hitler, and numerous Cowboys and Indians. My little solders would die and resuscitate a dozen times a day. We would dig a moat around the castle and let the drawbridge span the abyss. We tried numerous times to fill the moat with water but the sand sucked up the water as fast as we could pour it in. I never tired of that toy. I sometimes wish I still had it now, just to relive those wonderful years.

Paper Route

I started to pass the Lewiston Evening Journal, our local newspaper, at the ripe old age of eight years old. At first, my paper bag dragged on the ground and on days when the paper was thick I would have to use a cart. I had the largest route in the twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn. I took pride in being a good paperboy. That paid off big time. I believe a paper route is good training for a child. It taught me responsibility, money management, and how to communicate with people. I had to be respectful of my boss (Mr. Roger Forgue, SJ supervisor of the paper boys) on one hand and the customers on the other. Keeping my customers happy meant bigger tips. Tips made up most of my pay.

Years later, at the age of twenty- three, Mr. Raoul Plante, one of my customers, hired me to work for him as a Prudential Insurance Co. agent. I stayed with that company for thirty years, until my retirement. All five of our children had a paper route. My work took me away from Lewiston for many years (we were in Canada for eleven years), when we moved back to Lewiston, Andre, our youngest son, got my old paper route. He was named paperboy of the year. I was so proud of Andre, almost busted my buttons.

My First Bike

I got my first bike when I was about nine years old. It soon became a part of my extended self. I was never without my faithful green Schwinn bike. Dad taught me how to service it, and that soon became a ritual with me. At least twice a year, I took it all apart and cleaned, greased it, and changed the brakes and put on new tires. I knew if I took good care of it, it would take care of me. I used the basket to carry my newspaper on my delivery route.

I must have put on in excess of a hundred thousand miles on that thing. That might be a slight exaggeration. It had big wide tires that wore out at least twice a year. Being a boy's bike, it had two cross bars from the seat to the steering shaft. There was a place for a horn and a headlight. It had the old fashion type brakes that worked when the person pushed backwards on the pedals.

Every week I would do all my mother's errands. I would go from place to place, leave the bike outside the stores, unlocked and unattended, without fear of it ever being stolen. It was a standard bike with only one speed and that was whatever strength I had, and how fast I could pedal. One day I was

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coming down Main Street (the hill from Mountain Ave. to Russell St.) and a car pulled alongside of me and told me that I was going fifty miles an hour. That apparently was quite a feat for that kind of bike.

Another time, my friend Maurice and I were racing down Pine Street (between Beacon and Jefferson Sts). I turned to look back at Maurice to taunt him about my being faster, and that I would win the race, all the while I was pedaling my bike as fast as I could possibly go. When I turned back around to look ahead to see where I was going,

Surprise! There was a car directly in front of me! My bike hit the rear bumper of the car and I flew over the roof of the car landing on the hood facing the driver. The driver, in total shock to see a skinny scrawny kid lay sprawled on the hood of his car, looking up at him, slammed on his brakes. This sent me flying off again, this time to the pavement in front of the car. The driver, an elderly gentleman, was visibly shaken. He got out of his car to see where the kid, who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere, had just as quickly disappeared. I got up unscathed to see Maurice bent in two having the last laugh. I convinced the driver that I was fine. I don't know who was more relieved, he for not having killed me or me for him not having to tell my parents. The only damage done was to my pride and to my bike. I took the bike home, changed the wheel before my father had a chance to see it. My bike and I were ready for our next adventure.

One day I was on lower East Avenue, riding my bike towards home. Rather than continue on East Ave. to Webster, on to Walnut and then home I thought I would take a shortcut down Bartlett Hill, which happens to be extremely steep. I had a fist full of comic books in one hand and was steering with the other hand. The first couple thousand feet from East Ave. was at a slight slope and all was well, but it soon became very steep and soon I was careening down the hill out of control. I must have been going at least 40 miles an hour. Back in the forties, bike helmets were not even thought of and since it was summer, I only had light clothes on. I knew if I hit a pothole or bump I would be thrown into the trees and boulders that lined both sides of the road. I also knew if that happened I would not live to tell why I had decided on such a foolish stunt. The comic books were beginning to get loose (from my hand). It never occurred to me to let them go and hold on with both hands giving myself a bit better edge on getting to the bottom of the hill safely. My Guardian Angel must have been sitting on the handlebars. I flew to the bottom of the hill and could see the sharp curve ahead. I kept bouncing up and down on my seat. I gripped the handle so hard my hand was hurting. I knew if I applied my brakes I would fly head-over-heal over the handle bars. All I could think of was how would I make that curve? I used my knees and my body and managed to navigate the sharp turn. That accomplished, I began the almost as steep incline to Birch St. That brought my speed down quickly and I knew I was okay. I hadn't dropped a single comic book!

Stella And I Try "Three Legged Walking"

Stella is almost three years (actually two years and two months) older than me. One day we were playing three legged walking. It turned out to be quite the adventure. We had tied my right ankle to her left ankle. We were walking up the sidewalk when Stella spied a dog; she is petrified of dogs. She took off at a run. I could barely keep up with her.

She ran up the front stairs of an apartment building (the "Lebeau" building at the corner of Beacon and Pine Sts.) and climbed up on the porch railing. By this time, I was flat on my back with the foot that was tied to her, up in the air. As brothers would do, I yelled at her...."What did you do that for, idiot?"

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When she explained that there was a dog, I told her to come down so I could get up. She refused because she could still see the dog down the street. Finally, I persuaded her to untie me. That was the last time I ran a three- legged race with her.

The Jefferson Street Gang

In the early forties, summers were a relaxed and fun time for children. From the time I was about nine or ten years old, after our chores were done, the boys around our neighborhood would gather to play "pick-up" baseball, or some other kind of pick up sport. My group all lived within a few streets of one another. We called ourselves the "Jefferson Street Gang." Our rival gang was called the "Jewish kids." Our only clashes were on the baseball field playing pick-up baseball.

Although many years have passed, I can still remember some of their names; Norm and Mike Marseille were good athletes, and were really good at the game. Mike Marseille was older than the rest of us, and a good batter. His brother Norman was about my age and a real hot head and bully. He kept picking on me until one day I had more than enough and I beat him up. Fighting was out of character for me, but that day, he pushed me too far and I beat the crap out of him. I must have taken the Moxie out of him because he never even tried to bully me after that. It also taught me to never let anyone bully me again.

I remember a guy by the name of White. There was a comic strip with a hero by the name of Chuck White and so we called him Chuck. I don't think I ever knew his real name. Then there was, Robert, Roger, and Flute Royer (three brothers that lived next door to us); Skippy Banks and I completed the group. We were just a bunch of gangly teenage boys who met to have fun. On most Saturday afternoon's, The Jefferson Street Gang would go up Walnut St. Hill to the Franklin Pasture, where the Jewish boys from the area would meet us for a fun game of pick up baseball. As I recall I don't think they ever won a game. I don't think they cared that much, we were just a bunch of boys having a good time.

In the winter, the gang would go skiing, sliding, or ice-skating. St. Dorn's had an outdoor natural ice hockey rink. When it was not in use by the (St. Dorn's hockey) team, the general public was permitted to skate there. The small fee they charged helped to defray the cost of maintaining the ice. I went skating four to five times a week.

Faith and Communications

There were many people, like my mother, who didn't speak a word of English in Lewiston. They had come down from Canada to work in the mills. Many came from large families with little or no education, and were very young when they came to the United States. Others had varying levels of schooling. They had one thing in common, and that was their French culture. During the week, they worked long, hard hours in the mills. On weekends, they would gather together in groups to socialize and relax. Most were Catholic and belonged to French Parishes. As the population grew, more churches were built to accommodate them. Because transportation was limited they did not travel far from where they lived and worked. They were very devoted to their faith.

We belonged to Saint Peter and Paul Church. The upper church held 2000 people and the downstairs could hold about 1500-1800 people. Every Sunday, starting at eight o'clock (a.m.) and every hour on the hour until noon, there was a Mass upstairs. Starting at 4:30 (a.m.) and every half hour, until 11:30

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there was a Mass downstairs. The later Masses were often standing room only. Dad would go to the first Mass because they permitted smoking. Nine churches were built in the Lewiston- Auburn area with a combined population of approximately seventy thousand people.

Mr. Louis Philip Gagne started a radio station, WCOU and The Messenger (Le Messenger), a French daily newspaper. These became lifelines for the French community. The radio station and newspaper carried many French programs and news not only to Lewiston, but encompassed wide areas where French immigrants had settled in the New England States. In our home we had both the Lewiston Evening Journal and Le Messenger. The Gagne family lived up the street from us, and the Gagne boys came to play with us once in a great while but not that often.

Grocery Stores

Supermarkets were not even a distant dream. Fresh vegetables were grown locally and sold by the cultivators at farmers markets or peddlers on the street. As they travel the streets they would ring a bell and yell out what they had in their carts that day. I can still

hear them as they went along; "I have carrots, cucumbers, small new potatoes and so on." Women on the first floor of the apartment buildings would come out to his cart, but those living on the upper floors would call out to him for prices, such as, "Are your tomatoes fresh? How much are they a pound?" Then the bartering would start. With the women saying the produce were old (not fresh), and the peddler fringing agony at being taken advantage of. At the end of the haggling, each participant went off thinking they had gotten the better of the deal.

My High School Years

During the summer, after graduating from the eight grade, I let go of my paper route and I went to work for Turgeon's Pharmacy. I was thirteen years old. This was my first job and I was eager to please. Turgeon had more than one drug store. All prescriptions were filled at the main store (on Lisbon St.) where Mr. Turgeon worked. Our store (located at the start of Sabattus St. across the street from St. Joseph's church) sold only over the counter medicine. One Saturday morning there were quite a few people in the store. A man came in and asked me for a box of Trojans. In those days very few people used condoms and they were kept hidden under the register counter. I had no idea what condoms were or where they were. I called out to Ray Goulet, the manager, who was working at the other end of the store; "Hey Ray, where do you keep the Trojans?" He came running up trying to "shish" me up. The man walked off pretending to look at something on a display rack while the other people in the store were chuckling. I got a very quick lesson on condoms that morning. (That was an embarrassing experience to say the least.)

The next two years, I went to work for Bedard's Pharmacy. When Mr. Bedard would leave to do errands, he would leave me in charge of the store. If people came in with prescriptions, I would fill the easy ones and line then on the counter for Mr. Bedard to check over before giving them out. During my senior year in high school I worked at Lewiston Hardware. I worked after school and on Saturdays. During the summer I worked six days a week until it was time for me to leave for College.

In September of 1952, I started college at St. Michael's in Vermont. Two weeks later, I learned that my father was forced to retire because of his age (he was then seventy years old and the mill liability

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insurance would no longer cover him). They would have to mortgage the house they had worked so hard to pay for my college tuition. I decided to join the Air Force. I returned home and went back to work for Lewiston Hardware until it was time for me to leave for basic training.

I turned eighteen years old on February 2nd and left for boot camp a week later. It was during the time of the Korean Conflict, but as it turned out I never saw combat. I was sent to Keesler Air Force Base in upstate New York for basic training. (Note: here, mother made a mistake-Keesler AFB is located in Biloxi, Mississippi-the base where I went for my basic training was in the Fingers Lake area of upstate New York-I don't remember the name of the base.) The first week there, we were given a two day written exam. A few days later another enlistee and I were called to the commander's office and we were offered a four-year scholarship to the newly opened Air Force Academy (in Colorado). The conditions were that if we accepted, we had to stay in the Air Force for six years after graduation. Since I had no desire to have a military career, I declined the offer. After boot camp, some of us were sent to Biloxi, Mississippi for radar training.

A Year In Africa

July of 1953 was very hot in Biloxi, Mississippi. I never liked the heat so I was ecstatic to learn my squadron was being shipped out. Since I had enlisted in the Air Force, I had spent all of two months in basic training, followed by three months of radar training, so it is understandable that I was not yet aware of the curious ways the government Armed Forces have of doing things. Our destination was French Morocco in northwest Africa. Oh Yea! Two hundred and fifty new trainees were off to a new adventure.

Our ship, The U.S.S. Harry Taylor, was a small troop carrier and not a luxury ship by any stretch of the imagination. It was my first time on such a large vessel and I thoroughly enjoyed it. While at sea we hit a storm. The men were sick all over the place. I worked my way up (from the belly of the ship where the bunks were) to the deck, but was stopped by one of the sailors, telling me it was too dangerous on the deck. I told him, "Look the stench is so bad from all the vomit down below that I really can't go back down there. He was sympathetic to my plea and secured me (around my waist) to the side of the ship with a short cable.

After about nine days at sea, we arrived in Casablanca. As we disembarked from the ship we had to cross a huge dock. The dock was approximately a hundred yards square, and bustling with people and vehicles of all kinds. At the end of the dock, there was a curbing and then a gutter then a street lined with shops. We were directed along a long street towards the railway station. In the street gutter we saw a large black lump. It seemed to be moving slightly. As I got nearer, I realized it was a woman with a baby lying there totally covered with black flies. Not an inch of her flesh or clothes could be seen. I had all I could do not to be sick right there and then. I stopped for a moment- completely shocked! People were walking right pass them and never even gave her and her baby a second look. I had to keep moving, but part of me wanted to yell "Hey look there is a baby and a woman here that need help." My instinct told me I had better not do that. We weren't there long before I realized that this was a common sight over there, but I never was able to get used to it.

We boarded a train that took us to the Navy base at Port Lyautey. The base at Port Lyautey was mainly a Navy base, with a large contingent of Air Force personnel that manned a B52 and B47 airbase. The working force on that base ran into the thousands.

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It served as headquarters for many small outposts such as the radar site we were going to be assigned to. From the base all 250 men climbed aboard (6Xs) six-bys, military transport trucks to the radar site, forty miles east, north, east, at the edge of the Sahara Desert.

We alighted from the trucks in our freshly pressed uniforms wanting to make a good impression. We stood in wonder with our mouths opened. We were jolted to the reality of life in a third world country, away from the luxuries of living in the United States. Before us were rows of eight-men Army tents on wooded platforms. This was to be our home for the next twelve months. The men we were replacing were waiting to board the same trucks that had brought us there, to go on to their next assignment (returned to the U.S). They were a rough looking bunch, in unkempt clothes with scruffy unshaven faces. They were calling out to us about what was in store for us and how happy they were to hand the reins over to us. For a space of a couple of hours the post held 500 men, the old and the new. Soon the old guard had left and we began to explore our new surroundings. A couple of generators provided electricity, but there was no running water, and no indoor toilets. I soon learned to adapt. I decided to make the best of the situation. As it turned out it became one of the most memorable year of my life.

It was not rare for the temperature to reach over a hundred degrees in the daytime; however it was a dry climate so it was not as oppressive as Mississippi. At night it got cool, sometimes as low as 50 degrees. After working in 100 plus degrees, the change was traumatic-it felt pretty darn cold. Since I like the cold, that was perfectly good for me.

There was a military regulation that you could not be outside without protective clothing on every part of your body except your face and hands. We were issued one piece, loose fitting outfits, call "fatigues." We were also issued safari hats or caps with wide visors or brims to protect our faces and necks. Anyone caught disobeying that rule were punished. The sun was so hot one could get serious burns in a very short space of time without ever realizing it.

I truly enjoyed my one day in radar. I had enjoyed the training program and I was looking forward to a career in that field, but at about three o'clock on that first day my great expectations came to a screeching halt. I was called to the post commander's office for an interview. Here I was eighteen years old, with only a high school diploma, and a new enlistee in the Air Force. What could he possibly want from me?

Colonel Marolf P. Gregory, the commander of the outpost, could not speak French. That created an annoying problem for him in French Morocco. He would have to request that an interpreter from a Navy base situated some forty miles away in Port Lyautey be sent to the site every time he needed to speak to a local official. Can you imagine having to wait for an order to go through, then having the interpreter come all the way to the site, every time he had a question? How frustrating it must be to try and get any work done while not understanding the people around you. When he learned I was bilingual in French - English, I was assigned to be his unofficial personal interpreter. This position brought me to many interesting places, and situations.

Colonel Gregory had just been assigned to our outpost about the same time that we arrived. He rented a house in the middle of Mechra bel Ksiri, a town situated six mile from the radar site. The better homes had "V" shaped ditches in front of them to protect them from flash floods. Flash floods were a hazard that plagued the desert homes. Rain was scarce, but when it came it caused a deluge. The bridge that spanned his ditch was flimsy, old and not very safe. He called me and said, "I want you to

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build a bridge that will be large and strong enough to hold a moving van. Go to the Master Sergeant and get work orders for the work pool, motor pool etc. Ask him to release to you as many men as you think you will need to do the job. If he hasn't enough men available then you may hire some of the local Arabs."

I said, "Sir, I know nothing about carpentry, never mind building a bridge."

He looked at me and said, "Oh, you will do just fine."

"Yes Sir," I said as I saluted and headed for the door.

I went to the Colonel's house and stood in the middle of the ditch trying to evaluate what the job entailed. I had to estimate the material needed. The ditch was roughly five feet deep and about five to six feet wide. I stood there wondering how did I get myself in this mess and more important how do I get out of it, and I wasn't thinking about the ditch.

I knew that moving vans were wide and heavy. The last thing I wanted was for my bridge to be the cause of the colonel's furniture landing in the ditch. I made a list of what I thought I needed and went to the supply sergeant. He placed an order to the naval base in Port Lyautey. Next, I went to the motor pool and requested a truck to go get the stuff. Orders from the commander's office had been given that I was to be granted anything I requested. I soon learned that the work force on an outpost is run by a Master Sergeant, with tech and staff sergeants manning the different departments. A good Master Sergeant will see that much of the details of running a base are taken care of without having to bother the officer in charge. They know their stuff and even though I might have orders from the Colonel it was a good thing to stay on their good side. The year I was there, I kept a good relationship with all of them because I never pushed my way around and respected their position.

It took the men and me about a week to build the bridge. We laid 12x10 inch beams across the ditch and anchored them securely in place. Then we bolted 2" planks across the beams. When we were finished the Colonel came to inspect it. I told him I was concerned about the weight of the van. After one look he said, "This thing could hold a Sherman Tank!"

Every chance I got I went up the hill to the scope (radar) room and asked the sergeant in charge to give me something to do. Before long I knew if I popped in I would be given a job.

It was soon known on the radar site and the naval base that I was Colonel Gregory's unofficial interpreter-errand man-go-between etc. person. My job could take me anywhere from going to the hardware store to buy nails or deliver very important documents, to communications with the French Government officials.

On one such trip, I was going to Port Lyautey in a six-by (truck) that had double-dual wheels at the rear of the truck, when in my peripheral view I saw something to my right moving in the desert. A second look showed me a set of dual wheels racing across the desert. Hey wait a minute I thought. I'm the only one on the road; those had to have come off my truck! I maintained my speed trying to figure out what to do next. I couldn't see through the mirrors which set it was; front or back of the double dual wheels. If they were the front set, it could make the truck flip over and I would be in serious trouble. I thought to myself, "Well here I go" as I gently applied the breaks. Fortunately for me it was the rear set and

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even though I tore up the road pretty badly I came out of it unscathed. I was close to the Navy base so it was not long before military personnel came along and helped me out.

One day I went to the Colonel's office and told him that we were invited by one of the "Colons", settlers subsidized by the French Government and usually well off, to come for dinner. I told him that he wanted him there at two o'clock in the afternoon.

"Two o'clock in the afternoon!" Colonel Gregory said. "Is this a tea or a dinner? Pick me up at one thirty. You're coming with me."

When we arrived at the estate we were each given a gun (rifle) and told we were going rabbit hunting for our supper. The colonel was not a hunter and I got ill at the thought of looking at a bloodied dead animal. The host was a good shot and bagged the game we needed for our meal. We went back to the house and had drinks and made small talk while the wife was preparing the meal with the help of some "domestics" (servants). We sat down to dinner at about eight in the evening and course upon course was served, laced with talk and wine, in between each course. We left there at two o'clock in the morning. On the way back to the post, Colonel Gregory looked at me and said, "Labonte, the next time I'm invited to anything by one of the Colons, the answer is NO." I said, "But Colonel-" He stopped me short. "The answer is NO!" I replied, "Yes Sir." Inside I was glad the answer would be "NO."

Speaking French had some perks. During a mission for the colonel at the Naval Base, I was introduced to a young French girl. We got to talk, and she invited me to her home. She said to bring a friend for a leisurely afternoon visit. When we arrive there, we found out that her father was a very wealthy horse breeder. The ranch buildings were quite elaborate. I didn't know anything about animals, but I knew immediately these horses were thoroughbred. We went horseback riding and then were invited to stay for dinner.

Colonel Gregory called me in the office one day and said, "My wife needs an interpreter, She has many errands to do and things to get for the house. I want you to take her shopping today." I told him how I always did my mother's errands for her and would not mind doing some for Mrs. Gregory. This began a very good thing for all of us. There were times when I would take her list of errands and get them done. On other occasions she would come with me to choose what she wanted. In return I got home made cookies and some times pastries. Even though we ate well on the site, having home made baking was a treat.

The job also had its downside. In French Morocco the laws were quite different than ours. When Arab men were sentenced to jail for a crime, it was customary to have their wives serve the sentence. The only way the women could get out of jail, was to serve the entire sentence, or to prostitute themselves, to buy their way out. These jails were called, Kasbahs or women prisons. A thick wall over eight feet tall surrounded the Kasbahs. At the entrance there were two heavy doors that were always left opened. Anyone could come and go except the women prisoners. If they so much as crossed the door they were killed on the spot with no question asked.

On most Saturday nights some of the American servicemen would go to the town of Souk El Arba Rharb to eat drink and then pay a visit to the Kasbah. If they got disorderly they were arrested and kept overnight or until a military advocate would go bail them out. I was told by the First Sergeant to take a

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bus and pay the fines so they could be released. It became my job to go get them on Monday mornings. That was not a pleasant task. I had to deal with the Kasbah officials to bail them out. The stench in that place made me lose my "cookies" more than once. When the women would see any male within sight they would expose themselves in hopes to turn a trick. Then to top it all off I had to listen to the crude jokes and bragging of the exploits of the men on the way back to the radar site.

One Monday morning when I was called to the First Sergeant's office to get my orders to go get the men at the Kasbah, I said to him, "If those pigs want to get themselves in that pigsty they can bloody well stay there. I'm not going after them." The sergeant turned red purple and said, "Labonte! You WILL go get those men out or you will be looking out from a jail cell yourself. Understood?" Fie was so anger I thought he was going to have a stroke. I did not argue! But from then on I would take a 6X (truck) troop carrier and made them ride in the back. They were not happy with that, but had no choice in the matter. I figured if I had to suffer, so would they. I never could understand why these men who had girlfriends and wives in the United States would spend so much of their money getting into the Kasbahs and then spend more to get out, to say nothing about the sexually transmitted diseases they got from that place. They were pitiful when they learned they had come down with a STD. Some would cry others were angry with the girls, but few ever blamed themselves. Many brought these diseases home. The French government had a good thing going. They got money from the girls and from the men.

Our water was brought in by helicopter in large tanks (attached to their underbellies). We were allotted just so much water per person per day. To conserve water we learned to get wet, turn off the water, suds up, and then rinse. You had water to brush your teeth and shave in a wash pan. Anyone breaking that rule was dealt with severely by both the officers and the men who didn't want to lose their ration of the water.

I do remember once when the rule was eased: Our outhouses were nothing more than a building with wooden seats with holes in it, placed over a trench. When the trench got fairly full another trench was dug and the outhouse was moved. The building had eight handles on it, four on each side. Eight men would grab hold of a handle and move it from one trench to another. The old hole was filled up and we were in business again.

One time while moving the outhouse the ground on one end gave way and one of the guys slipped into the hole. He was in up to his armpits. Being a real comedian, he said "Guys, don't pull me out, just bury men." The other men were laughing so hard they had a difficult time pulling him out. He took about ten showers and no one begrudged him the use of the extra water.

The desert is very interesting. I used to go for walks to explore its beauty. There were many safety measures that we took to protect ourselves, such as to walk hard to created vibration. This way snakes would not be surprised and would go away from you. We never got up in the morning without looking under the cot for snakes or scorpions. We never put on clothes without first shaking it, to be sure that scorpions weren't hiding in our shoes or clothing. Not often but a few times we would find them.

There were always small jobs to be done on the site. It soon became my responsibility to deal with the Arabs. After a few times of hiring some of the local men I became aware that a young man named Ahmed was reliable and showed initiative and leadership. I would tell him the night before a job to bring the number of men needed. I could rely on him to pick out some good (hard working) people.

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After a while I was able leave him in charge while I went off to do other things. The Arabs were used to being exploited and pushed to work hard without any rest periods. I insisted that they take ten minutes off every hour when doing hard work in the sun. They were afraid to do so at first but I prevail upon Ahmed to make them work at a slower pace and insisted that they take their ten-minute breaks every hour. I never had to search for men. They liked working for me.

The hourly pay to the Arabs was absurd (what we could pay them was dictated by the French authorities). I took it upon myself to give them a raise. I got called in by the Colonel and told I couldn't do that. The French Governor had sent word to him to protest the fact that we were ruining a good thing for them and since we were guest in their country we had to abide by their customs. I had to take away their raise. But I got around that by giving them an extra hour or two of pay each day. The colonel and the paymaster were aware of it but never said anything. They were also aware that I got more out of my crew than most.

On one occasion, I was called to the colonel's office and told to deliver some classified documents to a certain officer in Sidi Slimane. Fie told me that it was regulations for me to carry a weapon whenever I had classified documents in my possession. I told him I was not good with a handgun. He replied that I must still carry one on me (per regulations). A Captain asked if I could pick up a package for him while I was in Sidi Slimane. I took the documents and the forty-five caliber pistol, placing them on the seat next to me. Just before arriving at the base (in Sidi Slimane), I stopped the jeep and put on the gun belt and holster. I delivered the papers and went for the package for the captain. I had lunch, did a bit of site seeing. Before getting back into the jeep I took off the gun belt and put the gun in the glove compartment and started out for Mechra bel Ksiri. I got there about nine o'clock (in the evening). I went to the captain's house and rang the bell. When he opened the door I handed him his package and stood there for a moment talking. I returned to the Jeep opened the glove compartment and the gun was gone.

I went to the mess hall and the cook made me supper. It was an understanding with the Colonel that no matter when I came in the people in the kitchen, the cooks were to make me a meal. Since I was not a fussy eater and liked leftovers the cooks and I got along just fine. When I finished supper it was past 10:00 pm, too late to report the gun missing. I was glad to put it off, because that was a serious offense.

The next morning I went out early to get my crew started. I told Ahmed that my gun had been stolen. He said, "Don't worry I'll get your gun back. Now don't say anything I will have your gun back. Don't worry." Ahmed had no power by himself he was just a tribesman. He told me he would go to his village chief. I said, "I don't want the person punished because I know anyone caught stealing could have his hands cut off." I kept repeating to him. "I don't want that person to be punished. I would rather take the blame for losing the gun." He kept repeating, "don't worry, I take care of it; don't worry."

Sure enough, the next morning he brought me my gun. When I asked Ahmed if the person would be punished. He said, "I told you not to worry. I took care of it." When one has worked with the Arabs, you know how loyal they are to one another, and for me, a foreigner, to get my gun back, was truly amazing.

Anytime the men in the radar room would pick up an unidentified aircraft in the area, they would first try to contact that plane. If that failed they would call the Navy air station and scramble two jets to intercept the aircraft. Most of the time, it was a civilian plane that had wandered off its course. The

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aircraft would be identified and then the jets had to burn the rest of their fuel before they could land. Jet fuel is very high octane and made it very dangerous to land with full tanks. The pilots would fly their F86D Saber Jets over the radar site and buzz us to show the mission was complete and use up their fuel at the same time. One pilot came so low that when he turned upwards (climbed), the vacuum created from the airplane speed, sucked up the tent I was living in. Fortunately I was outside watching him buzz us. A couple of airmen, John McDonald and a guy nicknamed Beaver got the surprise of their lives when the top of their tent was pulled right off and they found themselves outside in their underwear. Our gear was strewn all over the site.

When my tour of duty was up, Colonel Gregory asked if I would like to stay for another year. I said I would, but the Air Force authorities said there was a rule against keeping enlisted personnel more than a year in the desert. I was shipped back to the states.

Our outpost was a small site, when our tour of duty was over all 250 men were shipped out at once. Just as when we had arrived, the new replacements came in on the troop carriers (trucks called 6X) that would take us to Port Lyautey. We called out to them and watched the look of amazement on their faces as they took in the primitive conditions of the radar site.

When we got to the Navy base we were allotted seats on different flights headed for Mobile, Alabama. I and about a dozen other airmen were assigned seats on a C-124, known as a Globe Master. This happened to be a cargo plane that was delivering a "monster" press to the states. The belly of the plane was a massive lift that was lowered and raised by four cables. They would load (the press on) the elevator and then it would rise and lock into place. The press took up most of the space with room for only a few seats on each side where about a dozen of us men sat facing the press.

No sooner were we over the ocean, than one of the engines started to malfunction and we landed in the Azores, Portuguese Islands, to have the engine repaired. We were there a few days resting and visiting the islands before the plane was ready for takeoff. About half way between the Azores and Bermuda the same engine began to act abnormally again, and we started to lose altitude. They jettisoned the press into the ocean and we made it to Bermuda.

When they told us the plane was ready to leave I refused to board. The captain ordered me to go aboard. I still refused and told him I would find another flight to the states. Our destination was Mobile, Alabama. This was a busy military airfield and I knew I could hitch a ride on another plane. I arrived there only a few hours after the other plane. This one was a troop carrier. Not only was I more comfortable but I felt much safer.

I had a thirty-day leave. I headed for HOME!

When I arrived home, I rang the doorbell. An old man came to the door. It was not until he spoke that I recognized my Dad! He had aged so in that one year that I hadn't recognized him.

Time flew by and I was on my way to my next assignment at Mt. Laguna in Southern California. I flew to San Diego; from there I took a bus to the road leading to the radar site. It was an eleven-mile trip up the mountain to the site with no public transportation going there. There was a general store with a garage attached nearby. The people there were used to seeing new airmen coming in. They told me to wait a few minutes and some military personnel was sure to stop in and I would be able to get a ride up

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with them.

I waited less than ten minutes when an airman stopped by, and asked if I was a newcomer. When I said that I was, he told me to get my duffle bag and hop in. From that time until I got my own car, I relied on others to get a ride to El Cajon a town thirty miles away.

Looking to the east, far below us, we could see the desert. Mount Palomar Observatory was to the northeast. All around us were mountains and more mountains. The sunsets were breathtaking.

There was a mountain lodge about a mile down the road where we would walk down to the coffee shop for a snack and a change of scenery. One night (late evening, in the dark) when I came home from a visit to the lodge, they said "Woody", one of the airmen, was missing. They found him the next morning hung from the wires between two telephone poles on the road to the lodge. We could never figure out how he got there (between the two poles). There was no ladder or other means of getting up there. He was dead center of the poles. I always wondered if he was there when I passed that spot the night before.

I went into town and bought myself a car. I took it out on the highway. Coming down a hill it started to vibrate so bad I nearly went off a cliff. I was pretty shaken. I turned the car around and brought it back to the dealer. He said I had bought it and therefore could not give me back all my money. I accepted the loss. My one-hour drive cost me two hundred dollars. I wonder how often he sold and bought back that car.

On my next leave home I bought a used '53 Ford and drove back to California when my leave was over. My mother had filled a box of food and placed it on the passenger seat. There was everything under the sun in that box. Sandwiches, cupcakes, candy bars, cheese, all kinds of fruits, and drinks. That was so nice. I'll never forget that box of "surprises."

One night when going up the mountain, my car headlights caught the biggest tarantula I had ever seen bounding across the highway. That cured me from taking walks at night.

After I got my car, on my days off, I would go visiting the surrounding countryside. On a long furlough I went to Vista, California to visit Mr. and Mrs. Bert Dulac, friends of the family. Their daughter Connie and I were friends. We corresponded since their departure from Lewiston. Mr. Dulac started a trailer park on a hillside. He was a pioneer in that field. He struck a gold mine! They lived on a hillside and across the valley we could see his trailer park. One day he took me to see the park and told me that whoever married his daughter would get the park as a wedding gift. I guess they and my parents would have liked for us to get married, but alas it was not to be. She was a nice girl but not my type.

A Lieutenant Campbell was a "hotshot" flyer. One week-end he came to the site (actually he was stationed at the site) and told us he was going to check out an L-20 (a military reconnaissance plane) to do some sightseeing and asked if anyone was interested in going with him. A couple of us said yes. He gave us quite the ride. We were over farm country when he spotted a farmer on a tractor. He said, "Hey guys watch this, I'm going to give this guy the scare of his life." He started to dive right for him; at the last minute he pulled up and started to climb. The pressure in the cabin was so great that it popped the canopy off the plane and (the canopy) landed in the field. I knew he would have some tall explaining to do once he got back to the base.

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There were two radar "balloons" on our radar site situated about thirty feet apart. They sat on vertical (two story) buildings. The balloon part was larger than the buildings they sat on, making them look like giant ice-cream cones. As in Morocco, whenever we scrambled jets to investigate an unidentified aircraft the pilots would have to use up their fuel before they could land at their bases, so they would buzz us at the radar site before returning to their airbase. There were numerous airbases in the southwestern parts of the United States. We would call (radio) the airbase closest to the aircraft we needed identified.

One day we got a call from Lieutenant Campbell saying he was putting in required flying hours and he was coming in to buzz us. He aimed his T-33 (a jet trainer plane) straight for the center of the two balloons. Since his plane's wingspan was wider than the space between the balloons when he approached the radar structures, he tilted his jet plane and flew sideways, at about 250-300 miles an hour between the two balloons. Those of us who were outside watching him buzz us, jumped off the cliff onto a small ledge. He made it through with only inches to spare on either side. A feat that only an ace pilot (or an idiot) would do, but he put everyone on the site in jeopardy, plus the millions of dollars of equipment and possibly interrupting the country's security. He was grounded for life for that feat (he had his license taken away for life).

I went up the ranks (promoted) to Staff Sergeant while in Mt. Laguna just before being transferred to a radar site in San Luis Obispo. When I arrived and reported to the first Sergeant's office, I had no sooner told him my name and that I was reporting to the site for duty than he reamed me royally for not being in uniform. When I told him it was not mandatory to be in uniform unless I was on duty he only intensified his angry tirade of what was expected of me and what I would do while on that site.

In less than a week I got chewed out for wearing white cotton socks instead of the regulation colors. I had to show them the paper from the doctor that I was to wear only white cotton socks because of a foot problem. While in the radar room I was assigned to a scope while a corporal was on the dais, usually manned by Sergeants. When I asked why I got another dose of angry tirade telling me I was to follow orders and not ask questions.

Every day men were called to the office and given a rough time for minor infractions of what they considered code. It was a "weird" place. The atmosphere was tense.

The second week I was there an announcement over the intercom said they were looking for volunteers to go (to be transferred) to the Boron radar site in the Mojave Desert. In less than sixty seconds I was in the First Sergeant's office telling him I wanted to volunteer. The First Sergeant said, "what's the matter Labonte, don't you like us here?"

I said, "No, I don't." I guess that caught him off guard, he just grumbled and I got my transfer. The desert is not the desolate place most people think it is. There is so much beauty to be seen there.

I observed a number of interesting events that happened while I was in the radar room at the Boron radar site. There are established airways to keep flights from colliding in the air. Two of these crossed over Blyth, California. Airway Green Five went east to west and Red nine went from north to south. Aircrafts would check into the Blyth control station when flying in that area. One day I picked up a B36 going west about 200 miles per hour over Blyth. Then it stopped dead in its track and soon started to go backwards.

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I checked the registered flight plans, got its flight number, picked up the radio and spoke to the Captain. When I told him what was happening he said, "what are you some kind of wise guy? I just checked in with Blyth and we are right on track."

I said, "sir, before you accuse me of anything I suggest that you have your navigator check your altitude and longitude, I believe you are headed into the jet-stream and right now it is blowing faster than you are flying. A few minutes later he was back on the phone apologizing. He confirmed that they were actually flying backwards.

Another time I noticed a T33 plane flying erratically. I was just about to pick up the radio when the pilot called us to say that he had lost control of his plane. All the controls were going crazy. He said he was afraid to bail out for fear of being hit by the plane. At the same time, two ground observers spotted two strange lights acting in a peculiar fashion in the vicinity the plane. They called in their report to our radar site on their direct phone lines. This lasted a number of minutes and when the strange lights disappeared the plane functions returned to normal. We tried to decipher the correlation between the lights and the bizarre actions of the plane. We called Edwards Air Force Base to see if they had any thing up in air at that time but, as usual, the answer was in the negative.

We knew that the military did a lot of secret testing at Edwards Air Force Base situated about thirty mile north northwest of us, and could not divulge the highly confidential experiments. We saw something cross the radar screen going approximately 1,200 miles per hour. We knew that no aircraft could fly that fast. We also knew that at that rate of speed there was no time to scramble planes to identify it. Whenever we called to report such an incident, the answer was, "no, we do not have anything up there at this moment"

We still reported every unidentified object going across our screen. They knew we were picking up their experiments and they could never say we weren't doing our job.

Years later, we learned about the experimental aircrafts that can fly at altitudes of 45-50 thousand feet or more; jets, spy-planes, rockets and a number of experimental aircrafts that were made known only when it no longer jeopardized the security of the country.

(In February of 1957, my four year enlistment was completed and I was discharged. I returned home and got my old job back at Lewiston Hardware on Lisbon St. Four months later, on June 15, 1961 (met Eva).

John's Bike

This Essay, "John's Bike", was written by Eva in August of 2008. The basis for this Essay is part of her writing of "John's Early Years"-but without the fictitious names of Kate and Mike and some make-believe event.

In this Essay, Kate is Pauline; Mike is Gregory and, of course, Pepere is me.

Dad

Kate was on the porch watching her father fix her son's bike. Listening to their conversation, made her

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feel like she was eight years old again. Her father never forgot even the most minute details about the events he related in his stories. The only thing he forgot was the fact that everyone had heard them at least a dozen times.

"You know Buddy, when I was your age, I had a green Schwinn bicycle. I must have put at least a hundred thousand miles on that bike," Pepere said.

"What's a Schwinn, Pepere?" asked Mike.

"Why, a Schwin was only the best bike you could own. It was the "Mongoose bicycle" of my time. It had wide tires with tubes inside," said Pepere.

"Tubes? What are tubes?" asked Mike.

"Tire tubes were like air balloons in your tire that gives the rider a smoother ride. I wore out two sets of tires every year. My Schwin was a boy's bike. It had two cross bars from the seat to the steering shaft. There was a place for a horn and a headlight. It had the old fashioned type brakes that worked when I pushed backwards on the pedals. Every year, I would take it completely apart to service it and change the brakes." Pepere began to grease the ball-bearing case. "Buddy, will you please hand me that wrench over by the steps?"

"Didn't your father do that for you?" said Mike.

"My dad was old, and once he showed me how to do things, I wanted to do them myself.

I used to do all my mother's errands and I could leave my bike outside the stores in town unlocked, and never have to worry about it being stolen."

"How many speeds did your bike have Pepere?" asked Mike.

"It was a standard bike with only one speed and that was whatever strength I had and how fast I could pedal," Pepere said.

"One day, I was coming down Main Street and a car pulled alongside of me and told me he clocked me going at least fifty miles an hour. That was quite a feat for that kind of bike, even if I do say so myself."

As Pepere would name a particular tool, Buddy would have it in his hands in a jiffy, just like a nurse working for a surgeon. He was proud that he knew all the different tools, and Pepere didn't have to show him which one to get.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I was racing my friend Maurice down Pine Street?" asked Pepere. He bent over to adjust the speeds cables. He didn't wait for Buddy to nod in the affirmative. "My friend Maurice and I were racing down Pine Street. Maurice was three years older than I was and much taller, but I was way ahead of him. I turned to look back at Maurice to taunt him about my being faster than he was. All the while, I was pedaling my bike as fast as I could possibly go. When I looked ahead again, surprise! There was a car directly in front of me. My bike hit the rear bumper of the car, and I flew over the roof of the car and landed on the hood looking up at the driver. The driver was in total

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shock to see a skinny gangly kid sprawled on the hood of his car looking up at him. He slammed on his brakes. This sent me flying off again, this time to the pavement in front of the car. The driver was visibly shaken. He got out of his car to see where the kid who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere had disappeared just as quickly. I got up unscathed to see Maurice bent in two having the last laugh. I convinced the driver that I was okay. The only damage done was to my pride and to my bike. I took the bike home, changed the wheel before my father got home from work, and was ready for my next adventure."

Buddy helped Pepere put the tools away all the while listening to Pepere tell him to be careful; to wear his helmet; to not drive recklessly; to watch traffic and.....

Our Mother's Kind of Christmas and Our Dad at Christmas

These two items "Our Mother's Kind Of Christmas" and "Our Dad At Christmas", were written by Mark. Thought you might like these for the "Mom" Book.

Our Mother's Kind of Christmas

by Mark

*T'was a month before Christmas
And everyone knew
That our dear little Mother
Would guess who had who.
How she found out, she really did not care
The conniving old lady just did it with flare.*

*All of her children
Slept restlessly in their beds
While visions of revenge
Danced in their heads.*

*My wife slept soundly
As I jumped in the sack
And soon I was snoring
In one of my short little naps.*

*When, inside my head
There arose such a clatter
That I shook it vigorously
To see what was the matter.*

*I sat up in bed
With a quick little flash
And knew what I was thinking
Was really quite rash.*

*My brain has never worked this hard you know
And the thought of it just scared me so
When, into my wandering mind should appear
But a miniature brain cell with a neat little idea.*

I shook my head for I thought it was a trick

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*And knew in a moment I had to act quick.
My siblings and their spouses I called and they came
And if you want to know here are their names:
Now Dasher, now Dancer, now Prancer and Vixen,
On Comet, on Cupid, on Doner and Blitzen.*

Or

*Lisa and I, Joline and Eric, Anne and Joseph, Pauline, and Andre
We plotted and planned, till we got it right.
Oh, how we could not wait to see our Mother's face
On this special night.*

*At Christmas our Mother is known to lie
She knows who and what you got, she really is quite sly.
She struts around like a peacock on gin
And "can you guess how I know all of this?"
She says with a grin.*

*Her eyes, how they twinkle, her dimples how merry,
Her cheeks are like roses, her nose like a cherry,
Her droll little mouth was drawn-up like a bow.
Oh! Us children would like to kill her you know.*

*Needle and taunt you-she had no mercy
And when she laughs her stomach shakes
Like a bowl full of jelly.
Evil as she is
And conniving as can be
Mom, we still love you
As you will see, you will see.*

OUR DAD AT CHRISTMAS

by Mark

T'was three months before Christmas
And Dad had set the deadline
We all had to have our lists in
Well before Christmas time.

Not having them all is what he most dreads.
"Oh, can't they get that through their thick little heads".
By imposing a fine he gave us flack,
But we had figured out how to get him back.

Suddenly, us kids in the den made such a clatter
And snickered when he sprang-up and yelled
"WHAT'S THE MATTER, WHAT'S THE MATTER?"
When he flew to the den like a man with a rash,
Then we all knew our trick was a smash.

As the sweat on his brow began to flow
We all knew it was time to go.
When what to our wondering eyes should appear
But his devilish grin from ear to ear.
We knew in a moment he was on to our trick
And his retaliation would be merciless and quick.

More rapid than eagles, his "sonic boom" came
He screamed and shouted and called us all names
"Now listen to me you stupid little vixens,
Go to your rooms with no supper or fixens."

To the top of the stairs and to the end of the hall,
We dashed away, dashed away, dashed away all.

Now, deep inside he isn't so mean
He just wanted us out of the way
So he wouldn't be seen
Searching in the cupboards and all around
For there were Christmas chocolates to be found.

Snooping around like a cheap little crook
He scrutinized every little cranny and nook.
Upon finding his loot
He settled down for a snack

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Propped himself up and threw his head back.

No biting, no chewing, he swallowed them whole
MY GOSH HE ATE THE WHOLE FRIGGIN BOWL.
His eyes, how they twinkled
His dimples how merry
For he had just eaten a chocolate covered cherry.

He let out a sigh and rubbed his big belly
Then was off to the kitchen for doughnuts filled with jelly.

He then washed his face with water and soap
Hoping to look as innocent as JOHN PAUL the pope.

Holding an empty bowl, our mother came in
And asked, "Who is responsible for this terrible sin?"

Instantly he knew what would be his plight
As he failed to get his chubby little body out of sight.
"Not I" he said with a toothy grin
As chocolate oozed from the folds of his double chin.

He's mean and warm hearted
And does it with grace.
This is the man with "Duuuuuh!" on his face.

It's not a lie and it's not a myth,
This is the Father we have to live with.

Stella's Soap

This little "fable" was written by Eva at about the time Bob Murphy and Stella were courting and probably after they got engaged.

As we all know, Aunt Stella has the reputation of~ probably being the cleanest and sanitary person in the world--hence this little teasing piece about the various soaps and cleaning agents of the time.

This then could be a miscellaneous item in the "Vlom" book.

Stella's Soap

Not so long ago a big man named Murphy with an Irish Spring in his step got up enough courage to pick up the phone Dial, 783-0223. This Bold act got him a date with Stella, the Spic n Span queen of Lewiston/Auburn.

He told her, "You are the Dawn of my life. You are a Dove. "

"Enough! Enough!" She exclaimed. "I wish you would Vanish!"

But, he would not give up. He had too much Zest and Spirit. "But Stella, dear." he said, "You are a Fantastic person, I must go out with you." She could not withstand the Tide of fate. He was too Suave and debonair for her and he was able to Wisk her off her feet.

He took her to the Chickadee restaurant and together they Snuggled in a booth. With a Gleam in his eye, he reached for her Ivory hand and Caressed it with a Gentle Touch.

"Will you marry me?" he asked.

She thought; he must have made an Era. The signals in her brain started to shout, S.O.S. S.O.S! She tried to reason with him that he would only Lever in the year 2000. She tried vainly to Safeguard her heart. But he knew how to win her over. He told her, he was, Mr Clean!

That make all the difference in the world. She told him, "Yes, I will marry you."

He jumped for Joy and make a Dash for her. He planted a kiss on her ruby red lips. She thought that was just Fabulous and felt she was on a White Cloud.

Everyone Cheered this union but doubted whether he could really get her to the alter to Pledge their undying love to each other. We will just have to wait and see what the Future holds.

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