

Stitchless at Stitches

It all started this winter when the water lines froze up to many homes in Moosomin including ours. It is now June and there is still there nothing coming out of the taps, not even an annoying drip! So for this nasty winter to 2013-14 we didn't have running water. . . . more of a saunter slump with 3 gallon containers back and forth across the yard. We considered it our exercise program and we were fortunate to have flowing water taps at the store. Showering at the Coop truck stop. . . that is another whole story and experience!

Pour a warm beverage. . . you can tell this story is going to take awhile. . . another convoluted tale of Lori. My weekend routine really had to change when we lost our water. For those of you that aren't familiar with my routine. . . I work and have an apartment about 2 ¼ hours from where my home, husband and dogs are. I go back and forth every week.

I am one of those odd women who actually enjoys doing laundry. . . the smell of the products and I love my clotheslines! Over the years I have had many experiences at Laundromats and I can now add Moosomin Laundromat to the roster. Every Saturday morning, I fill my travel cup with coffee and load the week's laundry into the car and head for the Laundromat. Moosomin has a pretty new Laundromat and I think the owner wants his patrons to pay it off the first year of operation. I also feel I am putting his children through university . . . but that is just the way it is and I am grateful to have it so convenient. You do meet interesting folks at a Laundromat! I had quite a few weeks of companionship from women that were pipeliners. They are a breed unto themselves. They were interesting and I found our conversations quite fascinating however we had nothing in common but a bottle of detergent and bags of dirty clothes. When spring breakup came and their work took them elsewhere I really missed them. They were soon replaced with farmer / rancher type folks washing horse blankets and manure coveralls in the special machine! One morning I felt I was "Dear Heloise" and / or "Abbey". I was 911 for stain removal and matters of the heart. A sweet rosy cheeked young fellow needed advice on how to ask a girl out! He made no eye contact and kept on folding his laundry as my interview skills and thorough advice including "protection" were spilled onto the folding table. I am hoping to cross his path again as I am curious how he made out. No pun there! . . . just deep curiosity.

When I got the timing down to an art I knew how much time, how many errands I could do while the machines were running. One quiet morning I started a new ritual. . . I would walk over to Shirley's Quilt Store. She has lovely staff and there is often a Saturday morning class taking place. I like watching "newbies" become fabric addicts! However these side trips were costly too but I do have an addiction to feed and my stash needed replenishing. One morning I noticed a brochure for a Saskatchewan Stitches Conference in Muenster, Saskatchewan. I picked one up as I left the store and back at the Laundromat studied every word and class description. It had so many options for classes and the setting sounded so inviting. There were 44 classes to choose from, everything. . . sewing, knitting, beginner, novice to expert. It was to be held at an Abbey. . . whatever that is. I pulled out my Blackberry and looked at my work calender and cross off courses I definitely could not attend. . . made a list of "possibles" and then set it aside for a week. The next Saturday I inquired if anyone at the

Quilt Shop had ever attended. I got great positive responses and endorsement and then some grumbling as it seemed the staff were farm related and seeding season often conflicted with the conference time. I was "sold" on the conference and a half dozen fat quarters. The next week I registered for Gelli Plate Printing.

Finally the date came and I headed to Muenster, SK. St. Peter's Abbey. It was about a four hour drive from my work home and it was a glorious day. I arrived mid afternoon and found the Abbey rather mesmerizing. A beautiful 4 story brick building and many other buildings attached and detached. . . . and the cutest bird house that was a replica of the big brick building, an Abbey for the birds! I sat in the parking lot just taking in the ambiance and discussed the spilled Cheesies on floor of my car with a squirrel. He was certain he could help me clean them up but I told him there was too much sodium content for a wee fellow like him. I told him about water retention and the UN attractiveness of swollen ankles and he scurried off.

In my usual style I was delayed in reading the directions of which door to enter and I entered an almost correct one and was greeted by the receptionist who was ever so pleasant. She gets 100% for her customer service. She escorted me to where I needed to go and gave me a mini orientation. No doubt she took one look at me and knew I wouldn't absorb complicated directions so she kept it simple. Bonus, I was gifted with a private room with its own washroom. I thought I would be sharing a room and using a common "down the hall" facility. I immediately had a flashback to the 70's as the bedspread I had seen before on a friend's bed, it was rather comforting. Those of you that have travelled with the government and gotten the government rate at hotels know all about those rooms. They are the special rooms by the ice machine, vending machines, elevators and should you get excited as you walk down the hall of a new hotel thinking someone messed up and you are getting a regular room this time and when latter that night you "hear" that you are surrounded by a rambunctious hockey team. Those special rooms I often thought were the revenge of hotel employees annoyed at me travelling on their tax dollars!!

So here I am at the Abbey, which I still need to Google and learn more about, in a private room with two large windows, one that opens (it is the little things that I really appreciate!) and as I glance out my window my eyes are drawn to a smaller brick tower which my ears were introduced to quickly. This was the bell tower and the bells started ringing and kept ringing . . .so I am thinking this must be a fire or fire drill. I step out into the hallway and met a woman who informed me it was not a fire drill and the quick and long ringing of the bells is calling the Monks to prayer. I smile relieved but thinking I have the Abbey equivalent to a government hotel room! This kind lady also assured me that the bells don't ring after 9PM but they do start early in the morning.

Monks. . . I never met one before and I have had very little exposure to the Catholic religion other than a few funerals. So I am reading every brochure about the place and enjoying the spaciousness of it. It was very majestic with the high ceilings and everything was polished clean. I now took the time to read the excellent information I had received from the organizers of the conference! . . .and it is supertime so another journey and adventure to find the dining room. . . which of course I would, as I love food. I was greeted by a small group of lovely and welcoming ladies who obviously had some history and bond but ever so welcoming to a newcomer like myself. That

group of ladies grew and grew with each meal as they arrived for their classes and meal time was really special and social.

Supper was done and I didn't have to haul or boil the water to wash the dishes, another gift (presents around every corner at the Abbey) . . . what to do next?? I opted to go for a walk on the grounds and then attend the evening 'vigils' (I have to Google that too). I find the church easily. The pews and their arrangement aren't anything I am familiar with. There is an aisle down the middle and the rows or pews which I learned are called carols as each seat is partitioned off. So I am first (as you may know I don't like to be late for anything). I survey the room and think if I sit in the middle row of the middle section of the room that should be "safe" . . . not too conspicuous. I sit down and in the shelves in front of me there are many many books, not your typical hymn books I am accustomed to so I start reading and trying to figure things out. I am deep into my second book when in comes three Monks dressed in those brown Friar Tuck outfits! One younger Monk was pushing another in a wheel chair. He looked at me and his eyes popping out nearly knocked his glasses off. I had instant panic. I had a skirt on that I thought was very respectable length but my blouse was sleeveless and I thought OMG is this like a Muslim place and I am not to have my arms exposed! Young Monk parks his co-Monk's wheel chair and heads straight for me. Very kindly and quietly he informs me I am sitting in one of the Monks carols (that is how I learned the proper name!). I swiftly relocate to where he directed me. What are the odds. . . 72 seats, 12 are spoken for and I choose one of those! I am sitting down in my new location and he approaches me again as he senses I won't know which book to use or what to do. Another great experience with customer service at the Abbey! Young Monk gets me organized and in comes a few more Monks, maybe a total of a dozen and the service begins. It was all quite fascinating . . . sing songie, chantie sort of service in the round, a couple times it was almost hip hop rap! Their turn, our turn. About 10 minutes into the service I thought I had lost my place in the book as I couldn't figure out where they were . . . I just sort lip synced and over comes Young Monk as he realized he hadn't given me the correct page to turn to. His carol is across the aisle and kitty corner from me so he can see me too well! I am doing OK and then they switch books and I did a poor job of "faking it". He keeps raising a book to show me which one to switch to but there are too many books and I didn't select the correct one. I nod to him politely and go back to "faking it" but I guess I am not good at it as in a couple minutes I have a Monk from my side of aisle appears beside me showing me the book and page I should be on. This fellow, if he was one of the 7 dwarfs he would be "grumpy" . . . he was not pleased with me, he had a very stern and somber face. . . . you could tell he was thinking "dumb woman can't even follow along" . . . hopefully he went back to his carol and prayed my intelligence to return! Service is over and the Monks leave and I just sit there a little longer reflecting on my experience and thank God immensely for everything.

Another little walk and I get to help a new arrival get settled. I am back in my room with a new paperback, "Hutterite Kitchen". I read well past the 9 PM last ringing of bells and then came the rain, thunder and lightning storm of all storms. . . . it was beautiful . . . as the electrical storm moved on to terrorize children elsewhere, in moved high winds. It wasn't a night of poor sleep or good sleep but it was pleasant and secure and I had a new book that I was really enjoying. It is a good read, culture, food, traditions. . . it is like it was written for me. My world was good. Two days truly away, I felt blessed.

Morning comes and I am back to the dining room, porridge, good coffee and the warm conversations of like minded women was a great start to the day. There was a real excitement in the air, mildly resembling the first day back to school in grade 2!

Now for class... there were 6 of us and I think three, maybe four had attended this instructor's classes in previous years. Now that is a complement to the instructor! It didn't take me long to understand why they would register year after year with "Jackie". Her talents are many and her instruction is so genuine and supportive she could write a book "how to" about artistic adult learners. The plan was to learn the printing technique on paper then print onto muslin cloth and then sew something using the fabric you printed on. I received my "supply list" a wee bit late for my lifestyle and organizational skills. I still have belongings all over the place, two homes, a sea can and the Lang church. It would have taken me a month to put it all together! For a regular person, no problem. I opted out of the sewing component of the class... and I didn't get detention... I got encouragement to do what I had rambling around in the right side of my brain.

My niece Quinn that some of you know is super special to me, is now a young woman sharing a home with a "fellow we all like"! I have wanted to create something unique for her that involves her grandmother (my mother) for awhile. Last month she and two other friends helped me cater a dear friend's funeral lunch and I had an Oprah "ah ha" moment of what I would do. Even as a little girl she ate Ginger Snap cookies with her grandmother, an odd cookie for a little girl to enjoy. My mother would make her the extra sweet and milky tea and Quinn would dip her Ginger Snaps acting very grown up like! Those cookies are fondly renamed in our family as "Dunkers".

I was given the gift of time, encouragement and the knowledge and experience of not only Jackie but everyone around me. They heard Quinn stories and had experience and knowledge to share with me to assist me in my creation for Quinn. I had brought along a printed copy of the Dunker recipe and many sizes of stretched art canvases. In my corner of the classroom I was on fire to integrate my newly learned printing technique and to imbed the recipe into the picture. When I was done I didn't think I was truly done and I thought I would embellish it more once I was at home but I have tried a few things and I like it just the way it is... simple... just like a good home made cookie (slightly under cooked) and a cup of tea! I look forward to when I give it to her... no doubt we'll both have a couple tears as we are pretty mushy Tulloch girls. Grandma's recipe and memory will live on hanging wherever Quinn calls home.

When the first day of class was over I felt artistically awoken... like I came out of coma. I couldn't shut my thoughts off... I filled one of my Dollarama note books up in two days with notes and sketches and plans for future projects. When I got back to Weyburn this week I moved my kitchen table into the second bedroom and it is now my studio (artists have studios!). I have been mucking, experimenting every evening and I am sure I will continue as I have an allocated space... my studio! Did I mention I have a studio? I am alive and **WARNING** you might be the recipient of some fine "behind the laundry room door" or "inside the kitchen

cupboard" artwork created by me. You will open or close a door and shake your head in wonderment of what was I thinking! Jackie said I would look at things differently and she is right. . . this was life changing!

The evening's entertainment was an informal show and tell and story telling. Those who wanted congregated in the lower level where there was store (bought more fabric, everyone needs souvenirs!) and in an area where the bra making classes was housed. Inspired and entertained I was. It was Jackie's night to speak / host this event and one of my co- classmates, a repeater had brought projects from past years. Stories kept coming and then "fairybra mother" who could easily be a stand up comedian started. Lots of authentic friendships were in that room and the conversation and stories flowed. It was Wendy (a remarkable woman) who is the founder / organizer / coordinator of the conferences said this was like hunting and fishing for women. . . . and that says it ALL! One small sometimes large item to note is the bras makers' class. I think if you were shy when you entered the class I am doubtful you are when you complete the class. Apparently there is nothing quite like making your own bras that fit you perfectly is comfortable and the girls are up where they belong and once were! You want to show everyone; even one of the fellows in brown experienced the exposure in a past year. They make a plain Jane white bra first to create the pattern perfect for you and then they make one that maybe brings out your inner sexy! Stories of past bra making classes were most entertaining. And corset making . . . the most unassuming, unsuspecting lady was the sewer of corsets. . . she was lovely and has so much talent but just not quite the appearance or demeanor of someone I thought would be making corsets! I keep speaking of the ladies at the conference but apparently there am and have been some men. If I eavesdropped correctly one of them went onto lingerie designing in Europe! (I bet he owns a picnic basket!) There was one man in my residence hallway. He was there with his wife but he was not attending classes. I first thought. . . "let her come and have some fun without you" . . . but latter was embarrassed by my thoughts and attitude as they had driven out from BC and she was there because he was able to bring her! The first morning he is like her Sherpa carrying her machines and equipment and they sort of have this bickering style of communicating like some mature couples develop! As I encountered them often I soon got to know who sews and wears the pants in that family! We shared breakfast on the second morning and she came out of her turtle shell and told me about her career (as an ER nurse, looked more like a physio to me!) . . . and her sewing that she is passionate about. I soon put my bias and negativity away and admired that he brought her to something she really wanted to be part of. Most of the attendees came in dyads! and it was lovely to be surrounded by so many women with common interest and caring. Not too much lipstick and sensible shoes were trendy. This was the 12th year for the conference, hats off to the founder, organizers etc. It started with about 50 students and now is over 200 lasting for 12 days. No doubt an organizational nightmare at times. A quote from their website. . . "The Saskatchewan Stitches Conference offers creative classes with renowned fibre and needle work artists and attracts participants from across Canada who love to sew, knit, quilt and rughook."

John, my husband called this morning with the news that someone up the street from us has gotten their water back this week and he is confident that I will be in using my own washing machine this weekend. I hope it is a good drying day!

Lori Tulloch June, 2014