

From Here & Nowhere

*From Here
& Nowhere*

MUSINGS OF A JOYOUS SPIRIT

JOY GARTSHORE



BC Canada
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Acknowledgements and Dedication

Firstly I would like to acknowledge my wonderful wife Joy who was instrumental in encouraging me to begin this project and for her ongoing help in editing and suggesting changes while keeping distractions to a minimum. Her total love was my ongoing inspiration and this book is dedicated to “My JOY.”

My deep appreciation goes to Joy’s niece, Deborah Robinson who, with her daughter Marah Farmer, arranged Joy’s musings to create *From Here & Nowhere*, this beautiful book of memories. And to Joy’s niece, Myrna Kerr, for her lovely foreword.

I also thank my publisher, Bruce Batchelor of Agio Publishing, for his direction, expertise and encouragement in the publication of Joy’s book.

And finally, to our loving Lord, who gave me my Joy to “Love and to Hold” for 62 wonderful years, my everlasting thankfulness.

— Bob Gartshore

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Foreword:

The Blessing

Where our family lived, on the Prairies in Alberta, a last child born – often many years after their siblings and often not expected – was called “a blessing.”

Georgina Phyllis Tooley, born 1933, was such a blessing. Her best friend, and husband of 62 years, Bob, called her Joy. Whenever he spoke of her to others, he said, “My Joy.”

Joy grew into a beautiful, talented woman. Her life was filled with many successes: she excelled in school, was a lifeguard and swimming teacher at Sylvan Lake, a Girl Guide Leader, and a strong member of the Presbyterian Church where her beautiful voice led the choir.

As you’ll see in this collection of stories, Joy was a friend to everyone, and had a wonderfully quick and quirky sense of humour that could keep the family laughing.

Always, her great desire was to have children. You’ll read a tale of when she was a mere six years old, how she went to the doctor’s house, knocked on the door and asked the doctor for a baby. The doctor replied, “You’ll have to wait.” Joy sat on the step and waited until a neighbour explained that she would need to be older to have a baby, and sent her home!

I was the first grandchild, born when Joy was eleven. My mother brought me home to Grandma's house and put me into Joy's arms, saying: "Here is your baby!"

I was the first of many she nurtured – Joy's nieces and nephews, her own children, their friends, her sisters as they aged, her mother and mother-in-law, and friends. We were all loved and cared for by Joy.

These stories reflect how no one was left out. Joy kept spirits high when we were hurting, regardless of circumstances. No judgements were made; her acceptance was all encompassing and unconditional.

Our family was held together by Joy. She was the centre for all of us, our touch point for information and security. Joy was a safe place to go with our trials and successes, where sound advice was given – if asked for. We were all blessed by her love, her kindness, her laughter and by her creation of a secure family so that no one was forgotten in the circle of her caring.

Truly, she was a blessing. I hope you'll enjoy this collection of her writing: her wry humour, her enquiring mind, her passionate opinions, her warm heart. I hear her voice and her laughter in these pages, and take delight in the fact that they shine with the essence of Joy.

— *Myrna Kerr*

Joy's niece and forever friend

Section 1

FAMILY and OTHER UNAVOIDABLE ADVENTURES

No “harried housewife” here,
only witty, wry and philosophical observations
on life, love, family, travel,
and – last but still lots of fun – horseback riding!

You Want Me to Do What???

... The Arrival

Living on Canada's West Coast had never been on my wish list, having grown up with the understanding that everyone living there was old. At the ripe old age of forty, that was beginning to sound ominous.

We were being transferred by the airline and decided to live in Victoria rather than on the Lower Mainland – smaller city and the traffic somewhat less frenetic. Bob would spend the next twenty-three years commuting for his flights, which would normally leave from Vancouver; still, he felt it would be a quieter place to raise his anything but quiet little family.

Everyone was very excited as we boarded the B.C. ferry on a beautiful, calm day. They all proved to be good sailors. All but me, that is. My face took on a slightly green hue the moment we got out of the car, and that very unflattering colour was to be common as we learned to live near this watery environment. At times, I considered buying a matching wardrobe.

The kids, on the other hand, took the ship by storm and, before we were halfway across the strait, had given our life history to anyone who would listen; located all the toilets; asked to visit the captain; and more or less cleaned out the snack shop. Their father tried mightily to disassociate himself from the lot of us – difficult to do when every few

minutes one or the other of the five would run up to him demanding money or asking for information on the operation of the ship.

Bob and I had flown out ahead of time to get the furniture in place, and then gone back to Alberta to get the family, so we weren't arriving to the usual chaos one experiences with a move. Still, it came as somewhat of a surprise when a man came down our driveway an hour or so after our arrival, carrying a large bouquet of flowers and a look of sympathy. He wouldn't come in but mentioned that there may be others turning up. Our ten-year-old had gone up and down the street, and invited everyone to tea that afternoon! I am eternally grateful to my neighbours for their forbearance – no one came! We were, however, greeted with huge smiles and friendly waves any time we were outside.

Our ocean-front home was a wilderness of high grass, dense underbrush, monster trees, and voracious mud wasps that immensely enjoyed the new meat being offered them. Our boys have never taken pain quietly, and there is a distinct possibility that they were heard, faintly, on San Juan Island across Haro Strait. When there seemed no percentage in being fed to the wild life, they all trooped down to the sea to catch mud sharks and a bag of snakes. There was some discussion about what should be fed to whom, but since I knew that five siblings can never reach a consensus on anything, the possibility of an early demise of one of them was highly unlikely. While the argument raged, the snakes departed for a locale with less traffic. The sharks, having been accidentally tipped out of their baby bath, decided to take their chances with the killer whales.

The greatest discovery was an old, small gauge railway car left abandoned in the underbrush. It proved to be a much cherished plaything. The wheels were iron and made a wonderful racket when one or two kids climbed in and rode wildly down the steep little hill on our driveway. Alone, it made a terrific noise; loaded with screaming kids, it defied description. The neighbours, being good sports, assured us that it didn't bother them at all; mind you, as the years progressed, we noted that one by one they quietly sold their houses and moved away. I envied them.

The first day of school was anticipated with much pleasure because

this would be the first year they would all be in school. The thought of three hours silence was wonderful for, of course, we expected them home for lunch.

Imagine our surprise to learn that all the children in Victoria take their lunch to school every day; whereas in Edmonton, where we had previously lived, they couldn't stay at school unless it was minus twenty degrees Fahrenheit or colder. Back there, one had a choice: we could wrap them in lots of clothes and scarves, shove them out the door and hope for the best (bearing in mind that they were income tax deductible), or go out into the sub-zero garage and turn over a very hesitant car engine, leaving it to run for ten minutes while dealing with the normal chaos attendant on getting several reluctant kids ready for school. This, of course, meant dressing all of them, even if they weren't school age, for the car would not be warm enough to ride in when lightly clothed. This procedure had to be repeated four times a day.

Looking back on it, I wonder why we felt our children were too fragile to walk to school in the prairie cold. As children ourselves, we walked it as a matter of course. In those days, there were few cars and, unless there was a horse and sleigh available, everyone walked. Staying home was an option only when a bad blizzard forced the closure of all schools.

Victoria rarely freezes at any time of the year and, on a hot September day, packing lunches seemed bizarre. Besides, I've long been a proponent of the old adage, "Never look a gift horse in the mouth!" The powers that be sure weren't going to get any arguments from me.

Watching them leave for school that day was an interesting experience: my emotions ranged from sadness to joy, with a bit of pride thrown in. It was wonderful, however, to have the choice to do whatever I wanted for the next several hours, and I sat with a cup of coffee and savoured the freedom. This state of euphoria lasted until mid-morning, when the silence hit me. There had always been a toddler at home, and now my littlest was gone too.

This tiny one was always the calm in the storm – a quiet, busy little girl whose brothers taught her how to climb ropes as soon as she could



First day of school

walk. In the midst of the racket that four older siblings created, she was as often as not climbing a rope tied on the sun deck, or constructing a tree house which would forever be accessible only by rope; not for her, the niceties of a ladder. She was neither shy nor lonely, just introspective. Now she was in school, and I was sad.

At noon, the phone rang and a teacher asked if it would be alright to send her home for lunch, as she seemed sad. I tried not to sound too thrilled!

When she ran into my arms, I picked her up and said softly, "What's the matter, love, don't you like school?"

Her reply, in her funny little way of talking, was to stay with me forever: "My like school, but my *loves* you!"

With that one simple sentence, she made it alright for both of us. She never had to do that again, and I never needed her to.

As she left again to go happily back to school, I thanked God for this precious little creature who had been added to our family when we thought it was complete.

There was a codicil to that, however: 'Please, God, NO MORE!'

All Shook Up

Coming from the Prairies where earthquakes only happen somewhere else, we were on the West Coast some time before it entered our heads that the house might shake enough for us to notice. The first time we heard an earthquake, it sounded like a train rolling toward us, and reminded me of sitting in a station as a kid, feeling the building shake as the train went by. It was no big deal, really. The only one upset was one of the kids who was accused by the others of walking too heavily down the hall.

However, years of reading warnings about being prepared for the “Big One” finally got to me, especially after an Alaska quake threatened a possible tsunami wave on the West Coast. So, I bought a pamphlet and we had an unproductive discussion about what, if anything, we should do.

Bob is always in agreement with whatever requires him to run off to the store to buy some necessary gadget that, from henceforth, neither of us will ever be able to find again. I insist on vast quantities of food which will feed an army, or the arrival of family, whichever comes first. I read somewhere that the safest place to be is under the stairs but, on close inspection, I can tell you that unless I can corkscrew myself past twenty years of junk, I’m in deep trouble. Besides, what if I get trapped in there with nothing to eat but white flour and an old pair of riding boots?

Bob arrived home recently to find me crouched under the piano,

wearing a hockey helmet, shoulder pads and my high school sweater. The last isn't on any of the preparedness lists, but I kind of liked the way it all went together.

Also under there with me was a very large jug of water, food, dishes, a can opener, candles, radio, sleeping bag, I.D. and a chamber pot with toilet paper (bet you never thought of that).

It was crowded, extremely uncomfortable, and I had the uneasy feeling that if the piano fell through the floor, being squashed into a shape like a grand piano was not going to be even slightly flattering!

Bob pointed out that as a décor, the "preparedness" look smacked of early American Attic, and he really wasn't interested in being that prepared. Besides, he seemed to feel that the likelihood of my being close enough to the piano to get under it was somewhat remote, and missiles flying about the room would make progress hazardous in any case. (Why did he think I was wearing the helmet?)

Eventually, we came to an agreement. He secured the really dangerous stuff to the wall and I removed my gear from under the piano. (When he isn't looking, I may stash it under the dining room table.) Actually, since we live so close to the water, we should probably invest in one of those life boats that you can sit inside and zip up. We could tether it to the deck, and just leap out of the bedroom window as soon as the rumbling starts.

On second thought, have you ever been in a very small vessel being tossed about in large waves? I have, and believe me, death is preferable!

I have evaluated the situation, and have come to a decision. I will carry I.D. at all times, except maybe in the bath, so that they can always identify me. I wouldn't care to be labelled as the fat dame shaped like a piano.

We have made some headway on our emergency preparedness kit. Currently, we have in our possession a battery-operated radio, which I am unable to figure out how to turn on; a coal oil lantern, that only runs for about thirty minutes, at which time it takes a three-hour lunch break; two big containers of water buried under three tons of treasures; and

probably enough food to last us until the Rapture. We will not need to worry about water for washing dishes (if, indeed, any survive) since any large surge of water will likely deliver quite enough salt water into our basement to more than supply all our needs.

In any case, I don't know what all the fuss is about. One death is what I've been promised and my insurance papers are filed in The Book of Life. If you have a choice between singing praises in Heaven, or feeding all the survivors that would come to the door, which would you choose?

I, for one, am sick of cooking.

My Nemesis

We often read stories and see cartoons dealing with the frustrations inherent in operating a computer, but my problems extend to anything that is mechanical, computers merely providing the *pièce de résistance*.

It first began to dawn that things worked differently for me than for Bob when he bought me my very own car. It was a Chevy and it had just six cylinders. With five kids and varying numbers of dogs, performance was not one of the superlatives usually applied to it. One of the boys dubbed it the “Rolls-Can-Hardly.” It rolled well downhill and could hardly get back up. To me, it was a delight, for it gave me a great sense of freedom. While it was very reliable, it did have an odd sound from time to time under the hood, although never when Bob drove it.

Driving into a gas station one day, while it was making this odd noise, it struck me as a great opportunity to ask the attendant, while he was checking whatever it is they check under there. I asked if he could locate the little man that kept flushing a toilet. It did seem possible that my driving must be causing him the problem!

Some of these attendants have no sense of humour: he simply looked startled and left me to pump my own gas.

Pressure cookers are another gadget designed to shorten the life span of the female race. When using mine, a lot of precautions are essential. Bob walked into the kitchen the other day and stopped dead-in-his-tracks.

I was out on the sundeck, dressed in my bright yellow sou'wester, high boots and yellow rain hat, carrying an umbrella in one hand and holding binoculars up to my face. I wasn't pointing the binoculars out to sea. I was hunched over and peering into the kitchen window. With the patience learned over many years, Bob leaned wearily against the wall and said: "This ought to be good!"

It is my opinion that anyone stupid enough to go within 20 yards of a pressure cooker in full steam should have their head examined. I've tried sneaking up on the thing but that never works – the minute I'm within spitting range it takes on the role of a factory whistle.

Telephone answering machines are usually fairly straight forward; they either work or they don't. Mine, however, seems to be having a mid-life crisis. About two months ago, it decided that taking calls should be the responsibility of the people of the house, and every once-in-a-while, it takes a notion to place a call. Now normally we wouldn't have a problem with that, but the long-distance operator does. You see, it has learned how to dial out; but so far, although one can hear it breathing, it hasn't learned how to talk! For this we are truly grateful. Just try taking it in to be repaired! When you describe what it is doing, they treat you as if your elevator doesn't go all the way to the top. They won't even take the stupid machine in to give it a general check-up.

Modern technology has come up with a machine that can call Aunt Mathilda in Syracuse, but one of those will not be residing soon in our home. Can't you just imagine the chaos?

From now on, any gift to me will be acceptable as long as it doesn't have a function; it takes me all my time to cope with the machinery that owns me now. What would be really useful would be a dress that changes shape according to whether I am expanding or contracting. On second thought, perhaps that wouldn't be such a great idea. It would probably decide to contract just as I expanded and it might just manage to strangle me. (Something Bob has, no doubt, often been tempted to do!)

All it takes is a power failure for a few hours to make me realize that we can't live without gadgets. Dripping candles, cold rooms and

warming fridges soon have us praying for power to return. Neither we, nor our homes, are made of the stuff of pioneers.

It seems that we in our modernized world need to have a power failure at times to make us grateful for all we have. So, too, does a personal failure or loss make us realize how much we need God in our lives, and how poor and weak and cold we are without Him. How blessed we are to call Him Father!

Lists and Other Useless Exercises

Bob is nothing if not organized, and this of course extends itself into many facets of our lives together.

When the kids were young and their rooms looked like the aftermath of a tornado, he had an inflexible rule that all items left on the floor (this meant everything they owned), would be picked up by their father and thrown into “Daddy’s Box.” This monster cardboard box lived in the laundry room, and contained all their clothes – some clean, some sort of clean, some downright filthy – toys, dirty sneakers, home work, and at times, when he scooped up indiscriminately, some dirty dishes.

The kids of course hated the thing because it all smelled like a locker room, and made it very difficult for them to get dressed in the morning.

I also hated it because, at times, it became necessary for me to dump it all out and wash vast piles of laundry.

Daddy’s Box came to an untimely end one day when something alive and well-fed crawled out and snarled at me. Since I was barefoot, I was forced to use a baseball bat to subdue it. It was shaped a lot like a sock with a sneer, and sported a sort of mouldy hair piece. Having mercilessly slaughtered it, I skewered it with a screwdriver and rushed upstairs and dumped it in Bob’s lap. I then informed him I wasn’t paid active duty allowance, and if I was going to live in a war zone, I wanted a machine gun!

It was, of course, him who instituted the Christmas wish list which

each child was required to put up on the bulletin board. Our eldest son's always read like a school supply list and was very boring. The next two always asked for things like Porsches and dune buggies, while the girls carefully listed every item seen on T.V. that week. Meanwhile, Bob and I wracked our brains trying to think of several items, none of which cost more than \$1.49.

As they became adults, nothing much changed as far as the usefulness of the Christmas wish list exercise. One still reads like an office acquisition form, and the next two want permanent jobs with no lay-offs pending. The girls want clothes, none of which they will like, and all of which they will exchange on Boxing Day.

Bob has upped the anti to items under \$5, and faithfully listed the usual socks, pen refills, etc. I finally balked since they never bought anything on my list anyway, so the next time around a new creative list was pinned on the cork board.

Complaints began almost immediately and were all somewhat similar: "Mom, give me a break! What kind of a list is that?"

I thought it was rather well thought out – nothing too expensive (they are still all broke), and while the items may be somewhat hard to locate, they won't be bored while they search. The list is as follows, in case any of you are needing a challenge.

A pair of pantyhose, one size fits all OF ME. This may be a bit tough, since they usually only fit from the knees down. Makes it so hard to walk when your knees are tied together.

A hot water bottle with lots of tread. They make them smooth now, which is fine if you have a somewhat concave shape. I however am convex, and am sick of having the rotten thing slither off every time I take a breath.

A large box of no-calorie, chocolate-covered almonds. Knowing my kids, they won't make much of an effort on this one. They will simply buy the regular kind, then eat them.

A bottle of soy sauce that is impervious to osmosis. I am fed up with soy sauce rings in my fridge, and on the table cloth. How does it do that?

Musical eye glasses, programmed to play a tune only when missing. Enough stuff beeps around here.

A fantasy bathtub that will maintain an even temperature no matter how long I lie in there and read. It will also accommodate a stand for my book, have a telephone handy, and supply a storage rack to hold my low-calorie, chocolate-covered almonds.

I got a whole new perspective on gift giving when I was reading recently about a young couple who were labouring as missionaries to the natives in the northern part of the province. For a number of years, they had remained childless, and longed with all their hearts to have a wee one. Finally, a lovely little boy was born to them, and they were simply overjoyed.

Then one dreadful night the little one became ill, and before they could get any help, he was taken from them. They were completely devastated, and as the weeks and months went by, their sorrow was still very acute.

The Christmas season came, and they sorrowfully attempted to share their beliefs with the people, but it was evident that they had no real joy to offer. Then came Christmas Eve, and as they were sitting by the fire, a knock came at the door. They found on the doorstep a young Indian father, and in his arms he held a tiny baby boy. With a great deal of love, he handed them the child and said simply, "We give him to you because we love you." Then he turned and left.

We celebrate the arrival of another little boy, given to us out of the depth of our Father's love. When life falls apart at the edges, it's important to hang on to that fact.

Jesus loves us. That's the greatest gift of all time!

The Feds Strike Again

There is a strange and virulent virus that makes vast inroads into the population from time to time. The symptoms are easily recognizable: it begins with a harried demeanour, but develops fairly rapidly into the zombie stage. Its presage is always a brown envelope with “Government of Canada, Taxation Department” printed in the upper left-hand corner. That title alone has the power to turn a normally passive individual into a nervous wreck. This is particularly true if it arrives in mid-summer after the all-clear letter has been received.

You know, of course, that the Feds are never interested in big time crooks who blatantly pay no tax at all; they are much too busy watching for failure to pay blood money on the bond that Aunt Matilda left you, which brings in the grand sum of \$23.45.

The April virus started hitting our household many years ago, around the time one began to need an economics degree to fill out page one.

I’ll never forget the first time Bob came out of his study, where I knew he had been wrestling with the inevitable. He had a grey pallor and was bent over as if in pain. In a voice that would have done justice to a bit part in a third-rate melodrama, he said, “I have done the income tax AND WE ARE BANKRUPT!!!”

“HOW MUCH?” I cried in horror. “Ten thousand,” he replied as he stumbled back to his study looking like a man sentenced to the gallows.

Now I have never been one to sit and stew about something, so I had

already listed one of the cars for sale, had made an appointment for a job interview and was speculatively eyeing one of the kids who was being particularly revolting at that moment, when I looked up to see him pouring himself a glass of milk out of the fridge. As he disappeared around the corner, still looking rather ill, he said, "I've got it down to \$7,000."

A glimmer of hope! Maybe I wasn't going to have to start working for a living. Maybe if we were very careful we could sell the car and, if we could just find someone dumb enough, sell the dog.

Another hour passed, during which time everyone we knew had been informed about our extreme poverty. A bill was issued to the kids: "From henceforth, the trough from which we have been in the habit of feeding every stray kid in the countryside, will no longer be full of juice, fruit and milk, but will instead be minimally supplied with bread and water!"

I was actually beginning to enjoy the pathos of it all, when Bob emerged from his little room looking rather cheerful. "Guess what!" says he with a smile. "I made a couple of errors. I think they may owe us something!"

This little scene was re-enacted every year for a number of years and each time my reaction was a little less volcanic. By the time we moved to Victoria, I was able to view this performance with a somewhat jaundiced eye. I would respond with, "That's nice, dear. Maybe with any luck one of your relatives will peg out and leave you some money," or "Never mind, perhaps you can get a job rag-picking in your spare time." It didn't matter much what was said, for he heard nothing anyway. His head was too full of alarm bells.

This little melodrama is no longer enacted at our house, because we now live in the A.F. era. It stands for: "After Fred." Now all we do is put it all together and hand it to Fred, our accountant, who in due course sends it back all neat and tidy, and best of all, ACCURATE. No need to suffer any longer the haunting nightmare in which five little waifs are taken to visit Daddy in the hoosegow because he is found guilty of cheating the government.

What A.F. has done for our finances, A.D. has done for our lives.

While it is doubtful we can truly appreciate what Christ has done for us until we see the balance sheet spread out before the throne of grace, it behoves us to make an effort.

At Easter time, we rejoice in the Resurrection. Let's not lose sight of why He was crucified. He hung there for us.

Second Fiddle

I had a sudden urge the other day to dust the book shelves. After evaluating the desire for some minutes, I decided to at least make a start on them. Years of experience have taught me that something in there will catch my attention and the day will slide out from under me with nothing much accomplished. Book shelves are fascinating.

The first shelf was pretty boring and got cleaned rather rapidly, but on the second shelf, I hit pay dirt. There is nothing like reading your old report cards and yearbooks to give you a wonderful trip down memory lane.

Growing up in a small town on the Prairies in the Thirties, one experienced a sense of freedom that is unknown to our youngsters today. We had the freedom of the town at a very early age and I was blessed with a best friend who loved all the things I did. We spent hours climbing trees, hiking, or playing Cowboys and Indians. Shirley was two months older than me, which put her in school a full year ahead of me, so my life fell apart the day she started school. This situation was solved by sitting on the school steps all day and looking sad. By the end of the third day, I was brought in and given a desk – the teacher couldn't stand it any longer!

This was a woman who was at least fifty years ahead of her time in teaching techniques, for we laughed and sang our way through grade one with probably a far more thorough education than any of us would ever

receive again. Likely it is remembered with such nostalgia because the competitive spirit hadn't yet reared its ugly head.

The years rolled on and two things happened: first, I had a driving desire to be at the top and, second, a certain Miss Goody Two Shoes joined the class. You will all recognize her: she always had the top mark in everything, her dress was perfectly ruffled and always clean, even at the end of the day. She could draw and paint, she had blonde ringlets which never got out of place and, worst of all, she was the teacher's pet.

To be perfectly fair, if you had one kid who looked like that and another who was always slightly grubby, had pig tails braided so tightly they gave a somewhat oriental cast to the blue eyes, a body shaped like a melon and a definite inclination to devilment, which one would you choose? I know the teacher liked me a bit though, for she gave me her orange when mine got dropped down the hole in the outhouse!

My arch enemy moved away before high school and the number of students dropped off as well. These were the years when parents thought a kid didn't need a high school education.

High school was great and, since there was no longer a whiz kid in the group, the challenge to succeed was somewhat nullified by the stronger urge for self-education. This went along swimmingly, until the day I blew the windows out of the lab and was informed – in no uncertain terms – that if I wanted to learn something about chemistry, I'd have to take a course in it. In today's system, we could probably claim learning repression, but in those days, they simply locked me out of the lab. Perhaps just as well, for although the thought of dying didn't worry me much, my preference was to arrive at the pearly gates with my facial hair intact!

Funny how we change. These days I'd almost welcome an explosion. It must be quicker and certainly no more painful than ripping my facial hair off with wax!

So, I drifted to the top of a very small heap, but it was an uneasy position. Being awarded top marks in grade twelve left a lot to be desired. It's easy to be top when you are the only one who passed! The certificate

awarded me by the Town Council was eaten by the dog upon arrival. Poetic justice!

Sitting on the floor of my living room with all the dust balls floating around me, I came to the conclusion that one could sum up my academic career in three words: “She also ran.” This could be a rather sad epitaph but for one thing: I had a great time down there in second place.

In the years during the Great Depression, children had very little to play with but we were able to find great pleasure from some tiny thing that we found or were given. My brother gave me a huge magnet from an old Model T Ford and we were amused for hours trying to see how far away a nail could be placed and still be attracted to it. A tiny magnifying glass brought endless pleasure, although it was too poorly made to actually burn a hole in wood. A wee mirror was used to make signals to call in reinforcements during an imaginary Indian raid, or could shine light onto broken bits of glass with the hopes of producing multi-facets of colour.

The years have taught me that we don’t need to be terribly intelligent or beautiful or rich or famous to succeed, but rather just be a little mirror that reflects the light and love of Jesus Christ into a dark and lonely world.

Debut

After many years of singing opera on the boat, in the bath or whilst horseback riding, the opportunity finally arrived to be part of a real opera. And no one told me to be quiet! This is for sure going to be at the top of my résumé if ever one is required.

On second thought, perhaps this might have uncomfortable ramifications, for if one were to delve too closely into my performance, it would soon become evident that this wasn't exactly a personal invitation. Rather, the gifted director of my all-women university choir came close to getting down on her knees and begging the choir to go. Little did we know what we were getting into.

Practises were very long and very late. We were to perform at the end of the last act as the Heavenly chorus. They asked us to wear black! This seems an odd colour for angels, but it turned out that they didn't want us to be seen, just heard. Now I was raised on the old adage: "Be seen and not heard," (my mother had other failures as well) so this seemed to suit me well. At my age and condition, being invisible rather appeals. When we arrived for the dress rehearsal, it turned out that they wanted to be very sure we weren't seen—they had us come in at the back of the audience in pitch darkness! This would have been fine, except learning all those Latin words had proven difficult and the cheat sheet secreted up my sleeve was impossible to read.

I'm here to tell you that we made lots of noise in a language a Latin

scholar would not recognize, probably because at least one of us was making up her own words. In my opinion, angels should be able to sing in any language they choose.

John Chancellor once said: “If you want to make God laugh, just tell him your plans.” Well, until God laughs, I plan on being a singing angel. Or maybe just an ethereal voice behind the throne of God, singing praises and rejoicing. This time I’ll know the words because they will be mine. No one will tell me I’m on the wrong page, or too loud, or off key because Heaven wouldn’t be perfect if they did. I’ve already practised being loud and invisible. An invisible angel riding on a white horse would be nice.

In the meantime, you may call me Diva!



Trinity Choir

Random Access

Recently a group of church folk were standing around discussing age so, of course, some time was spent talking about memory loss, aches and pains. Then an attempt was made to be more positive about growing old. As usual, there were comments about discounts afforded seniors. Not too many other advantages surfaced, so the conversation lagged. At that point, I interjected with a profound statement: “When I turn 65, I’m going to do anything that strikes my fancy!” There was a stunned silence, then with one accord they said, “But you always have!”

Now that point of view gave me food for thought. My conclusion was that they weren’t entirely correct.

When I was with my parents, it was always politic to comply. When they forbade me matches – after nearly burning down the barn – and declared the crumbling root cellar off limits, they were obeyed.

During the Depression years, there were a lot of very sad men riding the rails across Canada, trying to find work. An old cottage at the back of our acreage was left available for such men. There was a wood stove in it, which must have been a life saver during the bitter winters, and the food Mom dispensed at the door would have been desperately needed. We were cautioned never to go near the cottage, a command we always obeyed, for the look of desperation and hunger was frightening to young children. Even as adults, we shy away from anything so horrific.

My sisters once took me on a hike and threatened annihilation if I

told Mom they had been smoking. They reinforced this command all the way home. A four-year-old can get quite disturbed by pressure like that, so it really is no wonder that the first thing I said coming in the door was: "Mom, I'm not going to tell you they were smoking!" For quite some time after that, I made a real effort to keep my mouth shut.

We four girls shared a large bedroom, thus the older girls were careful not to say anything a young sibling shouldn't hear, just in case she blabbed. Once they thought I was asleep, they whispered all sorts of neat stuff, until they discovered I was just pretending to be asleep. So, they switched to pig Latin, that wonderful gibberish they considered unknown to all but them. It didn't take long to break the code. I amassed a goodly sized portfolio, at which time an effort was made to share it with anyone who would listen. That got me in a whole lot of trouble and rule number two became imperative: ears open, mouth shut, file for future reference.

My marriage seemed to give them all a great deal of pleasure. While it was nice that they were so happy, it seemed to me that they needn't celebrate with such gusto. I felt like a mortgage being burned!

Bob took over from failing hands. There are times when he gets quite agitated by a harmless suggestion that I run by him. What is wrong with sliding down the bannister on a display model in a hardware store? We weren't rich enough to have one in our home and falling through the heat vent onto the piano isn't quite the same thing.

There are a bunch of things I'd like to try, but common sense prevents it. Wouldn't it be neat to ride a horse into a shopping mall? Or how about slowing the escalators in a big store so that your hand arrives at the top at the same time as your feet. Have you ever noticed how often you need to move your hand if you don't want to end up in a horizontal position? Why do you suppose they have them out of sync? When someone annoys me, it would be great to be able to poke them with a cane, if I had one. Wouldn't it be fun to break into song on a bus; ride a motorcycle; play a carillon; dock a B.C. ferry; or, carry the sceptre into the Legislative Assembly? The list goes on.

The fact of the matter, of course, is that as a Christian I take authority

from Christ. Believe me, He has told me to do some pretty outrageous things. My submissive reply is often: “YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?” One can attempt to gainsay the Lord, but there isn’t much percentage in it because He is so persistent. The Old Testament puts it rather succinctly: “It’s hard to kick against the pricks.” (Acts 26:14 KJV).

I don’t know about you, but being swallowed by a whale doesn’t appeal.



“See my new boots?”

Pitter Patter of Little Feet

Bob and I were enjoying a leisurely Sunday dinner when the talk drifted to Christmas on the Prairies. Sleigh bells and gently falling snow, homemade decorations that only eyes of love could find beautiful, and trees even Charlie Brown wouldn't drag home. My mom considered any tree costing more than a dollar to be highway robbery, so ours always came from a road allowance, or out of some bush. Branches next to the wall were superfluous.

By natural progression, we began talking about Christmas with young children and the attendant chaos and confusion. Being organized, we were always ready well in advance so we could cherish Advent; the children, however, got increasingly wound up and by Christmas Eve things were at a fever pitch. They coped with that in their own inimitable fashion. The eldest retreated to his room and played his accordion very loudly. The hyperactive middle son bounced off walls and cried a lot. (One year he rode his bike down two flights of stairs, inside the house.) The youngest son had the unique ability to create a dual-toned scream and this he used anytime either of his brothers looked at him. Naturally, they did this as often as possible. The girls were much quieter. The eldest spent her time hiding in the crawl space and unwrapping any gifts she found there. The youngest slung a rope over the bannister and practised rappelling.

Sitting at the table remembering all that, but not necessarily

verbalizing it, I remembered that I'd once again heard rats in the attic. (The analogy isn't that remarkable!) Bob rarely hears these sorts of things, so in a rapid conversational leap, I said: "By the way I'm hearing the pitter patter of little feet again."

Immediately his face froze in shock and it took a minute to realize what he was thinking. He must be getting too immersed in Old Testament theology if he thinks for one minute I'm another Sarah!

Once he got the story straight, he leapt from the table and went out to do battle. Rats can get in a hole the size of a quarter and for twenty years we tried 'no vacancy' signs to no avail. Poison works but tends to make the house smell like the city dump. For many years, it was evident where the general area was that rats were getting in, but we couldn't get at the spot to fill it. That evening, Bob was so agitated that he tore a hole in the garage, revealing a large entrance conveniently lit by the bathroom fixture. The noise they made coming and going made me wonder if they were running a mobile home park above the bathtub – I'm pretty sure they were advertising in the *Globe and Mail*. The first fix of steel wool and wire didn't work – they chewed through it. The two-by-four that went up next did the trick, although they tried mightily to get back in.

We have an entrance to Heaven lit by God's love; too bad we waste so much of our time in detours. Take a leaf out of the rat's notebook: "Look for light, follow directions, tell friends." The way won't be barred by a two-by-four.

Whisper that You Love Me

Many years of flying in a cockpit with smokers has resulted in several episodes of surgery to remove polyps from Bob's throat. This has rendered him unable to raise his voice or sing, so when the specialist suggested an experimental procedure which might give some improvement in volume and timbre, he was all for it. The idea was to remove some fat from his body and insert it in the vocal cords, but he personally had none to spare. Our family had lots to offer him. It was determined that if the doctors suctioned off the excess from the immediate household, they would likely be able to clone Bob and have enough left over to render into a commercial quantity of Grandma's Lye Soap.

My voice is capable of being heard into the next municipality – our kids have never been in any doubt where Mom was. This was a talent much called on, for not only did we have five children of our own, there were at least two others that were there so often, we forgot they weren't ours.

Even when Bob had a voice he very rarely raised it. When he did, we all stopped and stared in disbelief.

Only once has this gentle soul raised his voice at me and that wasn't so much volume as octaves. That was the day I phoned home from Alberta to "jokingly" tell him I'd bought a horse! It is a puzzle why Bob was so agitated; he didn't do anything more than raise his eyebrows when I bought a piano without telling him. The purchase price of a horse is lower than a piano, and it could get itself off the truck. So, maybe it

eats a bit... at least there would be some return on the money. We could have a stand at the top of the driveway and sell manure by the bag.

Bob lives with the apprehension that someday he may come home to find a horse grazing on the front lawn, while I chop up the deck to build a shelter. The sound of a horse whinnying in the night is so soothing, but Bob seems adamant that sleeping downwind from a stable does not clear the nasal passages in an acceptable manner. He also hastens to point out that it is against city bylaws to keep any large animals on the property. Too bad.

The surgery wasn't a success: Bob's body promptly absorbed the injected fat. Do you realize how many people out there in the real world would kill and die for a body that so conveniently disposed of extra fat? I have a horrible feeling that it slithers off him while he is sleeping and finds the lowest common denominator. I'm buying bunk beds!

Bob's voice will never be strong, and it will always require a microphone to speak to large groups, but it doesn't need much volume to say, "I love you."

Something like the still small voice of God.



Happy Couple

Another Racket

From time to time, the call to higher education rears its ugly head, so at one point I succumbed to the lure of learning French. This turned out to be a five-year odyssey which resulted in a lot of misspelled notes to Bob and a great deal more work than envisioned. One of our assignments was a two-page essay entitled: “My favourite sport.” Since I’m rather literal, Bob only blinked a couple of times when I asked him how to translate “couch potato.”

Basically, I’m lazy. The only reason my swimming strokes are so efficient is that it’s a lot less work that way. Housework dealt with in the same manner is sooner over with, leaving more time for doing nothing.

Bob discovered my indolence soon after our marriage and, as is typical for a newly-wed, he promptly tried to take the girl he had fallen in love with and change her into someone different. Like all such projects, it was doomed to failure, but being very tenacious, he has not yet admitted defeat.

His first idea to get me off my dead end was to register us in a bowling league. This went alright until I became adept at having strikes, which unfortunately always occurred in someone else’s alley. This was in the era of manual pin setting, so when the boys – whose unenviable task was to reset the pins – all threatened to quit, Bob saw the writing on the wall and withdrew from the league.

Next came badminton lessons. After a month, the only thing I had to

show for it was a battered racket and very expensive court shoes. Years of swimming had given me powerful shoulder muscles, but most of my court time was spent fanning thin air with a racket that always seemed too small. It got rather boring for Bob and he would quit paying attention just at the moment the birdie would accidentally connect with my racket. At that point, everyone in the room would flee as the shuttlecock turned into a dangerous missile. Since I couldn't control direction or speed, the birdie could and would travel at Mach 1 speed toward anyone foolish enough to be looking the other way. Since wearing armour while playing seemed a bit cumbersome, the decision was made to switch to tennis, on the theory that the racket was larger and any sport played outside in an area the size of a football field should render me harmless. Bob was right. In our first game, all the balls went outside the fence, possibly into orbit, for they were never found again.

Next, we tried curling, with much the same results. No one ever swept my rocks for the simple reason they could never catch them and, what is more, no one ever praised me for a clean sweep of the house. It wasn't always the first pass through the coloured circle that did the damage; it was after it had bounced off the end and was on its way back that it took on a life of its own.

Eventually, Bob came to the conclusion that age and five kids might mellow me a bit, so I heard little about exercise for a number of years. Then one day, he announced that he had registered us for sailing lessons. It was apparent that round two had begun.

Sailing was a good choice, for the sea is more than a match for anyone. Shoulder muscles are well used hoisting sails and, while a petite bathing beauty would be more decorative, a muscle-bound gorilla is what is really needed.

The remarkable thing about a boat is the ease of steering. Our boat weighs 9 tons, but even when driven by strong winds it is easily steered. The rudder is such a small part of the whole boat and yet has total control over the direction the boat takes. In the Bible, John likens our tongues to

a ship's rudder. A very small member which is capable of destruction. It wants some thinking about!

What's That Again?

Many years of being a pilot and enduring jet whistle has left Bob with some hearing loss, a condition that is difficult for all concerned. One has the feeling that he could hear if he would only pay attention. He keeps accusing me of muttering! It's understandable, then, that I was ill-equipped to cope when my own hearing was severely compromised recently by an ear infection. The fall-out was incredible. We went for three weeks with a communication gap that frequently had us in total confusion. As near as I can figure out, this is how one conversation went:

"Has the mailman come yet?"

"No. He phoned and said he'd take a look at it around noon."

"Soon? I should hope so, he's already two hours late."

"Tate? I didn't call Tate Appliances. What would we need them for? It's the toilet that's plugged."

"Did you say you need something de-bugged? The gardener sprayed everything a month ago. Have we got ants?"

"Which pants? If it's your uniform pants, I took them to the cleaners."

"You can't find the steamer because you took it to the boat. You said you needed it for cooking clams."

Me, muttering to myself: "What is he on about now? I swear he said he is looking for hams!" I started to ask what he wanted hams for, then thought better of it. I was cognizant of the fact that:

If necessary, he'd empty the deep freeze looking for them.

The freezer needed cleaning out.

We were clean out of ham.

I was quietly pleased with my subterfuge and purposely remained quiet for half an hour, thinking I'd give him lots of time to get at it. Then I called him up for morning coffee and as we sat and chatted about this and that, I casually asked him if he'd found any ham.

He was most apologetic and said he hadn't heard me ask him to look

for one. He'd been busy getting the bug spraying machine ready for use on whatever needed spraying.

It serves me right. I might have to clean out the freezer myself.



The Love Birds

A Seasonal Compulsion

Have you ever noticed how our priorities change with the seasons? Fall is the time when people turn their thoughts inward. This is the time of resolving to better ourselves by learning something, it is the time when we buy some new furniture, or a large pile of firewood. It is a time of drawing in, when we revert to activities that can, psychologically, take place around a fireplace. The only thing missing is a coal oil lantern.

Spring is the time when we look outward to new horizons. We plan our gardens, change our hairstyle, clean the house, buy garden furniture, shop for a new car, paint the step and promise ourselves we will exercise to get rid of the winter blubber.

Bob and I follow these patterns to some extent, but there is a suspicion that often we are a season behind. This year, I resolved to make an effort to do things in an orderly fashion. So, when the announcement was made that we were to keep the rummage sale in mind when we did our spring cleaning, some serious thought was required. It didn't take long to consider – then reject – the idea of cleaning everything. After all, everything can't possibly be dirty. My methods may not be quite the same as other peoples', but I can highly recommend them. This is how it works. You wait for a sunny day (rainy days are for reading a good book and eating chocolates) and you get a pail of soapy water and a rag. Then you remove your glasses and rush about the house washing any mark large enough to come to your attention. You air the curtains by opening

the window wide and if you are more concerned with impressing the neighbours than actually being clean, you hang all your blankets on the line. It is not necessary to wash them first. If you really want to impress them, hang everything out after midnight when you are sure they are in bed and they will think you have been up since the crack of dawn. You follow all this with a quick shampoo of the entrance carpet, then you run your power mower over the driveway. The latter, in case you didn't know, does a credible job of sweeping the winter's dirt onto the lawn where it isn't so visible. Having done all this, you are now prepared when people talk about the task of spring cleaning. You can honestly interject with remarks such as: "I love the smell of blankets fresh off the line," or, "Newly shampooed carpets are so lovely to look at."

All this frees you to register in an exercise program to wear off the fat that you would have worn off if you had actually done something useful!

One spring, I registered in the Master's Swim Program designed for seniors. My theory was that it wouldn't be too tough since all the others were older than me. The reality was a bit of a jolt, for the others were swimming circles around me, often doing it by using the very difficult and exhausting butterfly breast stroke. This is the stroke that involves leaping half out of the water. It is not decent that retired people should be doing many lengths of it when I could only manage one.

It was, therefore, quite a relief to read an article that says singing burns up lots of calories. It beats hard labour, sounds great in the shower and gets rid of tension. Unfortunately, it also seems to make the neighbourhood dogs howl and the family complain.

We heard recently about a woman who swims around Desolation Sound singing Italian arias while the seals cluster around her. This seemed to me to be a neat thing to do, so despite muttered comments about silk purses and sows ears, I shall continue torturing the canine population with my own unique renditions. Any moment now, there may be a great breakthrough in skill and talent, which has previously lain dormant.

You see, the God I believe in is an expert tanner and, if He chooses, can turn a sow's ear into a good facsimile of a silk purse. There is, however, some doubt in the family's mind that He would attempt turning an old crow into a meadowlark!

Whatever God chooses will be fine with me, because He once made the most important choice of my life. He chose to die for me.



Thoughtful Joy

Marshmallows and Baked Potatoes

Strolling in the neighbourhood recently, we were arrested by the enchanting sight of a wee boy standing knee-deep in coloured leaves, joyously tossing them to the wind. Instantly, I was transported back to the small prairie town that “spawned” me. The memories flooded in. There, the leaves are usually dry and crunchy, and the intense pleasure of the crackling underfoot, with the resulting pungent scent, epitomized the autumns of my childhood.

Autumn has always been my favourite season, likely as much because of the fragrance as the colours. The sun has such a gentle touch, and, each warm day is precious and to be savoured, for the hint is there that perhaps it is the last. Watching the sunset fade into the deep purple of evening as it brushes the hills and islands, one is tempted to whisper, “Wait! Wait! Just one more minute!”

To kids on the Prairies who had few toys, but heaps of imagination, each season had its charm. The rite of fall leaves was likely one of the most carefully observed for it was all tied up with produce rolling into the root cellars, gardens tidied up and leaves being raked. While the adults and older siblings laboured in the garden or installed the storm windows, we youngsters chased leaves as they drifted willy-nilly through the village. Leaves were the precursor of winter; like snow, they drifted in

wonderful heaps, in the ditches and against hedges. There one could find even the littlest kids, rolling and tossing and winnowing, eventually drifting home, satisfied with happiness and eager to watch the ritual bonfire.

As the days cooled and the trees had cast all but the most malingering onto the carpet of colour, the leaves were raked into a pile and prepared for burning. It was then that each child rushed into the root cellar to find a nice big potato to put in the centre of the heap, placed there with the expectant certainty that it would emerge hours later, perfectly roasted, ready to eat. It was difficult to wait for the fire to burn itself out, allowing us to retrieve them. Generally, the ashes were still warm as we scrambled around searching for this wonderful treat. Never once, to my knowledge, did they ever come out other than burnt to a cinder and totally inedible. Undiscouraged, the ritual was repeated year after year.

Our city-bred kids were thunderstruck the first time I roared out of the house and jumped into the midst of the pile of leaves they had just carefully raked up. Howls of protest were soon followed by a melee as everyone got into the act. Eventually it was all tidied up and set on fire. As it died down, wieners were roasted, as more and more neighbourhood kids turned up to help consume vast quantities of everything. Then with soot-blackened faces we all trooped into the house to top it all off with milk and cookies. While the glow from the fire died down, the household quieted, as one-by-one, sleepy people drifted off to bed.

The neighbours, if they were watching, may have idly wondered about the figure wrapped in a bathrobe, poking hopefully about in the ashes. Perhaps they thought it was the man of the house, checking to be sure it was safely out, but in fact he had long since fallen asleep. I'm here to tell you that those potatoes were burnt black as ever. Bob is still puzzled why burnt spuds were always found in the ashes of the fall bonfire. I'll never tell!

Fall in Victoria is lazy as it drifts somewhat aimlessly into the next season. No more does one see or smell even a hint of burning leaves. It would be as much as one's life was worth to sully our air with such a contaminant. We wait, instead, for winter, when we can light our airtight

heaters. In the more affluent areas, where every home uses a fireplace, the smog is enough to gag a maggot. But hey, we are being ecology-minded by saving fossil fuel. Personally, I'd rather burn leaves!

A pile of firewood graces our carport, enabling us to add to the pollution. It provides lots of exercise as we haul in wood and shovel out ashes, gives us burning eyes each time we open the door and provides somewhat inadequate heat during a power failure. Left atop the insert, a kettle will perhaps reach an appropriate temperature for a baby's bath. I'm agitating for a propane fireplace that doesn't need cleaning every five minutes and could perhaps heat a kettle, or soup, or leftover stew. Give me life, liberty and fossil fuel!

I'd settle for natural gas but it isn't down our street yet. Since the road has just been repaved and is wonderfully smooth, we can likely anticipate the arrival of a pipeline momentarily.

How blessed we are to have so many options and such freedom, including the freedom to complain about all the options. We have had a little family from Africa living with us while the husband and father upgrades his technical skills for the mission field. This has been a great eye-opener for us, and a huge reminder of the vast wealth in this country. One doesn't dare complain about anything in front of them, for they look at us with total incomprehension. Their children have never played outside before because there was no safe place to play. They are afraid of walking near bushes for fear of snakes, and none of them will get close to the water in case something leaps out and eats them. The children have never been to school because there was no school to go to.

Our problems pale to insignificance. Let us hope that our thankfulness approximates the abundance surrounding us.

Leaky Boots

We were watching our six-year-old grandson get ready for his hockey practice recently. It quickly became evident that his hockey bag is big enough for him to climb right into, and when full, requires three men and a horse (or his dad) to lift.

Now this isn't a kid who is playing serious hockey; he has, in fact, not really perfected the art of staying upright, being prone at least half the time. All his stuff is new and though it fits him perfectly, there really isn't much of him visible when he's all geared up. It makes it difficult to know which kid to cheer on! Like puppies, they are often in a heap. No one knows, or really cares, where the puck is.

Back in the 'Dirty Thirties' hockey equipment was so minimal as to be non-existent, for only the lucky ones even had skates, let alone a stick. The skates some little kids had were double-bladed bob skates, which strapped on over winter boots. The great advantage was the stability they provided. The disadvantage was the total lack of foot support and great difficulty in turning. Sliding wasn't their strong point either!

Most of us never owned skates that fit, so it was common to see a child skating mostly on his ankles, a brutally uncomfortable way to get around. My skates belonged to my adult brother, so no amount of padding helped. At least my feet didn't get cold too quickly with so many pairs of socks on underneath.

We grew up beside a lake, which provided a great deal of our

entertainment. One year it froze hard during a spell of very cold weather, with the wonderful result that nearly all of the thirty-five square miles became a skating rink. It was truly like skating on glass and because of the sheer size one was usually on unmarred sections of it. It creaked and banged in a rather terrifying way, which added greatly to the thrill, but no one suggested we should stay off. Danger was an accepted part of growing up in those days.

We also had a skating rink, outdoor of course, where most of the organized events took place. We used to gather at the rink even when we weren't going to skate, for that is where our peers were. Plus, the shack (buildings beside a rink were always called shacks) had a large pot-bellied stove and windows where one could watch the antics on the ice. Since skating was always pretty painful, my main purpose in being there was to be where the guys hung out. It wasn't until I was twelve that I thought of guys as anything other than great buddies to climb trees with, or to have on side for a snowball fight.

We lived at the bottom of a long, fairly steep hill, just across the tracks from the village. With two railways running through town, almost everyone lived close to the tracks and no one was considered to be "on the wrong side" of them. The hill was superb for sledding: one could hike all the way to the top, seemingly an hour's walk, yielding a fast trip down, or one could go part way up to make more trips. Toboggans were popular but as scarce as hens' teeth, so owners were cultivated assiduously, for theirs could carry several kids and were so much faster than the small sleighs. The person at the back had the job of pushing it to get it going, a great position provided you could hop on fast enough. The owner always steered, thus avoiding the possibility of 'missing the boat,' so to speak. If one had walked for an hour to get to the top, missing the ride down was a catastrophe unless someone else could be talked into making space on theirs. On occasion, a train would cross in front of us, requiring an emergency exit into a snowbank, for the toboggans moved very fast, often on somewhat icy roads. If the train was stopped some of the more daring went under it, but this seemed to get the adults agitated,

so had to be done when no one was looking. We were sharing the road with horses and sleighs, so sometimes we could hitch a ride up the hill by tying our sleds to the back. It beat walking and afforded us more time for extra rides down. Cars were few and far between, and interference from them was rare as they exercised great caution – a good thing in view of the fact that most sleigh riding was done in the evening in pitch darkness on Main Street!

The Town Fathers did get a bit excited about us going right through town, so the work crew would knock on Mom's door and ask for some ashes from the stove to mark the boundary, which she happily supplied. When we kids discovered ashes across the road, we would ask her for a shovel so we could cover them with snow. This she supplied with great delight and in the repeat process over many months she got rid of all the ashes the coal-burning furnace and stove produced.

This same hill was used for skiing when a fresh snowfall made it possible. The skis were very simple things: there was a rubbery spot for one's foot, with a metal clip to hold it in place. The clip did not break away when one fell. So, no matter what strange position one got into, the ski stuck like glue. I once hit a patch of gravel and fell flat on my face, a trick most of us tried at some time or other.

Our boots were not designed for skiing, so had no ankle protection. They were made of fleece-lined rubber and were worn over our regular shoes, which had been covered with an older brother's work socks. To my knowledge no one ever broke an ankle.

Winter seemed to go on forever but there was so much to do, no one minded. While the younger children stomped out a circular 'foxes and geese' game in fresh snow, the teens planned a hay ride. These rides were fantastic, for the horses always had sleigh bells around their necks and the big sleigh was filled with fresh clean hay. We pushed one another off the sleigh into the snowbanks on a bright moonlit night and we all got lots of exercise running to catch up.

Christmas for me was special because my older sisters would come home; the arrival of each car was greeted with shouts of happiness

accompanied by lots of hugs. In a kitchen equipped with one sink, a four-foot counter, a very small old free-standing table, a big coal stove and battered pots, Mom produced massive meals for fifteen to twenty. She counted herself blessed.

No one had refrigerators in those days and left-overs had to be dealt with. If the temperature was only a few degrees below freezing, we covered the food with a bowl (no plastic wrap or tinfoil in those days) and put it in the unheated porch, but since it was usually pretty cold at Christmas, the food had to be stored in the dirt basement. It was put in a cement sump hole near the furnace – not exactly the coldest location for staving off botulism. No one ever got food poisoning; in fact, we didn't even know it was a possibility! Mom did, I might add, keep the cement area scrupulously clean.

Outhouses were the order of the day back then so during the winter many houses had the precursor to the 'modern' porta-potty and this usually resided in some area that had some heat. Ours was in the basement, not far from the sump hole!

Spring always arrived in a rush and brought with it a longing for rubber boots, which made it possible for us to go wading. Many times, we fell into ice-cold water and managed to get ourselves upright again, learning early how to survive around water holes by sort of looking after each other, sometimes pushing a piece of wood toward a friend floundering around in a slough.

The hill once again provided much fun, for along the side of the road ran a ditch which handled the run-off from higher up. In the spring, it produced a swift-flowing stream which made a perfect place to have races with our 'boats.' Our school was part way up the hill and, when it let out, each kid chose a stick that looked like it might make a good entry. One by one, they were thrown into the torrent. The hazards were many, for the ditch had clumps of ice, small branches, eroded embankments and numerous bits of miscellaneous flotsam, plus many culverts. It was a happy kid who managed to get his boat to the bottom of the hill. It was an even greater plus if we stayed relatively dry in the process. Many people

didn't have a washing machine or more than one change of clothing, so arriving home wringing wet could have dire consequences for some kids. I think my mom was either a saint or still a kid at heart, for she rarely was annoyed with us for being wet.

I wonder how often she worried about the dangers of kids playing around water with no life jackets, no supervision, no swimming skills and mostly no brains.

During the summer, the Town hired a lifeguard to stand around on the pier and haul out anyone in trouble. That took care of only a very small area, for the beach was a couple of miles long, swarming with kids quite outside of the guard's range. Naturally we preferred the beach, where we could make sand castles and play on the slides.

If there were lots of tourists on the pier, we younger kids would offer to retrieve pennies thrown in the water, for it was a rare miser who wouldn't let us keep it once it was delivered to the surface. The big problem with this method of earning money was that we really didn't know how to swim and the water was over our heads. So, we fought our way back to the pier and gradually learned some very basic swimming skills in the process, counting it all worthwhile to have money to spend.

The only time I was really frightened over an escapade was the day my girlfriend and I climbed the ladder on the outside of the grain elevator. There was a sort of crow's nest at the top which we reached with no difficulty. The problem arose when we turned and looked out, only to realize that half the town was down below watching and the elevator man was on his way up to deal with us. That was when I froze, suddenly aware of danger and the knowledge that I couldn't go back down. I really loved this elevator man for he was always so nice to the kids, so when he promised to stay just below me while we climbed down, I trusted him. No one scolded us at the bottom and it wasn't necessary to warn us not to do that again. Once was quite enough!

We had very few material goods in those days, but we had something much more valuable: freedom. Freedom to explore, to risk, to fail, to

learn and to achieve. While children can still do that today, it is only within prescribed areas and always, it seems, under supervision.

I wouldn't trade my leaky boot upbringing for anything. Perhaps I'm not successful as the world sees it, but I found out who I was by pushing myself. Most importantly, I found God because my much-loved older sister told me about Him, and I trusted her.

Innocent and naïve? Yes, and very blessed.



Joy's "baby"

Wildflowers

I was sitting on the sundeck one November, marvelling at the fact that it was possible to do so without freezing all my edges, when I noticed something pink stuck on the wild rose bushes which grow on the embankment. One doesn't expect even a hardy prairie rose to bloom so late, although one can forgive it for being somewhat confused by the seasons here. Grabbing some binoculars, I focused in on the bush and, much to my amazement, discovered it was indeed a rose. Furthermore, there was a hummingbird hovering over it, checking for nectar.

Now the difficulty with sharing news of this sort of miracle is that the locals think you have lost your marbles. The prairie relatives, having just come in from a futile attempt at getting the car out of a mountain of snow in the driveway, momentarily loath you with a passion.

Our loyal children simply look at me with a jaundiced eye and imply that my gardening skills are such that only a miracle would place anything blooming within a square mile of us and that it probably wasn't really an early rose, but would have bloomed last spring if it had been given any water.

I personally think they are jealous that their gardens are so hum drum.

Highway crews on Vancouver Island scatter wild flower seeds along the side of the road, so spring here is breath-taking. These natural displays are never watered, except by rain, but seem to thrive none the less.

Sitting there on the deck, I began to ponder the definition of ‘wild flower,’ for this has long been a grey area for me. Frequently, I’ve nourished a plant that seemed lovely, only to have someone remark that they too have had a hard time eradicating them from their gardens. I’m too gutless to admit we’ve been fertilizing the thing. It sort of puts me in the same category as a neighbour who will not kill anything, so she gathers up all the slugs from her garden and takes them to the edge of her property where she gently instructs them to go away. “Away” no doubt meaning they should come visit me. She has evidently heard of my horticultural skills.

I decided to do a little research into wild flowers. Not, you understand, with any thought of doing any weeding, but simply so I wouldn’t appear as ignorant as I actually am. Starting with the premise that two things for sure were weeds – skunk cabbage and dandelions – it came as a shock to find that skunk cabbage is a wild flower. Let’s face it, how many of you haven’t treasured a bouquet of dandelions delivered to you in grubby hands?

I now have given this is a lot of thought, and hardly any research, and have come up with the following premise: wildflowers are plants that are blooming beautifully in the woods or beside the roads. Occasionally, they are transported at great effort and vast expense and placed in a wildflower garden, where they promptly die. Weeds, however, are any plants thriving in an area where you have planted your prize dahlias, and should be rooted out without mercy.

Since the rabbits and deer have eaten my prize dahlias, the decision has been made to encourage all wild flowers. Because I don’t have any idea what their foliage looks like and they never arrive in the garden in full bloom, it will unfortunately be necessary never to weed again!

The fact that our family has been transplanted here on the West Coast has never ceased to amaze us. We glory in the lushness of the growth, the incredible existence of wildlife right in the city, and the number of birds choosing to overwinter here.

Flocks of starling gossip in a fruit tree, robins forget it is winter and

start to sing their spring praise song on a sunny day in December, while the indomitable Anna's hummingbird defies the experts and happily winters here, daintily sipping from the feeder.

The grey squirrel bustling about in January no doubt gives thanks to the easterner who transported him to Lotus Land; meanwhile, begging peanuts and eating all our tulip bulbs. Raccoons dressed in their Halloween masks, sort through any garbage available and peer nosily into all available windows; while deer munch thoughtfully on the roses, paying no heed to the humans who suggest they should go lunch at the neighbours. From time to time, the warning goes out to keep pets and small kids indoors as a cougar or perhaps a bear may be cruising the area.

Throughout the year, we see seals and killer whales cruising by, while in the spring, the California Sea Lion comes into our waters to breed. The fall brings the massive Grey Whales to our point of land, where they feed on abundant plankton. Because they are a gentle creature, they say it is safe to paddle amongst them in a small boat; indeed, we have seen folk doing that. Some of these mammals are indigenous to the area, while others migrate from Alaska to California, stopping here on the way.

It is still safe to walk here (most of the time) and there are hundreds of miles of walking and biking trails on the Island. In the suburbs and on the trails, couples stroll hand in hand, enjoying the scenery and the wildflowers, often stopping to gather pine cones and wild holly.

What a lot some adults miss in their busy lives and how sad God must be that we fail to give thanks for the gifts He has scattered around us. Children take time to notice the miniature daisies and the interesting bugs and beetles, perhaps because they are closer to the ground, but more than likely because they aren't so jaded by the miracle of life.

Too bad that we adults are so "grown up" – standing on our dignity – when we would be so much happier shouting our joy to the hills. King David knew about shouting, singing and dancing and when Michal (Saul's daughter and David's wife) lectured him on his lack of dignity, he responded that it was before the Lord he danced and that he would,

in humility, play music and sing and be even more debased that the Lord may receive the honour due Him.

When we Christians think of Heaven, we imagine ourselves to be singing, dancing and rejoicing as we praise our Lord, but we often won't do it here in case someone thinks we are crazy. What a shame that we wait to die before we can truly live!



Interesting Soil

The Perfect Peace

I've just travelled thirteen thousand miles in complete safety, still with the same set of tires, the same brake pads, and the same spouse. God has been good! I think that, throughout this time, He was also somewhat amused, for my job was navigating and, truth-be-known, directions are a mystery to me. Fortunately, map reading is reasonably simple and Bob copes well with incompetence.

Did you know that Georgia and Louisiana are mostly swamps which nurture huge trees and that the trees are rooted in a floating mass of vegetation? They are nourished by nitrogen which floats up from rotting leaves etc., and in hurricanes the whole root mass leans over with the tree. The locals were somewhat annoyed at the sweeping statement that the area is all swamp, assuring us that a lot of it is wet land. Still, if I were forced to step into it, I'd want to be wearing pontoons and alligator repellent!

Being poled through the Okefenokee swamp in a leaking punt was a great thrill and the poisonous snakes in the overhanging trees added an extra buzz. The alligators were hibernating due to the cold. It was seventy-five degrees!

If you ever need to build a bridge, ask the Americans. There are so many bayous, swamps, inlets and rivers on the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of Mexico, we were airborne most of the time.

The food has been really interesting and sometimes wonderful.

Chicken and sausage gumbo is fantastic, hot boiled raw peanuts are icky and collards somewhere in between. In New Orleans, we went out for Cajun food, so I can now give you detailed instructions on how to prepare it. First you gather all the normal ingredients for a meal. Prepare and cook in the usual way. When it seems palatable, throw in a lot of Worcestershire sauce and a huge gob of Tabasco. You now have CAJUN gourmet plus a lot of steam coming out of your ears. It isn't uncommon in the South to be served a several-course meal. Each course will be the same seafood served in different ways, all of them spicy hot.

Speaking of the South, it was fascinating to tour an old plantation and discover, among other things, that pineapple was a symbol of friendship. A newly arrived guest would find a fresh pineapple beside his bed when he retired for the night. Considering that pineapples were not grown in Louisiana, the cost would have been considerable.

In this hospitable South, with many slaves, it wasn't unheard of for people to arrive for a visit on their honeymoon and not leave until the second child was born! If you woke one morning to find another pineapple beside your bed, you knew that it was time to move on. Don't you think that this is an eminently sensible way of dealing with the unexpected guest who came for dinner and forgot to leave? The thought pops into one's head that perhaps canned pineapple would work just as well. Try it and let me know.

A custom still in use is the term of respect 'Miss.' If, for instance, your mother-in-law was called Mary Jones, it would be in keeping to call her "Miss Mary" and a wonderful way of getting around the fact that there is no way you can call her "Mother" and don't dare call her "Mary." Of course, this is rarely a problem in Canada since everyone first-names you, even if you don't know them.

It is necessary for me to have allergy shots once a month and, as a result, we have seen a few medical clinics. I'd like to know what gives these young pups the right to dash into the room and say: "How are you today, Georgina?" If one was privy to their first names the playing field

would be level. But, it hasn't escaped my attention that **THEY HAVE THE NEEDLE!**

We are rested and relaxed, well-fed and lazy – even the threat of tornadoes hasn't dampened our enthusiasm for doing nothing. In this most southerly part of Texas, we have had time to watch the strange birds: enjoyed the armadillo poling his long snout in the grass: we have swum and sunbathed and, best of all, we are doing this together. We will be celebrating Christmas with my sisters, Nancy and Jean, in a much quieter manner than has ever been possible in our busy lives, which will be wonderful.

As you give praise for the First Coming, do remember to anticipate with child-like joy that great and wonderful day when He will come again, bringing the perfect peace that we all long for.



Enroute to Alaska

Down Under

January, with short days and copious rain, is hard to take. One is suffering from post-Christmas blues and spring feels a long way off. Each year, the dark days seem to drain off some of my cerebral fluid and while the results are never very predictable, the course of the ailment is.

The first sign of the malaise is the slowing of physical activity, followed by dangerous periods of sitting still, staring into space. When activity does occur, it is somewhat frenetic and can be hazardous to the health, for while the body is perhaps occupied with some mindless task such as driving the car, the brain is dealing with something far more important, such as: “I wonder what would happen if every other bulb was planted upside down? Would they all bloom at the same time?”

It takes Bob a little while to notice when my usual unpredictable behaviour has become, shall we say, ‘different,’ but when he does, he generally finds it advisable to head me off at the pass. One year he was busier than ever with church affairs and failed to notice the longish periods when I sat staring into space. So, he was somewhat surprised and puzzled to be called away from his computer with the announcement that the problem with the living room had been solved. His difficulty, of course, was that he hadn’t been aware there was a problem!

Several hours later and three pieces of furniture discarded, it had become very evident that if he wanted any place to sit (on the rare occasion

that he had time to sit), he had better get me planning something other than changing the living area.

Within a month we were on our way to New Zealand and while that may seem an uneconomic way to divert my attention, bear in mind that the master bedroom was beginning to look rather boring.

This beautiful country was everything and more that we had imagined it to be, with the added charm that people are still trusting and friendly much as Canadians once were.

One can't sum up a trip in a few words, but we came away from there with some great object lessons:

Never allow a horse to go paddling in the Tasman Sea. Mine took a notion to swim to Australia and it was pretty evident we weren't going to get there in time for lunch!

Gannets have garnered the wisdom of the ages when it comes to raising their young. The pair take shifts flying out to sea to bring back fish to feed their one chick. When it is old enough to fly, they boot it off the edge of the cliff, while they hover close by to catch it if it fails to get the hang of flying. The process is soon repeated. In due course, the young – somewhat tired of being booted out – head off to Australia, while the parents stay home and sun bathe. In four or five years, the kid returns quite willing to help feather the family nest, having endured the rigours of off-shore travel with no chart, the trials of feeding oneself with no parental charge cards and the possibility of being eaten by kangaroos. (Some of this information perhaps shouldn't be quoted since it proved to be quite impossible to interview the gannets.)

Never order coffee unless you already have false teeth. It is incredibly strong and will immediately put your ulcer on red alert.

Never ask a New Zealander if he is from Australia. (If any of you have the courage to ask why, let me know.)

We saw a mountain erupting and folk in their back gardens in Rotorua casually walking around holes that emitted foul smelling mud, learning that Maoris used to use boiling holes to cook their food. It seems to me

that raw fish would begin to look good after a meal cooked anywhere near that stuff!

We spent part of a day at Hell's Gate, an active thermal area inside a crater, with vast bubbling pools of mud surrounded by fragile cracked lava. A step off the path would be fatal.

At the far end were two horrid, fetid, sink holes aptly named Sodom and Gomorrah. As we looked down into them, I could almost see a hand reaching out in supplication. Hell became very clear to me at that moment. I realized that while people joke about not minding going to Hell, because all their friends will be there, the reality is horrific.

Hell isn't visiting friends in a hot place, no voice to cheer. Most terrible of all is the total separation from God. Forever.

Walking towards the exit gate we noticed red ochre scattered like drops of blood on the pathway and as we stepped on those splashes of red there was a whisper in the wind: "This I did for you. Rejoice, for you will be with me in Paradise."

Praise God that means even me.

Echoing Sentiments

After Bob retired we took a long dreamed-of trip across Canada and down the Eastern United States seaboard, across the South along the Gulf of Mexico, then north along the Pacific Coast to arrive back across the border into British Columbia.

Having left Victoria in August with the intent of taking all the time we needed, it was not a big surprise to find ourselves in Texas for Christmas. For me the surprise came when I realized that the prospect of celebrating it without the usual chaos didn't make me sad. What kind of mother would selfishly enjoy herself when she could be home baking, cleaning, shopping, washing dishes, scraping squashed cranberry off the rug and wondering for the tenth time what to do with a dog that has just eaten all the glass ornaments off the tree?

Instead, we took all morning unwrapping some fun little gifts, having coffee, swimming laps in the pool, lazing in the hot tub, and eating barbecued steak. The peace and quiet was wonderful!

South Texas rather grew on us, perhaps the flatness recalled for us our prairie roots; whatever the reason, leaving it was difficult.

After months of dead flat landscape, it was quite exciting to begin climbing into the rolling hills of the anvil-shaped western chunk of Texas.

Here lies the spectacular Big Bend National Park, so called because the Rio Grande makes some torturous bends here as it snakes its way through extinct volcano.

Stunning scenery of evergreen clad mountains and deep caverns is superimposed on a desert tableland containing warm springs, cactus and lots of wild creatures and flowers.

We spent one day climbing into a canyon cut by the river, with the sides almost touching at the top, thus creating a perfect echo chamber. The temptation was too much to resist, so yours truly broke into the opening bars of the *Indian Love Song*. You remember: “I am calling you oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.” When the rumbling echo finished, there was a pause, then off the canyon walls we heard the response: “I am hearing you oo-oo-oo” etc. It would have been fun to meet my kindred spirit.

Wild pigs, coyotes, road runners (which, by the way, kill and eat rattlesnakes), bears and mountain lions share the area with humans, doing so with total disregard for the comfort of the humans. The coyotes wandering through the campground only paused occasionally to eye the odd poodle, clearly considering it a menu item. They quickly lost interest if the animal was on a leash, no doubt having learned from experience that the leash was indigestible. Personally, I think the poodle would be, too!

On the trails, we relied on my loud voice, a whistle and a can of rocks for rattling – or throwing if it seemed appropriate.

Of all the critters, however, it was the rattlesnake that had my greatest respect. It’s hard to intimidate a rattlesnake with any of the above. If I ever run into one, methinks I’ll be airborne. Can’t you just see the headlines now: “LUMPY LADY LEVITATES!” I’ll be famous.

New Mexico and Arizona hold many historical and natural treasures. One is hard pressed to decide which of the many to see. I’ve always been fascinated by cliff dwellings and there are many scattered over a large area. Built about 500 years ago by an unknown native peoples, occupied for a couple of hundred years and then suddenly abandoned, they leave behind evidence of an agrarian society well suited to desert living. Walls and parts of roofs still remain after all these years, probably because the cave roof protected them from severe weather. One is awed by a society

that could thrive clinging to a mountain side. They must have been very agile to climb almost straight up carrying food and water.

We climbed via a modern staircase using hand rails and one of us (who packs rather a lot of excess baggage) was near total collapse by the time we reached the cave. The cliff dweller's average life span was thirty-four years. I can see why!

Moving northwest and approaching Arizona's famous Grand Canyon, it seemed a great idea to try that echo trick again, but the sheer size of the canyon intimidated me. Besides, it only echoes well if one is way down in the canyon and there are only two ways of getting down to its floor. One way is to get on a mule (that you have never met and don't trust) and take a five and a half hour ride down what appears to be a perpendicular trail ten miles long and 5,700 feet deep. The other way is to jump off the edge! Both appear suicidal, though jumping would be quicker. Cheaper, too.

There is a third option. One can mortgage the Old Age Pension, update the will, pay all the bills, then climb into a fragile looking inflatable containing other folk with a death wish, strap on a lifejacket and spend the next two hundred and seventy-seven miles shooting rapids. Mostly underwater. One wouldn't have time to see the scenery and singing wouldn't be way up on the priority list.

We chose, instead, to climb into a single-engine light aircraft. You need to know that airline pilots get a little antsy when one of their engines quits and most of them won't fly anything that doesn't have more than two, all fully functional. Bob is no exception but, having been a training captain, he can manage a poker face. Years of sitting in the passenger seat of the car while I'm driving have given him nerves of steel.

The airline claimed to have the most experienced pilot flying over the Grand Canyon, and, in this case, they were correct. He was sitting beside me, wearing his frozen face and making mental notes of possible forced landing sites.

Once over the canyon edge, none of it mattered anymore, for the scenery simply took your breath away. For untold centuries, the Colorado

River has cut through solid rock with a persistent timeless carving and sculpting that is beyond comprehension. When the river leaves the rock exposed, the wind and weather polish and shape creations of endless artistry.

What a mighty God is ours and how humbling to realize that He is interested in such puny creatures as us. He is patient and enduring and has promised to be with us through earthquakes, wind and flood. He has offered us a lifejacket, His only son, but it is up to us to accept that offer. I don't know about you, but I have seen the torrent and I'm not going through it without Him!

Take Me Home

When I was a kid, I was a great fan of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, so it was always a big treat when Mom gave me fifteen cents to go to the afternoon matinee, where I could lose myself in a world of cowboys and horses.

Occasionally, when I visited my sister on her farm, I was lucky enough to have the use of Nelly, a horse with a mind of her own and a great deal more cunning than the callow youngster attempting to ride her. Catching her was a morning's entertainment, but once you had her she would stand calmly and let you get on. When I had a saddle, staying on wasn't too difficult, though she spooked at a leaf falling. Staying on with no saddle was an art I never perfected. Consequently, I spent a lot of time on the ground, with Nelly standing by, whinnying her amusement. There was no spare money in those years for the luxury of riding boots or blue jeans, so after a day on (and off) Nelly, my ankles and thighs were rubbed raw.

All these memories came freshly to mind when my sister Jean phoned this spring and suggested that I visit her on her ranch in the Crow's Nest Pass, so we could go riding together. There is no fool like an old fool: I figured that the worst thing that could happen to me was that I might kill myself, so I agreed.

I bought a beautiful pair of Western boots, gathered together jeans and a jean jacket, and off I went, as happy as if I was in my right mind.

This first time I got geared up, Jean nearly had hysterics. I was Western from the neck down but, on my head, I was wearing a Tilly sailing hat. These things are goofy looking on a boat – combined with riding gear they are ludicrous.

The rule on the ranch is that you must saddle, bridle and groom your own horse. Mine was a beautiful, patient, Tennessee Walker named Shad. As I struggled with the bridle that first day, he looked me over very carefully. I could almost hear him saying, “Wow, I’ve got myself a rare one this time. I’ll have to be very careful with this old bird.”

That wonderful horse literally taught me how to ride. While he was doing it, he was very careful that I wasn’t knocked off by low branches, or rubbed against trees. The first two days, he made no attempt to gallop. I knew I had graduated when, toward the end of my visit, he broke into a gallop and jumped a creek. I became so confident of him, that I willingly took a trail along a narrow mountain ledge in the heart of bear country, a trail that experienced riders often refuse to travel.

The countryside consists of alpine meadows, dense brush and deep ravines surrounded by snow-capped mountains. The display of wild flowers was breath-taking.

On my last ride, we stopped our horses on a hill top, and simply drank in the magnificent vista spread out all around us. As the horses contentedly cropped the grass, we talked about the psalmist’s feelings as he wrote, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” We spoke too about how very blessed we are, and how grateful we are for little things like comfortable riding boots and hot baths for tired old bones. And for our God who doesn’t spook when the trail is rough and we cannot see a way out.

Jean told me that she once forced Shad to take her into a boggy area and, to her horror, she could find no way out. Dusk was falling when she finally slackened the reins, put her head down on the horse’s neck and in tears cried, “Shad, take me home.” He quietly and carefully worked his way around all the soft spots and carried her to safety.

God will do that for us too, but we have to give Him his head.

Shad kissed me when I left. Perhaps next year I should buy a stetson so he won't be embarrassed to be seen with me.

Along life's road, don't forget to count your blessings. They are many.



Joy on Shad

Unto the Hills

Someone asked me the other day if the tap dancing course, that at one point seemed a good idea to inflict on myself, had ever materialized. The idea fell through not so much because the floor joists in the hall were at risk, but rather that the classes were offered at six in the evening. Now I ask you, would a person who is nearly too large to touch her toes really be interested in missing dinner?

Horseback riding seems like a preferable form of exercise, for while there is a fair amount of effort required to get the horse cleaned up and saddled, once on the beast, most of the hard work is done by the horse.

It is hard to decide which season I like best in the Rocky Mountains: the spring with all its flowers and sudden weather changes, or fall with its beautiful colours and crisp air.

Both seasons bring their special anxieties, though. The fall offers a mosquito-free environment, but holds dangers that are far more terrifying. Two-legged predators with a gun and often a belly full of beer, can shoot to kill right across a valley. We clean up their spent bullets and empty cans, don bright orange vests and pray they aren't colour blind.

There are also four-legged predators, the most dangerous being the grizzlies. I arrived at the ranch one fall having just spent a week in the Arctic at a retreat on the Coppermine River. We were out one day when we found the paw prints of a grizzly. I was instantly turned into a quivering mass of cowardice. We were assured that they were rarely dangerous

because they have never associated man with food. The speaker finished by saying that there is no way you would catch him up in the Rockies anywhere near Banff!

Guess who was booked to ride in the Rockies south of Banff!

We didn't see any grizzlies, but I'm here to tell you that we rang bells, blew whistles, yelled, sang (likely the most effective deterrent) and generally let them know well in advance that this was not hot dinner arriving on horseback!

Spring time also has its share of worries, bears being one of them, but there is no known method of warning off the most terrifying thing of all: thunderstorms.

At home the problem is solved by hiding in a closet until it goes away, but when one is high up in the mountains and the gods of thunder throw balls of fire at each other, and the rocks reverberate with their mighty roar, one's hair literally stands on end. Now death has never worried me much, but the manner of succumbing to that state is of great interest. As I stood there, envisioning par-broiled socks covered in melted fat, my darling sister, in her pragmatic manner said, "Maybe we should untie the horses so they can get away."

"Get away! Do you realize it would take me a month to walk that far? Have you gone nuts?"

"Well," she said, "if we got killed we would be alright, but the horses would starve to death tied to a tree and it might be days before they were found!"

Perhaps she has her priorities in the right place. It would seem to me that with all that smell of roasting meat, the hunters would find us even if no one else was interested enough to search.

Riding in those environs one feels almost compelled to sing the twenty-third psalm, for the terrain is similar to areas where the shepherd would have led his sheep. Narrow valleys, where escape from predators is impossible, running water so frightening to sheep (and sometimes horses) and the abundant pasture often containing some noxious

weeds—all these and more were daily occurrences. We even ‘anointed’ our horses with a repellent to ward off the biting insects!

The shepherd saw to it that his sheep didn’t want for food, for he found them good and abundant pastures. He led them to water, and was watchful for predators as he guided them through narrow valleys where there was no escape. He took them high in the hills to the table lands, where he took great care that no poisonous weeds would tempt them, or wild beasts stalk them. He anointed their heads with oil to rid them of parasites, and they knew that where their shepherd was, there they always wanted to be, because it was a place of security.

While I often sing and make other noises, as only a devout coward can do, I also know that the Lord has me in His hands, and that He has indeed spread a wonderful table before me.

As we look at the table so often and generously spread before us, it is good to remember the Shepherd who has given us such care and abundance thus far. On top of that, He has given us salvation. The stuff of real thankfulness.



The Trail Riders

Signs and Wonders

Our lives are so full of busyness these days that one longs to turn the clock back to the days when it all seemed simpler somehow. That is why a couple of weeks riding horseback in the hills or mountains always appeals, for there one is back to basics.

Given the fact that the young horse I rode for a few years seemed determined to kill me, the basics were survival. Rocky was actually a sweet-natured critter. He just had so much energy that he delighted in spooking at anything that moved, which he felt required him to leap as far sideways as possible. Daylight was frequently evident under my rump, but eventually, I learned the signals: a muscle tensing always meant he was ready for take-off. One can get used to being tossed about, but it was his ballerina spin that was the most difficult to deal with. He used the spin when he didn't want to go in the same direction as me, which was most of the time.

Rocky is a magnificent Tennessee Walker and can travel miles using a steady running walk, with no discomfort for the rider. He never spooked when doing that, perhaps because we were always heading home where he knew he would be fed. I can relate to that.

Driving home through the Rockies from one such holiday, I ran out of tapes to listen to, so I started paying attention to the highway signs, pondering the fact that a good part of the time their meaning is somewhat obscure. Signs were developed to make the ability to read

English redundant and are quite creative. One in particular caught my imagination: it pictured a steep cliff with a boulder falling from it – and that is all. Now let us suppose that it is a warning that rocks are about to bash one’s brains out. Is one to prepare themselves to meet their maker? Would it be better to speed up? Slow down? Stop? Keep one’s eyes glued on the cliff edge? Turn around and take the backroad home? The signs that were common in the Rockies when we were kids were ever so much better: “Rocks unstable, do not honk.” That gave a fellow two choices and made one feel in charge. A little honk added a fillip of danger – even contemplating doing it seemed daring.

The signs in England are great, but the one that impressed me the most was the thesis pasted on the back wall of a hotel. It read something like this: “It is inadvisable to stop here as this is where the lorry picks up the rubbish. Persons ignoring this warning will suffer the inconvenience of having their transport removed forthwith and will be required to appear at a court hearing in a fortnight’s time.”

Now that is a sign one can relate to! None of these drawings with a cross running through them, which leave me pondering the possibilities with such concentration I forget to point the car. Being a literalist, they leave me literally confused.

Some time ago it was necessary to rush out to the airport to pick Bob up after a flight, and just as we neared the terminal building, a cute little Aladdin’s lamp became illuminated on the dashboard. It looked too fancy for a gravy boat and there was no little genie coming out of the spout, so what could it be?

Once inside the building I headed for the washroom, still pondering the mystery of it all. It wasn’t until the door was fully open and a very surprised man in dishabille was yelling at me, that I realized what the sign on the door meant. A stick person in pants does not include women wearing slacks! Also, at that precise moment the meaning of the Aladdin’s lamp sign suddenly became clear, so without thinking I exclaimed, “I’m out of oil!” Then I slammed the door.

Now it wasn’t clear what the man may have been thinking, but

there was no way I was hanging around to find out. Rushing into the handicapped section of the ladies' room, I combed my hair into my eyes, put on dark shades, wrapped my jacket around my head and ran for the car. Half way home, it occurred to me that Bob was likely still patiently waiting at the airport.

Does a handicapped sign include or exclude someone who is not quite right on the inside?

It is good from time to time to count our blessings, which are many. I'm very thankful for a husband who no longer even looks surprised when he sees me darting out from behind a large garbage can and whispering, "Psst... this way!"

I'm thankful for the bounty in our country, for freedoms, for justice, for loved ones, for health. For wild flowers and hummingbirds, for fall colours and pungent bonfires.

But most of all I'm thankful that God's saving grace is available to me, a sinner. I'm thankful that His word is written in plain English that is as clear as crystal: "He who believes in me shall have everlasting life."

Section 2:

BROADSIDE

“All hands on deck!” for these rollicking tales,
on and off the high seas;
these stories are “Red sky at night, sailors’ delight!”

How Boating Took Its First Bite

Sitting on the top of the boat on a lovely early spring day, disconsolately surveying the mess left by a winter of snow and rain, I began to ruminate on the course of events which led me to this rather filthy deck. We had our first few experiences sailing in mid-summer on my niece Myrna's boat. While the weather was always benign, her husband John wasn't. You see John doesn't suffer fools gladly, and about the only thing that made sense to me on the boat was that the pointy end went first.

The boat remained remarkably upright during the whole cruise so, of course, I thought that this was the normal state of affairs. The boats that sail by our house must be doing something strange to make them lean over like that. I was later to discover that Myrna is a devout coward when it comes to heeling over; any wind strong enough to fill the genoa was considered a gale. As a result, we stayed in port a lot and when we did venture out, it was usually under power.

I made it a habit to stay out of the way when anything that appeared to be important was happening, so it came as a bit of a surprise to me when John commanded my presence on deck as we slid toward a dock at Friday Harbour in the American San Juan Islands. A stiff breeze had come up at a crucial moment, and I was directed to take the boat hook and hang on to the dock until instructed to let go. Myrna leaped onto the dock with a line and was awaiting further shouted direction, when John yelled, "GIVE ME THE LINE!"

In a voice dripping with honey she said, “OKAY, JOHNNY, HERE IT IS.” Then she threw it at him.

Totally confused as to what was going on, I continued to do what I had been instructed to do, for I sure didn’t want to be the recipient of what appeared to be a full-scale lightning storm. John was yelling that he had asked to be given line, not the line. Myrna was sweetly replying that he may have thought that is what he said, but she knew better. During all this, the boat was drifting away from the dock at rather an alarming rate, with my body extended horizontally over the water, toes hooked onto the toe rail and the rest of me somewhere between the boat and the dock. I was, of course, still hanging on to the boat hook, since unhooking it becomes quite impossible once the slack is taken up. I didn’t think I dared let go even if instructed to, so when John hollered, “Hang on!” I assumed he was yelling at me.

With somewhat injured pride, I yelled back: “I am hanging on, what the devil does it look like?”

I looked up to see Myrna rolling around on the dock screaming with laughter; then, seconds later, watched as John made a valiant attempt to leap to the dock. Unfortunately, he seemed unable to move and in a frightened, awestruck voice screamed, “Help! Help! I’m paralyzed!”

Instead of making Myrna sympathetic, it seemed to send her into further gales of laughter, so I took a second look. At the crucial moment John’s undershorts had fallen down, effectively pinning his legs together and rendering him quite helpless. It is extremely difficult to command with any kind of authority with your shorts down around your knees. Bob decided the time had come to take matters into his own hands. With line in hand, he made a quantum leap and, landing beside Myrna, he proceeded to calmly tie the boat securely to a cleat. He then pulled the boat in and climbed back on board. This was all done with the nonchalance of a Sunday stroll, and required several detours around Myrna, who continued to find the operation hilarious.

There seemed to be some suspicious moisture around the eyes of

neighbouring yachtsmen, but I was new at the game, so thought perhaps it was just caused by the bright sunshine!

I came away from those trips with a lot of misinformation:

I thought that alcohol for the stove was terribly expensive since we only had hot water for essentials such as hot toddies and coffee, but never for dishes and bathing. It wasn't until a subsequent trip that I was encouraged to light the alcohol stove, at which time it became painfully clear to me why Myrna never had any facial hair. When we finally bought our boat, I insisted on propane. I'd rather be blown up than browned off; if I arrive at the pearly gates under jet propulsion, at least I have a chance of retaining my underarm hair!

Sailboats only carry a couple of gallons of water. With the constant and severe water shortage, dishes must always be washed in about a half a cup of cold water.

Water restrictions don't apply to things which the skipper enjoys, such as coffee and tea.

All water shortages are the fault of female crew members.

I also learned that anchoring and tying up require a lot of shouting, but words spoken in the heat of it all are to be forgotten immediately.

Wonderfully satisfying hot showers can be obtained by hooking the solar shower to the boom. One has simply to strip below deck, wrap yourself in a towel, and climb out into the cockpit. Once there, one simply hunkers down, flings the towel aside and proceeds to enjoy. My initial concern was that a large power boat pulling up along-side would have a front row seat for the ablutions, but Myrna made me feel a lot better when she said airily, "Oh, that's no problem. If they come along side, just shut your eyes and they will disappear."

It works you know. If you happen to look like a warm jelly bean, it is highly unlikely that anyone is going to hang around for act two.

I did learn, however, that watching the sun set from a gently rocking boat made all the shouting worthwhile. Experiencing dolphins dancing in front of the bowsprit seemed to nullify the exhaustion brought on by the overly frequent head sail changes.

Most important of all, I learned that I had a husband who loved it all and that, gentle reader, is what lured me into sailing.



On "Golden Bough"

Weather Report

I was wandering down a wharf this past summer when I overheard two men discussing their wives. The statement: “women are so devious” jumped out at me. While I am much too lethargic to be a women’s liber, the urge to push him in the bay was almost overwhelming. I smiled sweetly and walked by, but my mind, which is usually in “park” when on holidays, began to grind into gear.

Naturally, women are devious. Centuries of being subservient by law have taught us to weasel things out of the male population; in fact, one of us has become rather good at it.

Men, of course, are every bit as devious. The big difference between us – other than the more obvious and exciting differences – is that men never admit it, even to themselves.

Never was male deviousness more obvious in our home than when Bob decided he wanted to buy a boat. The usual “up front” methods were tried and, when they failed, he shifted into the more subtle approach. The process took eight years, and was so tortuous that I gave in out of sheer fatigue.

The old line “getting into boating need not be costly” I accepted as a first round in a downhill slide. I dutifully went with him to look at a trimaran that was going to be easy to put on a little trailer and take to the launching ramp. It would be very low maintenance and a sheer joy all around.

We bought it for a mere one thousand dollars. We got a real deal on a trailer for two hundred and off we went to enjoy.

Two hours later, the grim reality set in: putting this monster together each time was going to take all day, every time. The solution was obvious. We would leave it put together and tow it that way. New problem: it was now wider than it was long and, to be legal, we really needed a wide load permit! I wanted to go for the whole show: a big truck following us with flashing lights and danger signals, while in front would be a lead vehicle and a police escort. That suggestion was ignored.

Friends, whose home faced onto a lovely protected cove on the sea, suggested we might leave it moored in front of their place where they could keep an eye on it. It would be readily available when we wanted it. That seemed like a great solution, so with great alacrity, the requisite amount of line was purchased. Our “beginning to get more expensive” boat was moored, where it happily bobbed around just waiting for our pleasure.

Then Bob went off to work, away on a trip, and it was some time before we were able to go and make use of this wonderful vessel. When we arrived, it became immediately apparent that our friends were away and they had locked up all their rowboats.

My suggestion that we temporarily steal one of the neighbour’s canoes was met with silence. As we drove to the nearest village hardware, Bob assured me that a small inflatable two-man dingy would serve us just fine and would hardly cost anything.

Have you ever ridden in one of those things? They work well if both of you are anorexic, but since one of us is on the cuddly side, the thing rode in a decided bow heavy attitude. When I climbed in, the floor sagged under me and the gunwales folded their hands in prayer around my body, leaving just my head peering out at the world. It makes it extremely difficult to paddle when your arms are encased in plastic. It was disconcerting to discover that all the air in the thing seemed to have risen to the high side of the boat, leaving Bob sitting up high and dry, and very nearly clear of the water.

Our arrival at the “tri” was accomplished with great effort, only made possible by my expert advice. Oddly, Bob didn’t seem overly interested in any other sort of assistance from me!

We were about to get on board when we noticed something peculiar: the boat appeared to be tied to the bottom with swamp grass or something. From the water-line down was a growth far more luxuriant than anything we had ever managed to grow on the lawn. I had a gut feeling that unless it was removed, we weren’t going anywhere.

So, we dragged the trimaran to the shore and began the sorry job of trying to scrape it off, not easy to do when it has been dry longer than ten seconds. I wisely refrained from reminding Bob of the “low maintenance” clause.

Eventually we got our vessel into the ocean. Instantly, it took off like a race horse at the starting gate, leaving almost every other boat standing still. I think I could have water-skied behind it! Suddenly one of the floats dug in and without so much as a *by your leave*, it did the fastest ninety-degree turn ever recorded, effectively soaking both of us. After some minutes of enjoying the thrill, the significance of “a wet cockpit” slowly began to penetrate my brain. (That and other parts of any anatomy.)

This boat was built for warm lakes and wet suits, not for oceans and fat broads of indeterminate age. It quickly became evident that this broad was henceforth staying home. My bum is cold enough at the best of times. Besides, the poop deck was the only ‘facility’ on board and I’m not equipped with outdoor plumbing.

As we dripped our way home, I made the unguarded statement that if I was going to sail, it would have to be a lot more comfortable than that thing.

Thus began a gargantuan leap: we traded the trimaran in for a 28-foot sloop, which had all the amenities and a dry cockpit. That was the end of our low-cost sailing and the beginning of a learning curve fraught with mistakes, accidents, terror and, occasionally, pleasure. It was also the beginning of credit card burn out.

How naïve I was! One of the questions on my sailing exam was:

“What is the maximum wind velocity you consider safe for sailing?” I answered: 30 knots. The answer was correct. I must have been insane!

Before leaving harbour we always listened to the weather station to find out what is going on out there. The report is delivered in a very matter of fact voice and it all sounds sort of benign. I’m sure the Coast Guard isn’t really meaning to be devious, but weather reports are a study in understatements.

They call a four-foot sea “moderate.” What, pray tell, is moderate about four feet? After that they call it “rough.” Mountainous would be closer to the truth.

Do you know how bad it has to be before the Coast Guard calls it a storm? It’s somewhere in the neighbourhood of sixty miles per hour. In a 34-foot sailboat, the sea washes over the top of the cabin. At that point, they advise all small craft to return to harbour. (The thought would by then have crossed one’s mind!) For the first few minutes I pray for safety, after which sea-sickness strikes and I pray for death.

One of these days I’m going to get onto the marine radio and do my own weather report: “This is the distaff half of the *Golden Bough* reporting. Winds are light from the northeast, estimated at forty-five knots. There is a low southerly swell, with occasional calm waters between the ten-foot waves. Craft smaller than twenty feet are advised to reef their sails as there appears to be a storm brewing. The skipper has been advised by the first mate that throwing up in the fruit bowl is not her idea of a holiday and the ambiance inside the vessel is only slightly less foul than the outside. The dog has thrown up on the charts. All vessels are advised to remain well clear.”

Wait for it, Vancouver Coast Guard Radio!



Hanging in there!

Taking Leave of the Senses

One of the major problems Bob has with me is that I don't like shopping, not even window shopping. If I can be persuaded to go at all it has to be done quickly. If dire necessity dictates trying on clothes, it's rare that all the buttons are done up before the item is rejected out of hand. It wouldn't be so bad if one could try things on over existing apparel, but it's deemed necessary to strip. If you've ever stood nearly naked under a brutal light in one of those rotten little cubicles and watched all your rolls and lumps wobble, you will understand my great reluctance to subject myself to the futile process.

The only shopping that I really enjoy is at auctions, but Bob vetoed that exercise when he caught me bidding against myself. (I thought I recognized the voice!)

I can relate to a young friend of ours who was given permission to go to an auction to buy their first young bull. She had no idea how to go about it, but she and their five-year-old son were thrilled about the process. After carefully examining the hoofs and teeth, they waited with mounting excitement for the bull to be led forth. It became increasingly evident to all the grizzled farmers in the room that these two wildly enthusiastic beginners were determined to have this animal, so while the bidding was rather perfunctory on the part of the farmers, the beginners made up for it in noisy enthusiasm, shouting for joy when they managed to buy the little critter. They saw wry amusement on the faces of those

around them, but didn't take much notice as they rushed back to the farm to await the delivery. Our friend's husband arrived somewhat later looking pensive and when she asked him what he thought of the bull, he said: "Well, there's just one major thing wrong with it. It's a heifer."

Knowing my propensity for finding a bench, taking my shoes off and lying down to read a book while he does the shopping, Bob is not quick to suggest my accompanying him on any shopping trip. You can imagine my surprise when he suggested we go to the floating boat show.

It has always puzzled me why a man will park ten miles away from where he needs to go into a building or area where the sole intent of everyone there is to sell you something you don't need, can't afford and, in my case, may never figure out how to operate.

We bought our present boat at a floating boat show. From that experience, I note with interest that if a man has already decided to buy something – and mine had – it makes very little impact when the salesman looks you dead in the eye and says: "This boat sleeps seven." Somewhere in the back of my brain, spinning around with all those dollar signs, a voice whispered: "Seven what?"

We have now had five years on this boat that sleeps seven, and I'm here to tell you that it sleeps the following:

THE POINTY END: One very tall or two very short adults laid end to end.

THE CAPTAIN'S BUNK: Me! Actually, the skipper starts out there, but as soon as he falls asleep, I velcro him to the wall. Easy to accomplish since he sleeps so soundly.

THE BENCH: A small to medium sized dog, providing it doesn't snore or pass gas.

THE TABLE: One short adult, presupposing they don't ever move in their sleep. We put my small restless sister on that once, and during the night I heard a whimper which turned into a sob. I rushed out to find that the hydraulic lift had received mixed signals from all her tossing about and had decided to return to position one. There she was,

hunkered angrily in the centre of the table, looking for all the world like a disgruntled bull frog trying to defend his lily pad from a walrus.

She refuses to boat with us anymore.

If we are going to be really honest here, we need to admit that anyone inviting that many people on board should have their head examined. Any extra on our boat are instructed to restrict their carry-on baggage to a toothbrush tucked into a hat. We will supply deodorant out of our instinct for survival.

So, against my better judgement, we went to the boat show. With a contented air, we were able to walk by all those boats smaller than ours and inspect with apparent seriousness those that were beyond our wildest dreams. I wanted the power boat with the full-sized fridge and built-in washer/dryer. One need never leave the dock! Bob wanted the biggest sail boat with roller furling everything.

You know, it's a cheap entrance fee at that. A lot like buying a lotto ticket but with the added advantage of being able to lay hands on the dream.

However, it doesn't make any sense to me to go shopping for something we can't buy, don't want, will never use, or can't pronounce. Besides, my feet hurt!

Anytime the urge strikes to buy something just because it's there, the perfect cure is to stroll downtown and take a look at how some of the rest of the world lives. The outcasts of society struggle daily to stay alive in a harsh environment and their stories make pretty awful reading. Give thanks for all His care. There, but for the grace of God, go I!

Broadside

We seem to scatter our repair dollars equally between Nanaimo and Campbell River, and this summer was no exception. We were sitting in the cockpit enjoying an ice-cold lemonade and waiting for the repairman, when a chap from a very large houseboat came over to chat. In the course of the conversation, we got talking about anchoring, and Bob noted with satisfaction that the fellow had a substantial Bruce anchor hanging from the side of his boat. Bob is totally sold on the Bruce, so we asked him how he liked it. He told us that it was no good at all. When he bought the bigger boat, he had gone for a different anchor package. The new anchor worked very well, and he couldn't figure out why anyone would use the other. On closer questioning, however, it turned out that on the other boat he had used 10 feet of chain, and the rest line. On this boat, he had 150 feet of chain. Strange how well it held!

Anchoring is an art form in itself; in fact, one of the reasons we bought a pilot house was so that we could watch other people without appearing to. Skippers and their methods of anchoring vary as much as the boats they choose, and each day is a new experience.

As our skipper, Bob does a slow circle, much like a dog preparing a place to sleep. Since I never seem to remember how long this takes, I am up at the business end hanging on to the anchor, my muscles screaming in agony, wondering how much longer he is going to fool around. It seems to take an inordinately long time, though the reasons for such

a lot of activity are not entirely clear. One could assume that he is not interested in surprises: if there is a rock out there, he wants to hit it in the daylight.

A great deal of care is taken to ensure that the Bruce has well and truly dug in; at that point, Bob seems to lose interest in the proceedings. Perhaps he surreptitiously watches for a while to see if we are drifting but, generally, one could safely say that this is a man who is sure his anchor will hold!

We anchored this summer in Small Inlet, at the end of Kanish Bay, having just made our way through the Octopus Islands. We chose this spot because it appeared to be extremely well protected, which would serve us well during the bad storm that was forecast to hit in the evening. What we didn't realize was that a gale was going to whistle through a cut in the hill in front of us, gaining velocity as it funnelled through. There was no fetch, so the sea stayed reasonably calm, but we felt as though we were being picked up and shaken. Our boat is a beast for hunting in the wind, and we travelled many a mile that night as the line groaned with the stress.

As we prepared for bed, I started firing off questions about the safety of the operation.

“What would happen if we started to drag?” I said.

Bob's reply didn't reassure me much. He pointed out that if it begins to get shallower, the scope is effectively much greater, thereby ensuring that the anchor would eventually grab hold again. As an afterthought, he said that failing that, we would simply drift closer to shore where we would get stuck in the mud. So saying, he climbed into bed.

“But what would happen if the anchor line broke? Would we have any warning?”

“There would be a loud bang if it broke, and we would simply drift a lot faster.” With that, he put his trusting little head on the pillow and was fast asleep.

Now I ask you, how much sleep would you have had after that conversation?

I spent most of the night leaping out of bed every few minutes to see if we were closer to the shore. Around three in the morning, I'd convinced myself that one could stay just as alert lying down. You will recognize the position I was in: ramrod-straight, eyes open, hands clenched tightly, breathing rapidly, toes dug in. There is never any question of rolling onto one's side, for that would effectively block the hearing of one ear, and one needs to hear the enemy approaching. If you have ever watched a dog's ears turn and twist when he is listening to something, you will have some idea what was happening to mine. My hair was standing on end, and the roots hurt.

Then it happened: A VERY LOUD BANG!

I catapulted out of the bed and hit the deck running, Bob right behind me. When the roaring in my ears settled down, I heard him yelling, "What's the matter?"

"Didn't you hear it?" I screamed.

By then, Bob was awake enough to check our condition. It hadn't changed, and his reply was somewhat weary. "NO, I didn't hear anything, but if you have ever been run over by a moving freight train, you will perhaps understand why I woke up."

The bang, of course, was a log, and as I climbed back into bed I informed him, in no uncertain terms, that it was his turn to stay awake and worry. I was sick of doing all the work.

Bob, of course, simply went back to sleep while I lay there adding up all the times he had slept through floods, disasters, heart attacks, neighbourhood celebrations, trees blown onto the roof, and teenagers not home when they should have been. The only time I recall Bob being awake for a family crisis was because it happened in the daytime.

I asked him once why he never stays awake worrying at night like normal human beings. He replied that he was willing to attend to all things between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.; after that, he leaves it to the Lord.

Now, we all know that the Lord sends His angels to administer to the needy. I just want you to know that if I ever get to be a real angel, I'd like

to do things differently. I will be slim, blonde, mounted on a white horse (not a dirty boat), and I'll eat chocolate for breakfast... AND THERE IS NO WAY I WILL DO THE NIGHT SHIFT!



Surprised by Joy

Something for the Boat

We have just recovered from a very severe case of “two foot-itis” which was, I suspect, brought on by the fact that we had poured so much money into the boat that it didn’t need anything done to it, and there was no room for any large fun toys. Men love a challenge, and mine is no different. After much agonizing as to whether we could afford it, along with many explanations as to why two extra feet was not enough, Bob chose a boat that was six feet longer than ours, and needed no end of expensive things done to it.

The result of all this is that every time we give each other a gift, it is always “something for the boat.” It is amazing the number of occasions that have suddenly become important enough to warrant a gift. For example, we are expecting another grandchild soon. Such an important event may well earn me a gift-wrapped radar!

We celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary recently, so when Bob suggested that we buy something for the boat, I was ready for him. I took a deep breath and said, “Yes, I think that is a good idea. Why don’t we get a loudhailer?” To say that he had a look of stunned disbelief would be an understatement, but Bob is too much of a gentleman to point out that volume is something I’m not short of. He patiently tried to find out why I thought I needed a loudhailer and that got a bit sticky because we both knew I didn’t need it. I simply wanted it. I pointed out that my niece Myrna has one, and how neat it is that we know they are coming