

Plain & Valley

Covering Southeast Saskatchewan and Southwest Manitoba

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Farmer's proposal puts romance on the map

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

Every morning for a week Jeff Skulmoski text-messaged his girlfriend, Jeannie Thompson, a hint. Every morning for a week Jeannie shared that hint with the students she was teaching in a Regina high school. Together the youth and the striking young woman tried to puzzle out what she would receive for her birthday from the Moosomin grain farmer, who had been courting her for several years.

"I was convinced I was getting a homemade kitchen table," laughed Jeannie as Jeff grinned self-consciously beside her.

Most likely, neither of them had anticipated that people throughout Saskatchewan, across North America, and around the world would be marveling at the gift she received on the Thanksgiving weekend.

Perhaps you saw the fruit of Jeff's labor on Canada AM or CTV news. You might have heard about it on CBC, News Talk Radio, or caught it from an American perspective while watching ABC news. There was wide coverage on the Internet, and if you are a subscriber to Indonesia's daily *Pikiran Rakyat* or popular Romanian newspaper *Jurnalul* you wouldn't have escaped the story either.

People across the globe were touched and bemused by Jeff Skulmoski's 2,200-foot proposal, "Jeannie will you marry me?" carved in canola stubble with his cultivator.

"I really wasn't doing it for other people, I was just doing it for her," Jeff answers when asked how he felt about all of the media attention his proposal received. "We're really kind of quiet. We really don't need a lot of attention."

"Not very many people understand the effort he put into it, and that's what's important," added Jeannie, whose left finger sparkles with proof that all of that effort paid off.



Jeff Skulmoski and fiancé Jeannie Thompson at the airport in Moosomin.

Jeff was inspired by a George Canyon song, one he heard frequently while commuting between his home in Moosomin and Jeannie's place in Regina.

Once the idea took root, he began to plot it out at home; he graphed the design, worked out the math, and plotted the turns and stops into his GPS. On the Thursday before Thanksgiving, just after lunch, he began the task of carving the message into his field south of Moosomin, near Fairlight.

"A lot of numbers were going through my head," he says of the travail.

The next morning, pilot Dale Woods of Moosomin, a recreational flyer and close friend, took Jeff up for a preview. "I was actually pretty impressed," he says of his handiwork, "I couldn't wait to show her."

That Friday night, Jeannie

knew something was up. At a family gathering in Moosomin, Jeff seemed strange, preoccupied. It felt as though he were avoiding people, and finally he isolated himself in the basement and left his girlfriend to chat with his family.

Late Saturday morning, Jeff was even stranger; he invited her for an aerial tour of Moosomin. "He hates flying!" she explains. Jeff corrects her almost sheepishly, "I don't hate flying... I'm just not a fan of it."

Saturday morning found Dale Woods back in the sky, with two passengers this time. Once again he cruised over the recently harvested canola field. Jeff had been pointing out various sights and landmarks along the way, and when he said to Jeannie, "Now look over here," it took a moment for the reality to

process.

"I was shocked," she remembers. "Okay, wait a minute; that actually says my name!"

Jeff had to gently prompt her, "Is that a yes?"

It was, and once married, the couple plan to make their home together in Moosomin.

The attention generated in the media has definitely incited the townfolks' curiosity about Jeannie Thompson. "Now people are more interested in meeting her," says Skulmoski, not without a certain pride.

Jeannie, who spent her first years in small-town Kelliher but has lived and worked in Regina for some time, is looking forward to married life here. "It's a cool feeling," she says of meeting people that you know while walking down the street, while doing your

grocery shopping. "It's a weird coincidence if that happens in Regina," she laughs.

After so much media attention, Skulmoski and Thompson seriously considered doing yet another interview, this time with their hometown paper. "If it had gone on too long, it would have depersonalized it," explained Jeannie.

However, Jeff is positive he'd do it again, even though "all his buddies are mad at him," as Jeannie says.

The nature of the proposal was considered unexpected from Jeff, and has perhaps upped the ante for Saskatchewan grain farmers.

All in all, the couple agree that it was a positive experience. On the internet dozens of commentators reflected on good news in a bad news world

and celebrated the fact that romance is alive and thriving for a generation blighted by cynicism.

A man from Ottawa—a complete stranger—even called Jeff after getting his phone number from a Google search. "He just called to congratulate me," said Jeff.

After all, as the marriage is more important than the wedding, the answer was more important than the question, however romantically it was posed.

*Someone took a chance
Someone let it show
Since I met you girl, I want
the world to know
Somebody wrote live in a
permanent way
Somebody wrote love and
the world was changed
Just a simple word but it
can do so much,
In a space, where nothing
was
Somebody wrote love
—George Canyon*

Fundraiser planned for Moosomin family

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

A fundraiser is planned for Lorne and Angi Frape, who are dealing with medical expenses for their baby.

The young boy is facing surgery in Edmonton at only a few months of age.

Baby Liam suffered obstetrical brachial plexus injuries during birth.

Liam was born Oct. 22 at Moosomin Union Hospital.

Angi says there was no indication of any problem during her pregnancy. The couple was expecting the baby would be around eight pounds, but were unable to have a second ultrasound during the pregnancy because an ultrasound technician was on holidays.

Instead, the baby was born weighing 11 pounds, three ounces.

Because of his large size, the baby's nerves in his right shoulder were stretched during birth, rendering them useless.

"From the time they realized he was stuck until he was born was four minutes," says Angi. "We had two doctors and four nurses in the delivery room as soon as they realized there was something wrong. I'm so glad we have the doctors we have."

Liam has no movement or feeling in his right arm, and the nerve damage also affects part of his face.

Brachial plexus injuries are not uncommon, but rarely are severe enough that the nerves are totally cut off in part of the body. One doctor told the Frapes that he has not seen a case as severe as Liam's in 20 years of practice.

The solution the doctors have come up with is a nerve graft, taking tiny nerves from his legs to reconnect to repair nerve damage in his shoulder.

The Frapes have travelled to Edmonton twice already, and will return to the city once more in January, and then a few days before Liam goes into surgery, which is currently scheduled for February 5 at the University of Alberta Hospital. The surgery, in which part of Liam's sural nerve in his leg will be used to reconnect the injured brachial plexus nerves, can take eight to fourteen hours.

After the surgery, Liam must remain in hospital for several days, and will have follow-up physiotherapy at Wascana Rehabilitation Centre in Regina.

"It's going to be a long road," says Lorne. "You don't expect something like this to happen to you. We've gone to other fund-



Angi and Lorne Frape with their son Liam. Two and a half month old Liam suffered from obstetrical brachial plexus injuries during birth and requires nerve graft surgery in Edmonton. A community fundraiser is planned for Saturday, February 7 at the Moosomin Community Hall, including a soup-and-sandwich lunch and a silent auction.

raisers, and never thought they would need to have one for us."

Liam's parents do range of motion exercises with him every day to ensure that the muscles in his right arm develop normally, and following surgery a large number of trips to both Regina and Edmonton will be necessary.

The cost of the trips started to add up quickly, and the support from the community started to materialize overnight. Donations have started coming to the family—\$300 from the Moosomin Hospital Auxiliary, \$300 from the Rocanville Thrift Store—as people have heard about the situation.

"We're just fortunate to live in a small town," says Lorne. "Things like this just don't happen in the city. It's an awesome feeling to see the support we have from our community."

Neil and Carol Russell have organized other fundraisers for families with

medical needs, and when Lorne and Angi's travel expenses started to add up, a family member approached them about organizing an event for the family.

"It's wonderful to be asked to put it on," says Neil. "There are lots of fundraisers, but whenever you do something for a local family's it's a whole different thing. Everyone wants to support something like that."

The fundraisers involve a fair bit of work. "The lunch will run from 11 to 2, but we'll be there at 6 in the morning, and get home at 6 at night," says Carol.

There is never a shortage of soup, sandwiches, or volunteer help.

"All sorts of people come forward to help at something like this," says Neil. "Some people don't even tell us they're going to help—they just walk in the door, grab a coffee pot, and go to work."

The Russells say they have always been impressed by the way people

rally behind their fundraisers.

"It's not the people who are reading it up, it's the people in the community you have behind you that make the difference," says Neil.

A facebook group has been set up for Baby Liam. The Baby Liam group will be updated regularly to provide people with information on how Liam is doing with his medical procedures.

Anyone who would like to volunteer to help with the soup and sandwich lunch, to donate food, or to donate to the silent auction, can contact Carol or Neil Russell at 306-435-7760 or 306-435-3365.

The silent auction items will be on display at Moosomin's town office for the week before the fundraiser.

Donations may be sent to the Moosomin Community Fundraising Account, Box 1612, Moosomin SK, S0G 3N0.

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REDA planning Make Sask Home part two

The Gateway REDA is planning to follow up its Make Saskatchewan Home project with a second project aimed at bringing people to the Moosomin area.

Make Saskatchewan Home was a 2008 project aimed at attracting tradespeople and entrepreneurs from Alberta to southeastern Saskatchewan and southwestern Manitoba. The REDA prepared a section which was distributed inside the Calgary Herald and to non-Herald subscribers in Calgary and Air-drie.

The section included information on job and business opportunities, and on lifestyle advantages of the Gateway Region, and southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba in general.

The section was designed by the World-Spectator and printed by the Calgary Herald. It included participation from communities and companies throughout the region.

Saskatchewan Enterprise and Innovation has approved \$20,000 in matching funds under the REDA Enhancement Fund for the second phase of the project.

Some employers in the region, such as the expanding Potash-Corp Rocanville and some of the manufacturing plants, are facing a shortage of skilled labor that this project is designed to address.

"We were happy with our first 'Make Saskatchewan Home' project targeting southern Alberta," says REDA chair Kevin Weedmark. "For the second phase

we are targeting an area where there are a lot of people with the very skills needed by employers in our area—the southwestern Ontario area around Windsor. With layoffs and uncertainty in the auto industry and related industries, we believe this is a time many skilled workers in southwestern Ontario may look seriously at the opportunity to relocate to the booming area of southeastern Saskatchewan and southwestern Ontario.

"With growth in the potash, oil, and manufacturing industries, this area should look attractive to a lot of skilled employees, and possibly even to some small businesses."

"The ultimate goal of our project is to encourage people to relocate to the Gateway REDA

region in order to work, live, play, raise a family, and do business in our region," says REDA economic development officer Jeff Cole. This would contribute towards the capacity building, investment readiness, business and sector development, and sustainability required to build a high performing region."

The REDA plans to print and distribute a twelve-page, full-color flyer promoting our region in the Windsor Star newspaper. This paper will reach all Windsor Star print subscribers and extended market coverage in Windsor and Essex County in Southern Ontario, for a total distribution of 168,000 households.

The Windsor Star has the largest readership per capita in Canada. Studies have shown

that an average of 3.3 readers read each copy of a newspaper, so this gives the project access to approximately 554,400 people in that region.

This area is highly dependant on the automobile and manufacturing industries, and with the recent layoffs, Windsor has become the city with the highest level of unemployment in Ontario. According to Statistics Canada, the 2006 unemployment rate in Windsor was nine per cent.

The Gateway REDA is following the example of Premier Brad Wall who recently returned from the National Job Fair and Training Expo, on September 30-October 1, 2008, in Toronto, to recruit Ontario residents to relocate and work in Saskatchewan.



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Manitoba experiences steady job growth: Swan

Manitoba continues to chart a steady economic course that positions the province well for the future, according to the latest Statistics Canada information released this morning, Competitiveness, Training and Trade Minister Andrew Swan announced in early January.

Statistics Canada reported the national economy shed 105,000 jobs in the last two months. In contrast, Manitoba's economy added a further 2,000 jobs.

"While Manitoba is not immune to global economic turbulence, we continue to lead the nation on many fronts," said Swan. "Our

Manitoba posts best full-time job growth for December 2008, second-best job growth in 2008

job performance in the last two months was the best among any province and full-time jobs were up 2,900.

"Over the last 12 months, the province's employment grew by 10,100 individuals. This placed us in second place for job growth."

Manitoba's unemployment rate was the third-lowest rate in the country at 4.3 per cent in December, up 0.1 percentage points

from the December 2008 level. At the national level, the unemployment rate increased by 0.6 percentage points. Manitoba's change over the last 12 months was the best performance of any province.

"The steady growth places Manitoba above the national average for many of the major economic indicators. For three of every four indicators, we are out performing the Canadian average," said Swan.

Moosomin Kinsmen selling tickets on Lotto 365

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

The Moosomin Kinsmen Club's largest annual fundraiser is under way.

Between now and Feb. 8, Kinsmen will be selling tickets in Lotto 365, a local fundraiser in which the top winner gets to live free for

a year—receiving \$1,000 a week for a year. There are also two draws for \$1,000 each and ten draws for \$500 each. Lotto 365 raised \$35,000 to \$40,000 each year. Proceeds this year will be donated to the Southeast Integrated Care

Centre, the Moosomin Golf Club and the Moosomin Curling Club.

"The majority of what we have donated to is the health care facility," said Kinsmen president Ryan Thorn. "The health care facility is a cornerstone for our community, and the curling club and the golf course are important to our community and don't receive a lot of government funding."

The lottery started seven years ago. Terry Barros, the Kinsmen president at the time, wanted to take on a major fundraiser. As club members were brainstorming, the idea of giving away a prize equivalent to living free for a year was raised.

"People like the cash giveaway," Thorn said. "A lot of lottos give away boats and cars. A lot of people tell us they like the cash."

He said the lottery almost always sells out. "The support we get from Moosomin and area is just overwhelming," he says. "People like that it is local money being spent locally, and supporting something right in our community."

"We also sell tickets as far away as Wadena, and former members of the golf and curling clubs are spread as far away as Ontario and Alberta, and they support it very well."

Lotto 365 has sold out five times, and Thorn says he expects sales to go well this year since the Kinsmen Club has many new members.

The draw is a week earlier this year, so the club will have a shorter period to sell tickets, but Thorn isn't worried. "We feel quite confident that we can sell out again," Thorn said.

"We do a direct mail campaign so that everyone who bought a ticket last year gets a reminder letter, and every year there are people who drop in and buy a ticket. So it's a proven lottery. We've done it enough that it's a pretty well oiled machine now."

The lottery is one reason the Kinsmen have been able to donate \$355,000 to the community since 2000.

Tried and True Recipes

by Sandra Johnson



Turkey and Cheese Casserole

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1/2 cup onion, chopped | 1 cup frozen peas |
| 2 Tbsp margarine | 2 Tbsp pimento, chopped |
| 1 can cream of celery soup | 2 cups turkey, cooked and cubed |
| 1/2 cup turkey broth or gravy | Topping: |
| 1/4 tsp dry mustard | 3/4 cup bread crumbs |
| 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded | 1/4 cup margarine, melted |
| 2 cups broad noodles, cooked | |

Saute onions in margarine until tender. Add broth (gravy) and mustard, cook and stir until smooth and bubbly. Pour into a greased 2L casserole dish. Add soup, cheese, noodles, turkey, peas and pimento. Add to casserole dish, stir. Mix bread crumbs and melted margarine together, sprinkle over casserole. Bake at 350° F for 20 to 30 minutes.

Just Great Brownies

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 2 cups flour | 2 eggs |
| 2 cups sugar | 1 tsp baking soda |
| 1 cup margarine | 1 tsp vanilla |
| 1 cup strong brewed coffee or water | Frosting: |
| 1/4 cup cocoa | 1/2 cup margarine |
| 1/2 cup buttermilk or 2 tsp vinegar mixed into 1/2 cup milk | 2 Tbsp cocoa |
| | 1/4 cup milk |
| | 3 1/2 cups icing sugar |
| | 1 tsp vanilla |

In a large bowl, combine flour and sugar. In heavy saucepan, combine margarine, coffee and cocoa. Stir and heat to boiling, pour boiling mixture over flour and sugar. Add buttermilk, eggs, baking soda and vanilla. Mix well on high speed with electric mixer. Pour into greased 11x17 inch jelly roll pan. Bake at 400°F for 20 minutes.

Frosting: While brownies bake, prepare frosting. In a heavy saucepan, combine margarine, cocoa and milk. Heat to boiling, stirring. Mix in icing sugar and vanilla until frosting is smooth. Pour warm frosting over brownies as soon as removed from oven. Cool. Cut into 48 bars.

To order a copy of *Tried and True*, send \$12, plus \$5 postage and handling, to Sandra Johnson, Box 1072, Moosomin, SK, S0G 3N0.

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We are now working on a section that will reach households in Windsor and southwestern Ontario in the new year.

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- D. Opportunities in the trades
- E. Stories of people who have moved to the region
- F. Regional quality of life
- G. Community profiles
- H. Regional profiles

Our first project was assisted with a financial contribution from the REDA Enhancement Fund. We have applied for funding for this second phase, which keeps advertising costs down. We are targeting an area of Ontario where there have been layoffs in the automotive sector, and where the future of remaining jobs in the industry is in doubt.

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Fundraiser planned for Elkhorn woman

BY KARA KINNA

An Elkhorn couple who have always been eager to support their community are now the ones receiving a helping hand from their friends and neighbors.

A fundraiser in Elkhorn is being organized for Lily Lund. Lily and her husband Gerry Lund have lived and farmed in the Elkhorn area for the past 37 years.

The fundraiser is being organized to help send the couple to California, where Lily will receive a medical treatment for cancer.

Lily was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in July of 2008. After chemotherapy treatments in Edmonton, her condition did not improve enough to allow for surgery. As one last resort, the couple will travel to California where Lily will receive an alternative medical treatment.

"They gave her six months to one year," says Lily's husband Gerry. "Six months have gone by already, and the chemo just made her lose 50 pounds in four months."

The fundraiser for the couple will be held on Saturday, Jan. 31, and will include a silent auction, Chinese auction, and local entertainment. A live auction may also be held. Presently, the group organizing the event are in the process of collecting donations of cash or items for the auctions.

According to organizers, it is the Lunds who are usually the ones organizing and helping with events to benefit others.

"Gerry and Lily have always been amongst the first to volunteer their time and make donations in support of any and all community events, fundraisers, or worthier endeavors" read a letter sent out about the fundraiser last week.

"When we told them we wanted to do something for them, Gerry said 'you don't have to worry about that,' but he'd be the first one to organize something like this," says Heather Boos, a friend of the Lunds who is helping to organize the event.

"I don't know anyone who doesn't like them. If you mention Gerry and Lily Lund, I don't think people would say anything but kind things about them."



Lily Lund, a long time resident of the Elkhorn area. A fundraiser is being held for Lund in Elkhorn on Jan. 31.

Boos is a friend of the Lunds and is part of the Lund's coffee crowd, meeting at the house of Dianne Rookes once a week. It was there that it was decided something should be done for Lily.

"A few weeks ago we were all out for coffee and Dianne finally said, 'that's it, we're doing something'" says Boos.

Boos says the community seems relieved that someone is putting on a fundraiser for Lily. Over the years, Lily has been an integral part of the community. While Gerry has donated countless hours as a musician, performing in seniors homes, at local hospitals, and at events over the years, and donating the use of his equipment for events and fundraisers, Lily has always been by his side, lending a helping hand, giving her time and support to local events.

She also taught ceramics classes to local women in her home for many years, and is a well-known face in the community.

"She's very quiet and reserved, but when she's comfortable with you, then she can be hilarious," says Boos. "She's very spontaneous and wanting to joke around. She can be a real firecracker."

"She taught ceramics in her basement for years. Probably all the ladies, at one time or another, have taken a class from her."

"Over the years we have played for just about every fundraiser, and have supported them," says Gerry. "You never think you'll need the support yourself. It's kind of a funny feeling."

Gerry says the community has been extremely supportive since Lily's struggle with cancer, bringing food to the house, driving Lily to the places she needs to get to, and caring for the animals on the farm while the Lunds are away for Lily's medical treatments.

Although the Lunds have always been avid supporters of benefit events themselves, Gerry says he never expected anything in return from the community.

After years of helping others, Lund gets a helping hand

"It was quite a surprise," he says. "I just about said don't bother—I thought I could always sell some of my cows."

"I guess in the end, though, if you've helped them (the community) out, then they turn around and help you out."

The Lunds will be spending seven or eight days down south for Lily's medical treatments, and

are hoping to get through the treatments without Lily having to be hospitalized while they are out of country—something that could be extremely expensive.

The fundraiser for Lily on Jan. 31 will be held from 2-5 p.m. and from 7-10 p.m. at the Elkhorn Elks hall.

Boos says it will be a come and go event, where people can pop in and take a look at the auction items,

and listen to some of the local entertainment.

"I'm really hoping it turns around and Karma pays them back with this one," she says. "They've had such an impact on the lives of others that I'm hoping everyone can turn around and really pay them back."

Those wishing for more information or wanting to donate to the fundraiser can contact Dianne Rookes or Lyle Rowan at 204-845-2279, Ken or Lynda Martin at 204-845-2325, or Angela Tourond at 204-845-2657.

A Fundraiser has been
Organized for
Lily Lund
Jan. 31st at the Elks Hall
in Elkhorn
2-5 pm & 7-10 pm

In July, 2008, Lily Lund was diagnosed with Cancer and has spent several months in Edmonton taking treatments which are now complete. Unfortunately results indicate that the treatments have not produced sufficient improvement to allow the recommended surgery.

A medical treatment available in San Diego, CA has been proposed. Lily's friends and neighbors in Elkhorn and area would like to see her able to travel to California for these treatments.

To donate or for more information
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A glimpse of Africa

On Nov. 16, ten Canadians left from Calgary on The Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) food study tour to Zambia and Mozambique. On the trip was reporter Sylvia MacBean. She was sponsored in part by the United Church of Canada and area church groups in south-eastern Saskatchewan.

BY SYLVIA MACBEAN

Last spring I was contacted by James Kornelson with the CFGB. "Would you be interested in going on a food study tour with the CFGB to Zambia and Mozambique?"

I would need vaccination shots and to update my camping gear and \$7000. Okay, I am a former Scout. I have my Woodbadge (leadership training) for Scouts, Cubs and for Beavers. I had camping experience. But, that was before hip surgery.

I walked around my hometown of Carnduff to prepare for this. I worked part of the summer as a hail adjuster. I am 55 years-old. I grew up on a prairie farm, where we didn't get power until 1957. Running water was running to the creek and later the well, pumping it, straining it and boiling it. Later, during the 1960s we had a water well with a water pressure pump system and a water heater. I know what a precious resource good drinking water is.

When I arrived at the small Zambian village of Lumimba with nine other Canadians, we were greeted by a huge crowd. Many of them had been waiting for two days for their allotment of corn or rice seed. The seed had been purchased locally with funds donated by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Later, that evening we went to stay with our billets. I stayed with the Banda family on their small farm. I was shown to a little thatched hut. Another hut, had a pan of warmed water. I stood in the water and shone my flashlight into it. There were little fish swimming in it. I quickly stepped out of it.

My hut had a single mattress on the floor, with sheets, a pillow, a mosquito net and a tiny battery-operated light. The light was interesting. The Bandas' teenaged sons had made it using old D cell batteries. They had sliced two batteries and ran a copper wire through them and attached it to a tiny light bulb and held the whole thing together with duct tape. This little light lit up the small hut. Red Green would be proud.

Dinner arrived. It consisted of a small pot of shima (cooked corn meal), a small roasted chicken, home grown rice, and roasted cicadas (bugs). Denis, 14, a high school student who speaks English, French, Portuguese, and his own language was my translator. Cicadas are a delicacy. "Butterflies--carefully roasted," he explained.

His mother Joyce watched as I ate a little of the shima, chicken and rice. I told Denis to tell her she was a good cook. Joyce was overjoyed. Then I realized she hadn't eaten. She called her husband over and they ate, then the teenaged boys ate, then the girls. The youngest children stood there, and there was nothing left. I pulled out packages of Ramen noodles from my duffel bag and shared them.

It was mango season. They had a large mango tree and banana trees in the yard. The little children had been eating mangoes during the day.

The next morning Joyce rose early she swept the fallen leaves and twigs with a homemade corn broom that resembled an old fashioned curling broom. Roosters crowed. Chickens and baby chicks scratched at the ground looking for seeds and insects. She put a pot of water on to boil over their cooking fire. Then she pounded corn using her large mortar and pestle.

A few minutes later she led me to a grass hut that they used for bathing. I carried my towel, wash cloth, and soap to the basin of warm water. It was Sunday.

When I returned to my hut, breakfast was waiting. Shima, a small roasted chicken, rice, tea, and cane sugar.



Sylvia MacBean photo

John Banda enjoys a mango from a tree on his family's farm in Zambia.

At 7 a.m. it was time to go to the river and get water. Joyce carried a large five gallon bucket down to the dry river bed. Denis proudly showed the new bore hole he and his brothers had dug in the sand. Joyce scooped the water out of the hole and into her bucket.

When it was filled she raised it and placed it on her head and walked up the steep river bank.

The children followed. "Why don't you carry the water for your mother?" I asked Denis.

"Carrying water is women's work. I would be laughed at by my friends."

Denis showed me the five acre field the family had planted to corn. They had planted their crops in October and the rains never came. Now, the insects had eaten most of the seeds. Their 2008 crop had failed with too much rain. Now, they were being droughted out.

They would replant their crops with the seed they received from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

A distant church bell rang at 8:30 a.m. My ride arrived. Church started a nine and the service ended at noon. Nine Banda children were took part in the band and choir.

A young man approached us after church.

"Do you know Don and Marie in Quebec. They were my Plan foster parents. I want you to tell them that I passed my exams to go to university. I want to write to them, but I don't have their last name or their address," he said.

I arrived back at the little farm. Supper was shima, chicken, rice, tea, mangoes, bananas and roasted caterpillars.

Denis asked if he could have my caterpillars.

"Sometimes we have killed impalas (deer) using a spear and we eat the impala meat," said Denis.

I asked to see his spear. He brought me what looked like a sharpened six foot steel pry bar. It was heavy. If he can throw this, he should be in the Olympics for Javelin, I thought.

"Sometimes I make a bow and arrow and use that," he said.

Denis brought out his homework. He is studying for his grade 10 entrance exams. If he passes he will have to go to a Catholic residential school at Lusaka for grades 10, 11, and 12. He wants to become a doctor.

That evening the family had a family dance. Their father drummed on the bottom of a white five gallon pail.

"We would need a goat skin to have a real drum."

"Do you want a goat?" I asked, thinking I could get them a goat.

"No, we don't want a goat. A goat would eat our garden," said Denis.

Their garden consisted of six pumpkin plants.

"You could milk a goat," I said

He shivered and gagged. "People don't milk goats! Goats are raised for meat!" Denis said.



Sylvia MacBean photo

Zambian women getting water from a river bed for their families.



Submitted photo

Sylvia MacBean and student priest in front of her accommodations on a Zambian farm.

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Farmers should receive the \$60 million: WGEA

The Western Grain Elevator Association (WGEA) is calling on the federal government to pay directly to farmers the excess revenue above the Western Grain Revenue Cap for the 2007-2008 crop year.

In its press release of Dec. 30, 2008, the Canadian Transportation Agency announced that both the CN and CP exceeded their statutory grain freight revenue caps for the 2007-2008 crop year by a combined

total of approximately 60 million dollars. As it stands, the railways must pay the overage plus a 15 per cent penalty to the Western Grains Research Foundation.

"We understand the Western Grains Research Foundation (WGRF) does very good work for the benefit of all farmers and we support the work done by this organization, however, it was never imagined that the excess amount

would ever be this high," said Wade Sobkowich, Executive Director of the WGEA. "The WGEA members suggest that the penalty of 15 per cent (or almost \$9 million dollars) be given to the WGRF, but the actual amount of overpayment should be returned directly to producers."

In the past, the administrative cost of calculating how much each individual producer would have been owed was seen as too

costly; however the WGEA maintains that the amount at stake warrants the administrative exercise be undertaken this year.

"There are various options on how this money can be returned to pro-

ducers, some of which are straightforward and others which are higher in administration. The point is—this is a significant amount of money and it should properly flow back to the farmers," added Sobkowich.

The WGEA is an association of nine farmer-owned, public and private grain businesses operating in Canada, which collectively handle in excess of 90 per cent of western Canada's bulk grain exports.

Research returns increases

As part of an ongoing performance assessment, the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG) contracted Professor Richard Gray to update his 2003 study titled, Returns on Producer Investments in Pulse Crop Research.

The benefits received by producers were found to be much greater than the cost of the producer check-off, indicating substantial positive returns to research. The updated study calculated a \$20.19 return on investment to Saskatchewan producers for every \$1.00 of check-off invested in research. This is up from \$15.60 in 2003.

"When we compared the rates of return to a previous study done in 2003, they increased. This suggests that the SPG program has become more productive over time, which is likely due to the accumulation of knowledge and germplasm within the research organizations," Gray explains.

Richard Gray's full report can be found on the SPG website at www.saskpulse.com.

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Tail lights and trust

Sometimes random events can prove the mettle of a relationship in ways we can't plan, predict or orchestrate.

For example, the midnight I threw the wedding ring my ex-husband never gave me out the window of his speeding car, and he responded in kind, a little voice in my head (speaking in a calmer and clearer tone, barely perceptible, than the one shrieking foul names) told me maybe the marriage wouldn't last. And after the following experience, that same little voice (glad to be living in a much happier, more peaceful head, where its whispers are more easily heard) informed me confidently that I am blessed to anticipate a long future with Keith.

Keith's niece was to wed her love in Edmonton, and as her only uncle, it was incumbent upon us to attend. Danan was three months old and would obviously accompany us, but my mother kept the other two boys, and the trip became something of a honeymoon for the newly-wed Keith and me. From our home in Robson, B.C. to Edmonton, Alta. is an approximately 15-hour trip, so we decided to take advantage of a rumored short-cut through the Chain Lakes to Calgary.

Alas, for us, the initial leg of the journey was nearly 15 hours! Danan, who until then had traveled beautifully, howled disconsolate from his car seat. What could it have been? Colic, teething, was the baby ill? We stopped repeatedly to nurse, burp, and change him, examine his tiny pink gums, check for fever. As soon as we halted, so did his caterwauling. He was content to be strapped into his car seat. A few miles down the road, the doggerel began afresh.

I reviewed in my mind what had changed from our last successful road trip with the baby. Then it dawned on me! Sandwiched between his two older brothers, in his rear facing child restraint, Danan had never before lacked a familiar face in the car. He was lonely! Sure enough, with one of us riding beside him, he was as meek and sweet as newborn lamb.

As any parent of several children—or even one child—can tell you, at times the car is the only place you can



Monique McKay

hold an adult, uninterrupted conversation—if everyone is asleep. Keith and I were loath to squander all of the lovely hours of discourse that lay before us on the fastidious demands of our most youthful dictator. Once we got the hang of keeping Danan happy, whoever was in the backseat with him would transfer to the front passenger seat once the little tyrant was peacefully sleeping. If it were me in the back seat, I would simply clamber over the middle armrest and into the passenger seat. My husband, although lean, at over six feet, would simply become painfully lodged in the car if he attempted to mimic such a move. So when he was in the back, I would pull over and let him in the front.

Thanks to our slowness in deciphering the root of Danan's problem, it was nearing midnight when we reached the Chain Lakes turnoff. A secondary highway servicing farmland, it is a narrow and utterly dark road; only the myriad stars illuminate the sheer blackness of it at night. We pulled off immediately, fed the baby, and I hopped into the driver's seat while Keith sat in the back. I am a little deaf, so easy conversation from the backseat with me is difficult, and I love Spearhead. I turned up Michael Franti, drumming out the beats on the steering wheel while navigating the star struck night, until about three songs later Keith tapped me on the shoulder. I turned my music down, and Keith announced, "I think he's asleep."

"I don't know," I warned, "I'd give him a couple more minutes. As soon as we stop the car he'll squeak and you'll be right back there."

"No, he's really asleep," insisted Keith, so, obligingly, I pulled over. Sure enough, as soon as Keith opened his

door, Danan let out a pitiful little cry. Keith's door slammed immediately shut. "See?" I told him as I put the car back into gear and promptly got back up to highway speed, "he just needs a couple more minutes."

You have probably guessed what happened.

Luckily for Keith, I did not turn my music back up. I would have happily sung all the way to the turn off for Calgary, another 65 km up the road. Instead, in the mood for light banter, I began to tell him a story from my considerable repertoire gathered over three years of hitch-hiking. After a very few minutes, I began to feel like I was talking to myself.

"Keith?" I said, when he did not respond to a particularly salient point, "Keith?" I just about threw up when my glance into the rearview mirror was met with just the rear view; I had anticipated the sleeping visage of my husband.

The Chain Lakes road is so long, so straight, and so dark at night that Keith had the opportunity to watch me drive away for quite a little while. Even as the tail lights of our car grew distant, Keith's confidence remained high as he strode along the side of the highway. It began to wane just a little as I sped over a slight rise and those gleaming red eyes disappeared; but his optimism was immediately justified as the faint glow from my sudden brake radiated like a beacon from over the modest hill.

Back to that tiny voice. It is nice to consider that not once did Keith think that I had perhaps played a mean-spirited trick on him, and that he had every confidence I would worriedly return for him once I realized my abandonment of him. It is also nice to contemplate that not even for a second did I consider leaving him there, nor did I fear his reaction when I came back for him. This probably says more about our previous relationships than it does much else, but it also says a lot about our love for, and simple trust in, each other.

Monique McKay writes from Fleming, Sask. where she lives with her husband and children.



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Kennedy couple lends helping hand to Mexican children

Roofing and painting near Ensenada, Mexico kept Heather and Dave McMillan of Kennedy busy over the Christmas holiday. Ensenada is a busy coastal city about an hour and a half south of the U.S. border at San Diego.

Farm workers and laborers from the mountains of southern Mexico bring their families to "shanty towns" near the northern cities while they look for work or scout the border for illegal entry. As outsiders, their children have no papers to attend the local schools and are often caught in the cycle of uneducated poverty, but if some charitable agency or NGO will build a school, the Mexican government will provide teachers for the displaced children.

This year's project called for a new classroom to house the 37 primary students presently using the overhang of a construction trailer for a classroom. The kindergarten students were using a run-down partly painted classroom and had one toilet out of four that "worked," and it seeped sewage out from the toilet base.

Thanks to the effort of the youth group and others, the returning 37 primary students have their own brightly painted classroom, but the returning kindergarten children will notice even more difference. Their school has been painted inside and out, broken windows have been replaced, all four toilets and the sinks work, the washrooms are freshly painted, a dilapidated building has been reclaimed with supports and a new roof to provide for another class, and the yard has river-stone dumped on it to give them a reprieve from the mud.

Neither of the schools have any play structures or climbing equipment, but that will have to wait until next year!

Anyone interested in



Submitted photo

Dave and Heather McMillan joined thirty-seven young people and chaperones over the Christmas break building and repairing schools in Mexico.

participating in the schools project can contact Dave and Heather at 538-4542 or go to the project's website for True North Helping Hands at www.truenorthhh.org.

Below is a letter from Heather and Dave McMillan of Kennedy after their latest trip with True North Helping Hands in Mexico.

Hola,
... to all our friends interested in Mexico, and particularly to those who join us in efforts to ease suffering here and there.

We have just returned from a school building and repair effort in Northern Mexico where David

started helping with efforts four to five years ago. We roofed, painted, plumbed, and brought stone for five days and left the schools to welcome the students back. Our conclusion is that the poverty cycle is most effectively broken through education... in all its different forms, so the projects were satisfying. If you're interested in this particular effort, go to truenorthhh.org for pictures and descriptions.

I'm really writing to update you about southern Mexico however. Several of you had expressed interest in Monica and her girls, as well as Victoria and her family in San Pablo. Due to commitments with my parent's care, we did not visit

Oaxaca in 2008, so we have not updated you in some time.

Monica's situation is somewhat better. We stay in touch with her through Ariadna, the university teacher where we live when we are there. Monica's husband is still in the states somewhere, but Ariadna tells us that Monica's sister relented and let her come to live there, which removed the immediate danger of the molesting brother-in-law. Monica has continued to work away at the nursing certificate through adult education classes, and should be nearing completion, I think. We have helped her some, but fortunately she has not needed the larger

amounts we had wondered about.

We hope to visit Oaxaca in March and will check into her situation more specifically then, but if she can make it by without large amounts of money, that is preferable of course.

Victoria is in her second year of "high school", and is doing well according to Americo, the pastor at Tlacolula. I have asked him to check specifically on her however, since her Dad has not returned from the States either, and he hasn't responded yet. Nothing happens quickly with my friends there! So we will check on that family as well.

Americo and Norma's ef-

fort with the abused women continues. They are now trying to train a couple in each of the five villages in regard to intervening in domestic violence. The law is weak, and many men don't fear what law there is anyway.

We would like to head for Oaxaca about March 20 and stay for a month. With my parents continuing to fail healthwise, more time than that becomes a problem. Jared, our son, is in his teacher certification year at Queen's University and is allowed to do one practicum in a service-oriented situation. He plans to do work with the street mission in Oaxaca so he would go down with us as well. If possible, we always welcome others who may want to come for a week or more. Much of our time will be spent in reconnecting and checking on projects such as the wall at San Antonio, the weaving at San Miguel, the center at Tlacolula, etc., but we do want to encourage Americo and Norma in their abused women effort especially. They have moved to Mitla so things will be different again.

It looks like we can fly 'Chicago-Mexico city return' for about \$350 and then from the capital to Oaxaca return for about \$200, so flights haven't gone up at all. Accommodation there is minimal cost if we can stay with people, which is nice as we can use any money directly for projects.

So, thank-you to those of you who volunteered money for Monica or Victoria a year and a half ago, but as always, we try to distribute as little money as possible. We did want you to know that we stay in touch about them however, and that we provide what small amounts they seem to need. Perhaps after we see them again in March we'll be back to you!

For Mexico,
Dave and Heather

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