Saturday, May 29, 2004. c:/wklyltr4.4wcxx

**Month Letter/Story #7**

**Spring Flowers.**

Ah, .... what is lovelier than the bright splash of flowers in the spring. We had found a wonderful nursery in 2003, just across the Canadian border. It was time for a 2004 floral expedition and plans were hatched. Linda & Norman would drive there from Ottawa direct. Lucile & Ken would meet them at the nursery with the F150. The Ottawa contingent would cellphone the Vermonters as they passed through Montreal to finalize the ‘meet’ time. ‘N-day’ would be May 20th. Good plan.

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Editors Note: Before this goes any further let me say, I had nothing to do with this caper. F150 is a two critter vehicle. I was left behind. However, if I feel a pawnote necessary it will be provided. Well, not exactly, #3 doesn’t know how to cut & paste pawnotes, so these comments will appear as numbered addenda. Read them as you go, read them all at the end or ignore them, but I felt them necessary for the record. jj

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May 20 dawned a beautiful day. Lucile and Ken, anticipating a call, stayed near the phone. (\*1) About 11:30 Linda called. They had crossed the Mercier Bridge and thought themselves maybe 45 minutes from the nursery. (\*2) A bustle of activity ensued. The cell phone was transferred to the F150 and the Vermonters took off. Just north of Alburg they took the Noyan road, stayed east of both Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River and were shortly at the Canadian customs.

*"Where are you folks going?"*

*"Just up the road to buy some flowers. There is a nursery not too far up isn’t there?"*

*"Yup, well, have a good day."*

*"Thanks."*

A nursery soon appeared, .....on the left. Hmmn! It was remembered as being on the right. Neither the name nor the building looked familiar.

*"That’s not the place."*

*"Must be further on up the road."*

*"What was the name of it anyway?"*

*"I don’t remember."*

The northward trek continued. Every few miles a farm was passed, definitely the Quebec boondocks. The lost pair does a 180 back to the last crossroads which had a small hotel. The unknown nursery was thought to be in St. Jean (\*3). Lucile would go in and ask directions to St. Jean. She promptly re-emerges with a French type gentleman who commences to give animated directions on the front porch. A second 180 is made. They were to turn left after crossing a RR track about 17 kilometers north. Nothing looks familiar.

*"We’ve been driving over an hour."*

*"Linda & Norm must be at the nursery. Let’s call them and get directions."*

*"How can they give us directions when we don’t know where we are?"*

Glimpses of the Richelieu River are seen from time to time to the west. If they turn left they will be in the river.

*"What side of the river are we supposed to be on?"*

*"I’m not sure."*

*"Be nice if we knew the name of the nursery."*

*"Let’s call them now."*

*"You’ll have to talk, I don’t hear well on the cell phone."*

*"I don’t know how to use it."*

*"I think the manual is with the phone."*

*"We’ll wait till St. Jean, ..... if we ever get there."* (\*4)

Finally the outskirts of a town of some size are reached. They assume they are near St. Jean and pull off the road to call. Ken starts reading the phone manual. Fifteen minutes later he calls Linda.

*"Good grief, ..... where are you?"*

*" We’re not sure, but near the intersection of Rt. 233 & Hwy. 35."*

*"What have you been doing?"*

*"Touring Quebec. What side of the river are you on?"*

*"The west I think."*

*"We’re on the east. How do we get to you?"*

*"I don’t know."*

*"Can you put the nursery person on the phone?"*

*"She’s at the register right now and there is a lineup there."*

*"What’s the name of the nursery?"*

*"Lapinais ..... or something like that"*

*"We’ll get directions at a gas station and call you back from there."*

*"OK"*

A gas station is found but the owner has never heard of the nursery. Ken dials Linda who hands her phone to the nursery woman. Ken hands his phone to the gas station owner. A French conversation ensues. And ensues. Periodically, a summarization is imparted to Lucile, in French of course. Lucile, from the passenger seat, anglicizes this on to Ken in the driver’s seat. Ken nods at Lucile. Lucile nods at the owner standing alongside with one foot on the running board. Phone call is resumed, final batch of instructions received and interpreted. After countless automated gauches & droites, Ken thinks he has the picture. After two hours on the road they are 30 minutes from the nursery, which incidentally is eight minutes from the U.S. border.

At a quarter to three the lost souls pull into the nursery. Norm is missing. Thinking they they’re lost again, he’s off looking for them. Etta McDevitt, who left North Hero 2 hours after the Jeffersons, is also at the nursery.

*"Gee, ..... you could have followed me if you weren’t quite sure where it was,"*

Linda & Norman had already selected their flora & fauna, had paid and were ready to go. Norman pulls up and smiles thankfully upon seeing the senile simpletons.

*"We’ve been gone so long we’re not going to pick out our flowers today. We’ll come back next week."*

*"That’s 4 days from now. Do you think you’ll remember where it is?"*

*"We’re in no hurry, buy what you want."*

*"No Jason’s been cooped up since 11:30, it’s a Canadian holiday weekend and we’ve still U.S. customs to negotiate. Throw your stuff in the truck and let’s go."* (\*5)

Customs was not backed up. The floral bill of lading was accepted with minimal comment and the Jeffersons made it home all on their own. Bottom line: 4 hour drive (Enough time to drive all the way to Ottawa), half a tank of gas, cell phone bill, no flowers and a put-out beast. (\*6)

Nothing daunted, the Jeffersons start back to the nursery the following Tuesday at 8:30 A.M..

*"Do I need to take my pocketbook?"*

*"No, I’ve got my wallet and credit card."*(\*7)

Canadian customs on the west side of the river is a repeat of the east side on Thursday.

*"Where are you folks going?"*

*"Just up the road to buy some flowers. There is a nursery not too far up isn’t there?"*

*"Yup, well, have a good day."*

*"Thanks."*

So far so good. Even found the nursery. Spent an hour buying flowers and mulch. Nursery person filled out the customs declaration and said that will be $169 Can. Ken holds out his VISA card.

*"Oh, we don’t take credit cards, cash or check only."*

Lucile & Ken exchange exasperated looks. They’ve $13 American between them, and yes ..... the checkbook is back in the pocketbook.

*"There is a bank up around the corner, you can get money with your card there."*

Off to the bank. Doesn’t open till 10. Fifteen minute wait. There is an ATM, but do either of our heroes know their PIN #? Of course not. When the bank opens they are directed to another bank for that type of transaction. Where is the bank? St. Jean! Not the infamous St. Jean of the previous week, but another St. Jean. Decision time, deja vu or back to their own bank in Vermont. Back we go to U.S. customs.

*"How long you folks been in Canada?"*

*"60 minutes."*

*"What was the purpose of your visit?"*

*"Buying flowers."*

Customs Official takes a long studied look at the empty truck bed.

*"Didn’t buy very many did you?"*

*"They don’t take credit cards."*

*"Really? Never heard of that!"*

*"Going to Alburg VT, getting cash and coming back."*

*"Well, good luck."*

The round trip from the nursery to the bank and back took 40 minutes. Purchases were loaded up and the F150 headed toward home. The day was becoming crunch time since Lucile had a hair appointment in the early P.M. Truck was driven in the yard and parked. Jason was freed. (\*8) All got in the car and headed for Keeler Bay.

Entering the Town of Grand Isle, one removed from Keeler Bay, there is a sequence of signs southbound as one crests a hill north of the grade school: ‘Speed Limit 50’, ‘Reduced Speed Ahead’, Speed Limit 40’. Ken is very familiar with the sequence. Going 55 passing sign two, he takes his foot off the accelerator and is decelerating as he passes sign three. Not fast enough though, he is caught on radar at 53 cresting the hill and flagged down by three Sheriffs set up by the school.

*"Do you know why I flagged you down?"*

*"No."*

*"You were going 53 when you crested that hill."*

*"But I backed off at the ‘Reduced Speed’ sign and was slowing down."*

At this point Jason stuck his head out the drivers window and gave the Sheriff a great big smile.

*"Wow, what a handsome dog. You’re a big guy aren’t you. (Much petting and tailwagging) Well, 13 miles isn’t all that bad, we’ll let you go this time. Just be a little more careful in the future."*

*"Thank you officer."* (\*9)

Lucile makes her appointment. Ken & Jason wait. Twenty minutes later she is finished and back to the car.

*"I had a new girl this time. You’ll never guess what happened."*

*"Well what did happen? You look OK."*

*"I couldn’t pay her. She doesn’t take credit cards."*

Think we will try growing flowers from seeds next year.

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\*1. Lucile stayed near the phone.

\*2. To this point, in all the planning, no one had yet mentioned the name of the nursery or just exactly where it was. "St. Jean", and a Chinese ‘All You Can Eat Buffet’ were mentioned, but that was about it.

\*3 ‘St. Jean’ really doesn’t pin anything down in Quebec, they’re all over the place.

\*4. Hard to believe that idiots like these are free to roam the highways & byways of North America.

\*5. Finally, ..... a logical sentence.

\*6. Right.

\*7. Left alone again, I knew the pocketbook bit was a mistake, but no one asked me.

\*8. Finally, ..... on page four I’m mentioned!

\*9. Why they ever leave me home is something I just don’t understand.

This letter is being distributed late. The inept travelers above were journeying to North Carolina with stops in Connecticut and lower east side Manhattan the first week of June. After the sad performance documented here, we were afraid the family would impound our car.

Lucile & Ken

(Safely back in North Hero)