

2009 “Ladies of the Lake” Writing Competition

The question posed was *“How do you relate to the series or what do the ‘Ladies of the Lake’ say to you?”*

1ST PLACE WINNER Catherine M. of Stony Plain AB wrote
Inspired by “Saskatoon Picking”

Berry picking—a time honoured tradition among the women of my family. It involves daughters and mothers, sisters and cousins, and in the lead, at least one Grandma.

It is a time when the elder aunties, my mother’s older sisters, reminisce about their girlhoods—growing up on the farm, falling in love and raising families of their own. Ultimately, each aunty becoming the matriarch of her own berry patch.

It is a time of my own passage from child to teenager to young woman. As a young girl, I felt important to be old enough to share in the task at hand and listen to the stories as my aunties relived their youth. As a teenager, I was selfishly resentful of the obligation to harvest a ripening berry patch which stole unrecoverable social time away from my friends. As a young woman, I embraced the memories of the stories the elder aunties told about their involvement in raising their younger sisters, my mom and my Aunty N.

My most treasured memory provoked by this painting is that of picking berries, side by side, between my mom and my grandma. On one side, my mom was scolding me for eating more berries than what I was adding to the pail. On the other side, my grandma was not trying to hide a smile as she popped another berry into her mouth. She was most probably recalling a time when she gave the very same reprimand to my mom.

Now, as I become the aunty to a new generation of little girls, I look forward to those sunny summer days when I will be the weaver of stories in that same berry patch.

Catherine M., Stony Plain, AB wrote
Inspired by “MMM Pie”

“MMM Pie” is the Ladies painting that I most strongly identify with. It reflects the truly special relationship that is shared between my Aunty Norma (in the blue dress), my mom (in the purple dress) and me (in the yellow dress).

The pie is symbolic of life events that I have shared with these two wonderful women. We have had pies full of laughter and triumph and love; and we have had pies with tears and defeat and grief. Through all of these experiences, we always stand together and we always support each other.

I have been nurtured and counselled and mentored by these two sisters, each one incredible in her own right. I know that I am who I am today because of these ladies in the purple and blue dresses.

Honorable Mention Liz Massiah and Anna Hanschar, Edmonton, AB wrote

In June of 08, a friend was nominated for an award at the YWCA Edmonton Women of Distinction award. As part of the silent auction display we noted some of Kathy's art and commented how great it was. We were pleased when we sat down, to discover several of Kathy's cards on the table. We all commented how the images of the women were so realistic, respectful and empowering.

Anna my partner of twenty years had proposed marriage to me a few weeks before, and we were just beginning to plan the event. As soon as we saw the cards on the table, we knew we wanted to use one for our wedding invitation.

Interestingly, the evening was dedicated to women – and the overall focus seemed to be on the standard image of women – the winning business was a beauty salon, successfully run by women. Many of the prizes for the silent auction had to do with hockey- donated by the wives of the Oilers. Our friend did not win an award, although one was given to a member of the Canadian Forces, just back from Afghanistan. That was terrific. Overall though, the evening yet again seemed to focus on the more stereotypical images and expectations of women.

None of us at the table were slim, particularly fit or concerned about fashion. Yet we all work hard in our professional lives and do make a difference every day, a palliative care nurse and supervisor, a social worker, a psychologist, a policy analyst, a warden.

We could all relate to the women on the cards, with their round, imperfect and delightful bodies, and their relaxed and fun loving selves displayed for all to see. These are women we could understand, who have likely struggled in many ways, and who exude a wonderful sense of self acceptance. They clearly care for one another, are affectionate and playful. I gathered the cards from the table, and brought them home. For a day or so, Anna and I considered them – and settled on the "Too Much Cocktail" card for our wedding invitation. We chose that one since we have a cottage at the lake, that is our own paradise. The flicking of the water with the foot, the bathing suit strap slipping a bit, the women cuddled up – it is so "us". When I first saw the card I did not think of the bottles as containing anything other than lemonade, and so was surprised at the title. But goodness knows Anna and I like our wine, so that fit too.

We sent an email to my brother and sister in law, giving them the web site so they could guess which picture we were going to use. Little did we know that they contacted Kathy and arranged to purchase the painting of the card we had chosen, to give to us as our wedding present. Perfect. It hangs in a prominent spot in our hallway, where we see it every day and smile.

We ordered the cards and had the delight of meeting Kathy. What a treat that was. Our friends and relatives loved our invitations... they are so you ' was a frequent comment. We are round, not very fit, not overly concerned about our bathing suit straps being loose. We live in a large, messy house with many dogs and several rescued cats. Anna is a palliative home care nursing supervisor, I am a psychologist dealing mostly with traumatized military members. Our work is important and difficult, and we don't fit the standard images of women – and it was fitting to have the images from Kathy to support us in our marriage plans.

We married in September, on my brother's 77th birthday. What a day we had, with sun flowers from the market, lots of fun and casual love and caring everywhere – much like the women in the cards. Thanks Kathy.

Honorable Mention Susan H. and Colleen M., Abbotsford, AB wrote

The first time I heard about your 'Ladies of the Lake' series I was on vacation in Mexico with my sister, Colleen. We were lucky enough to have a small pool attached to our unit and would spend the majority of our day in and out of the water. We had a couple of bright yellow air mattresses that were bequeathed to us by neighbors who had headed for home at the end of their vacation. It became a favorite past-time to just float in our pool close enough to our wine glasses on the edge. Normally I didn't have too much trouble getting on and off but one day just could not make it on - the silly thing just kept flipping me over and off!!! Well, needless to say my sister began describing 'The Mattress' to me and we were absolutely killing ourselves laughing by the time she was finished - not just the fact that I looked like a drowned rat but also that you had already painted one of your 'ladies' having much the same problem.

Once we returned home, we both pulled up your website and just had to order some of your creative works - there are so many of your paintings that are just us - 'Ho Hum - I'll Have Another One', 'Fore', 'Just a Sip of Wine', 'Table Talk', 'Pushing the Season' are some of our favorites. As you can tell by looking at the choice of prints that we enjoy the most, our favorite times are spent sipping wine and challenging ourselves on the golf course.

Looking at the grouping of your whimsical characters on the cards that we now own, we are reminded of our lasting memories in relationship to the 'Girlfriends' you have created. We recall the wonderful times we have spent together and give our thanks that we are such good friends to each other as well as being sisters.

Your 'Ladies' are a constant reminder to us of our special bond and that your continued creativity inspires us and others to forge on with fun and laughter.

More Great Stories From The 2009 Competition

Val E. wrote

Your depiction of the "Ladies of the Lake" captures our hearts because we see our sisters, girlfriends, mothers and daughters in the actions that skip over your canvas! You have captured that special bonding between women and have managed to portray the essence of joy in the female gender. The "Ladies" are so fun loving that we cannot help but smile and snicker at their antics. Your clever use of titles urges us to go out and have some fun! Their bodies allow us to identify with them and since they are comfortable in their skin, we too, can allow ourselves to accept the "imperfections" of our own shapes. They remind us, that we too are beautiful...Thanks for giving us more "Ladies" that we can include in our group of friends...

Tammy S. wrote

What a neat idea to have people share with you their stories that have been initialed from your talent.

My first exposure to your work was in a card I received after speaking at a women's retreat the card was "Heated Conversation" and it was so fitting as the retreat took place at Rundle Mission on Pigeon (I now know that's also where you are from!).

Anyway...I just loved that the faces weren't there. It meant that they could be anyone, anywhere, time and that the ladies looked real, nature, complete with curves!

So of course I had your check out your website and there she was or more to the point there was the person I wanted to be sitting on a park bench eating ice-cream! Okay I know I can eat ice-cream on any bench anytime and I don't need a print to tell me that but I'm inspired by this print because it allows me to

eat my ice-cream without guilt. It says it's okay to be me, I can be perfectly content doing what I want to do when I want to do it, outside of all the rules of life eating ice-cream on a bench by myself is okay! If I was a writer I could express the metaphor in complete and moving thoughts and words... You have captured that for me in the print.

Not long after surfing the web, I was in the Paper Tree and seen "my lady" on a card...I bought two! One is hooked on my mirror in my room so every morning I see her; the other is on a photo holder in my den where I read, scrapbook, prep for work, plan the family calendar (more like color code the wall calendar so it looks like a crazy quilt) and surf the net. I work in kindergarten classes and some teachers do warm fuzzies during the day, just small words of encouragement and kindness "Ice Cream Time" is my warm fuzzy!

Thank you for sharing your talent and for continuing to explore all those areas of our lives that celebrate who we are.

Angie D. wrote

Over the past few years I have had the opportunity to see a lot of the "Ladies of the Lake" series. I'm not sure and I can't prove it but I think I may have even posed for a few of them. But the two things that always come to mind when I look at them is laughter...my laughter, and my friends. I have a really hard time looking at them without thinking of a funny story or predicament that I have been in with some of my girlfriends which usually ends up with us being in hysterics after having a few too many!!!

Whether it be staying up till the sun comes up and all bottles are empty with a certain sister-in-law oblivious to the world around us and how loud we really are when no one else is awake, or hanging out by the pool sipping on a cold one while on vacation with my old travelling companion "Saving the World" as we often referred to it.

How we would break into dance to show off our newest choreographed moves using a fireplace as our backdrop, or walking down the street in Cuba and seeing a very large person on a very tiny scooter and thinking...poor scooter ☹. And last but not least my infamous "Golf Girls" who are eight of the craziest and best ladies ever!!! We all look so sweet and innocent in our before group photos, drinks in hand, smiles on faces and after 18 holes of golf, oh my goodness, what a difference a few hours make!!! These scenarios, just to name a few of my favorite, are what I see when I look at the "Ladies of the Lake"

There are many important things in each of our lives but two very important things in my life are laughter and friendship. It's a great thing to be able to have a lot of both...and the odd glass of wine every so often doesn't hurt either LOL. The "Ladies of the Lake" series shows women enjoying both!!!

Tilly J. wrote

I'm really attracted to your work because I find it reflects many activities that two very dear friends and I have the pleasure of engaging in (or might engage in!!); we call ourselves the "Ya-Ya's" after the threesome featured in the related book. We've been friends for more than 30 years now. Our children have grown up together and the daughters of the three families are very close. We have actually told them that in a few years, we may induct them into the 'Ya-Ya Sisterhood'; they are over 20 years of age now and wonder when that auspicious event will happen!! One of my fondest memories is a winter evening at the lake when the skies were clear, the Northern Lights were performing, and the lake was 'talking'.

Have you ever heard the repetitive cracking of ice followed by it groaning and reverberating ever so deeply as if a troop of gremlins were lurking underneath those thick sheets of ice? It's awesome and gives me goose bumps every time I experience it. Well, on one of these amazing winter evenings, the Ya-Ya's were out at the cabin together and we heard the Orchestra of the Frozen Lake tuning its instruments. So, we decided to really take in the moment and grabbed our wine, three lawn chairs out of

the shed, and positioned ourselves right out there on the frozen lake. The Northern lights danced to the music of the cracking, groaning ice and we oohed and ahed at the miracle of the spectacle. If you've ever been out on a starry night in winter you know that it isn't really dark outside because of the reflection of the stars and moon off the snow. Well, we must have been quite a sight ... 3 women in toques, parkas, sorel boots sitting in lawn chairs facing north sipping wine ... because a coyote that was crossing the lake about 50 yards away stopped ... looked ... walked a bit further and, almost as if shaking its head at these silly people, stopped again and again to look at us before it disappeared in the forest on the other side. We sat there taking in the evening and the comfort of our friendship for about an hour and a half until our bottle of wine was gone and our toes were cold. Another Ya-Ya Kodak moment!! :)

Lori F. wrote

Kathy – I can't begin to say how the "Ladies of the Lake" affect me, until I tell you about my youth. I was born and raised in Edmonton, but when I was in Grade 11 my parents divorced, and we moved to Edmonton Beach (now known as Spring Lake). In my last year of high school, I met Frank, and in the yearbook, it was stated that he was dating the "Lady of the Lake". That is the first time I had ever heard this phrase.

As I grew up and had children, we went camping with several relatives, one being my sister. Now you know my stature, and my sister is like me, only taller. The first thing we did, at the lake camping, was to get out the wine and the cards, and play rummy. She won most of the games, but I think I only lost because of the wine.

Also, one afternoon, the ladies of Rotary had a meeting (Ya right, a meeting) at the cabin of L. and V. M., and after the meeting V. was kind enough to take us around the lake in their beautiful boat, he doing all the driving so we could continue with our wine drinking. Needless to say it was a great afternoon. Some time after this event D.L. purchased one of your prints as a thank you to L.M., and we presented it to her at our annual Rotary dinner in the summer. The print now hangs in her new home on Jackfish Lake.

The picture of the two portly ladies at the table with wine, and most of the others, of the ladies sporting about at the lake, are truly indicative of my sister and me. Now that I am in my teenage part of my senior years, I play scrabble on line with three other ladies, and therefore the print I purchased at the Rotary Auction, with the ladies playing scrabble) really hits home with me.

I am not a writer by any stretch of the imagination, but I hope this will inspire you to keep up the good work. You truly are an inspiration to all the women of the world.

Lorna K. wrote

From the very first time I saw your paintings, I was taken by them; as I belong to the Red Hat Society and they reminded me of them. I also love the very creative names you choose for your paintings. The names make the final clue to what you have painted!! Great inspirational work.

Linda H. wrote

I couldn't pick just one picture, so I had to write about two!

Buckets of Berries - Where I grew up in northern Ontario, the area was limestone rock with pines, oaks and maples. One of the main tasks we kids did over the summer was picking blueberries! The many pails collected went in to the freezer to be used later in pies, blueberry crisp, jam or in sauces. Often there were black bears about, though years ago with the abundance of berries, they were always full enough that they did not bother us any! We were usually given a choice; go and pick berries or vacuum or clean the house! Guess what we chose!! Scrambling over the rocks was always a great pleasure on warm sunny days. As we were usually gone for most of the day, a lunch was usually stowed in a back pack and eaten leaning against the coolness of a rock, perhaps by a babbling stream where we would stick our feet in to cool off. To make picking easier, we would wrap a belt around our waists and thread the belt

through the handle of the pail so you had two hands to pick. The berries were then transferred in to baskets - several quarts to a basket. The goal was to come home with at least two to three baskets full!

"Ice Cream Time" - Our dad LOVED ice cream!! It was always a treat to go to the big city of Sudbury shopping and almost always, we stopped at Dairy Queen or some other place with ice cream and got a cone for the trip home! The best was finding that special place where they made "home made" ice cream and it really WAS home made! To this day, to give myself a treat, I will on occasion pick up a cone and try to find a quiet place, like a bench or under a tree, lick slowly at the blob of heavenly coolness and think "there is nothing better than right now"!

Kathy, I enjoy looking at all your wonderful pictures! Keep up the good work!

Barb G. wrote

Oh my goodness,
Where do I start?
Since 2005,
I have giggled, smiled and related to your art!!

I have been a "Lady of the Lake" since 1956. Actually, a "little lady of three" Kathy, as that was my age at the time my mom and dad purchased our lot and built the cabin at Pigeon Lake, that we still love and enjoy to this day. I have delighted in your series and have purchased the various cards that bring back the wonderful memories of my past, or the activities I still have the pleasure of engaging in today.

As you drive to #36 Argentia Beach, you will notice a brightly coloured sign at our driveway that says "Baked in the Sun". Below these words there is a wooden pie. My mom, Grandma J. as she is known on the beach, used to bake pies for the Lakeside Grill in Mulhurst Bay back in the 60's. Of course the picture we have hanging in our kitchen is "MMM Pie"... The favorite kind of pie, of course, is saskatoon. Grandma Jo has her favorite bush just off our deck. The neighborhood families know that if they pick the saskatoons, Grandma Jo will bake them a saskatoon pie. Yes, "Saskatoon Picking" is another of your series I enjoy.

You will often catch me "Asleep in the Hammock" after reading my book - not quite a hammock, but in a lounge chair for sure. I am always up for a game of golf, so the "Fore" and "Pushing the Season" are well suited to this gal's interests. The perfect setting on my deck is "Dusk to Dawn the Game Goes On". Not only has scrabble become a daily fix with neighbors close by, but we have an annual scrabble tournament every July for the Ladies on Argentia Beach. Another one of our daily activities with friends is playing Argentia Rummy, a card game we have named after our beach. Yes, the "Card Game" is another on my wall.

As a child, "The One That Got Away" and "On The Beach", skipping stones, are wonderful reminders of days gone by. "Blown Away Beach Ball" reminds me of my mom or older sister having to swim after the ball that got away - sometimes never to be rescued!

We have many close friendships with our lake neighbors, as many of us have grown up together on the beach. There are many "Happy Ladies" (and gents) at our "Happy Hours", which are weekly events either on the deck or out on the dock. "Ho Hum ...I'll Haveanotherone", "Too Much Cocktail" or "Hickory Daiquiri Dock" are very appropriate pictures for these friendly get -together. Another picture that is very special to my heart is "We Got Talent 2". We have a neighbor who loves having a "Theme and Skit Happy Hour" for those celebrating a special occasion - 50th or 60th birthdays, retirement parties and anniversaries etc. Miss Gwen - she's got talent and always drags me into her little performances!! She also has a beautiful rock garden and the "Petal Pusher" picture fits her perfectly.

As a child, we had to take swimming lessons offered by "Silver Bay Beach", now renamed "Argentia Beach" for six weeks of the summer. The pictures that I delight in with regards to these memories are "Freedom Dive" and "Jump In". Not only did we wear the bathing caps, but you were the coolest kid if

you had the biggest rubber flower stuck to the side of your bathing cap. I don't know - maybe we thought it helped us float!?!

"Talking on the Dock", "Heart to Heart", "Table Talk" or "Tortoise and The Hare" are times spent with friends discussing life's little issues or just enjoying a quiet chat with a friend. "The Scenic Route", although not a scooter, reminds me of riding down the back road on the tandem bicycle my dad bought me in grade six. It is quite a challenge for the older folk today, but still enjoyed by many of the younger kids along the way. Their butts are a bit more resilient than the elder-lies!!

The fire pit is ablaze, on many a night, with friends gathered around, as your "Heated Conversation" portrays another neighborhood party delight.

"A Chat with a Cat", reminds me of the many feral kittens I have rescued at the beach. It is always a challenge to catch the little ones, but I have not failed yet and loving families are always found back in the city. The critters that are more common to my deck at the lake, are the "pooches of the beach". I "Flirt with Floyd", our neighbors' pup, who loves a treat and a tummy rub. And then there is Harley, Remi, Roxy and Bear, who I always have a special treat with them to share!!

During the winter, we help our little ones build a "Snowman on the Lake". Skating and cross country skiing are also activities we love to partake... But a favorite past time in the winter is watching the wildlife- as the chick-a-dees, woodpeckers and deer feed at our lakefront view. I cherish many of our moments, as they are only experienced by a few.

So it is time to send this letter, and say "Good Night - Adieu"
As I have enjoyed a bottle of wine, "Just a Sip of Wine", in writing this little "Ladies of the Lake" preview.

Win or Lose,
Bring out the Booze!!

PS. I am still looking forward to the "Ladies in the Treehouse".

Liz F. wrote

I first saw your "Ladies at the Lake" series at Pigeon Lake Public Library in Ma-Me-O Beach. I'm a librarian and work at Yellowhead Regional Library, of which Pigeon Lake P.L. is a member, and so I visit them often. When I saw your picture of the older lady sitting cross-legged reading on the grass, I could identify with her immediately. That lady on the grass, involved in what she is reading, could be me. I knew I had to have it!

The picture also reminds me of the librarian and the library board at Pigeon Lake P.L. They are a fantastic group of women who dreamed, worked extremely hard and fund-raised very successfully over a period of time to make their library vision a reality. I also bought the picture because it reminded me of their amazing commitment to their dream. Whenever I look at the picture I'm reminded that dreams can come true.

The picture also speaks to me of the magic of reading. How opening a book can take me out of myself to distant countries, allowing me to know people from and age and any place, to think new ideas and see life in a new way. I love the painting and I'm glad I have it!