

TALES OF NEEDLE AND THREAD

By Marcus Meyer

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A CHRISTMAS NEEDLE

My wife passed this story along to me after she heard Eileen Campbell tell it at the last quilt guild meeting. Eileen said Eliza Spalding was her second cousin and that she found Eliza's story in a family tree album.

Pastor Arnie

Some in Forest Glen wore silk, lace, and the splendor of European passage. Others wore the look of frayed cotton and tired leather. The dichotomy of wealth expressed itself just as clearly in the physical structures within town and the surrounding countryside.

Eliza stared out a window with a frosted frame. Once a month, she and her mom went into town to stock up on needed supplies. Should there be any question, Eliza wore a frayed cotton dress. The fall harvest had ranged from bleak to

depressing, if one could see any nuanced difference. Now, on her “one day”, the December weather blew bitter cold to add to the bleakness. Nevertheless, they would bundle up and drive their aging car into town. The falling snow had subsided by the time they began the trip, but it had accomplished its winter task of hiding the drive and roadway. Her mom had a plan, though. She waited at the end of the driveway for another vehicle to come by, and then she followed the ruts the other car had cut.

The car radio played the Christmas classic of ‘Jingle Bells’, and Eliza sang along, but her mom seemed oblivious to the fun of their sleigh. They eventually made it into town without any accident. Finding a parking spot on Main Street about half-way between the grocery store and the dress shop, they stepped up onto a freshly salted sidewalk. Eliza slowly walked towards the dress shop, while her mom walked towards the grocery store. When Agatha Spalding turned around, she saw her daughter standing in front of the big dress shop

window. Agatha managed a weak smile and nodded at Eliza.

Mrs. Tanner, the dress shop owner, saw Eliza outside and invited her to come inside the store. The lady always liked to see Eliza. Perhaps she saw a little of herself in the girl when she was that age. The wonder of fabric and beautiful dresses as a teenager led to the shopkeeper's present career.

"They're beautiful, aren't they, Eliza?"

"Yes. One day, I will make one for myself."

"Do you like to sew, Eliza?"

"I'd like to learn," answered Eliza. "I'm saving for some fabric, thread, and a needle."

Eliza's mom opened the dress shop door and waved to Mrs. Tanner. "Come on, Eliza. We need to get our supplies and head home before the next snowstorm moves in."

"Goodbye, Eliza," said Mrs. Tanner.

"Goodbye," replied Eliza.

The two shoppers and their supplies made it home with fresh snow catching a ride down their driveway. The two weeks that followed brought snow every day, keeping everything pristine white around the house. The path to the barn succumbed to the wear of traffic, turning an ugly mix of dingy clay and snow.

Two days before Christmas, Eliza's dad came through the back door with a freshly cut fir from the back ridge of the farm. He promised his wife that no critters came along for the ride inside the branches of the tree. Eliza and her little sister, Emma, loved to help their mom decorate the tree with homemade ornaments from years past. There wouldn't be many presents under the tree, but the ones there would be carefully wrapped and given with love.

On Christmas morning, Eliza and Emma sat at the foot of the Christmas tree waiting for their mom and dad to join them. Eliza saw two packages with her name on them, and she eagerly awaited her turn to open them. Her first present had a tag that said, "Merry Christmas from Dad, Mom, and

Emma. When she opened it up, she found a box of a dozen different spools of thread. Thanking her parents and her sister, she knew she grew one step closer to her dream.

Her second package didn't have a giver's name, and when she looked at her parents, they had puzzled looks on their faces. They knew they only had the one gift for their daughter, so the second present came as a mystery. Eliza opened it and found a small, but extremely elegant case. Inside the case, a gold needle lay on a red velvet bed. She felt warm tears moving down her cheeks.

“Thank you, Mom and Dad. It's beautiful.”

“We're glad you like it, Eliza,” said her mom. “But we didn't give it to you. We don't know where it came from.”

A week later, Eliza and Emma received a large package in the mail. In the lower left corner of the package, it said, “Merry Christmas”. The package bore the return address of Mrs. Sarah Falcon. In the box, they found a note from their Aunt Sarah apologizing for the late arrival of their

Christmas gifts. Emma clutched a plush doll, and Eliza held two yards each of four different fabrics. The very next day, the budding young seamstress began planning her first dress.

Eliza's mom helped her lay out a simple pattern for her dress. Then the young girl began sewing. The gold needle sparkled in her hand and the stitches flowed remarkably smoothly and elaborately, especially considering her limited experience. When she finished the dress, she put it on and showed her mom.

"It's absolutely beautiful, Eliza," said Agatha. "I ... I ... I marvel at your gift. You did far better than anything I could have ever done."

The next month, when they went into town for supplies, Eliza wore her dress. She walked into Mrs. Tanner's dress shop to show her what she had made. When Mrs. Tanner came up to her, Eliza turned around just like she imagined a model would do in a fancy fashion show.

"You made this, Eliza?" asked Mrs. Tanner.

“Yes. I got a needle, some thread, and some fabric for Christmas.”

“It’s beautiful. I’m glad you came in to show it to me.”

Mrs. Tanner looked closer at the stitching and piecework of the dress. Then she got a gleam in her eye.

“Eliza,” said Mrs. Tanner. “If I gave you the thread and fabric, would you make a dress for me?”

“Why ... why, yes ... I’d love to.”

A week later, she returned to Mrs. Tanner’s shop with the completed dress. The shopkeeper stood in awe of the skill that the young girl possessed. She paid Eliza a fair price and made an arrangement with her where she could make as many dresses as she wanted.

Word soon got around town of Eliza’s talent. Orders for all kinds of other sewing projects began coming to the Spalding’s door. Eliza completed all the work on time with exquisite quality. The golden needle in her fingers moved effortlessly through

the fabric with precision. As word spread to other neighboring towns, some began calling her artistry the work of ‘Eliza’s Golden Magic Needle’. After a while, Eliza herself began to believe she may have a ‘Magic Needle’.

Everyone she created projects for praised her work, except for one woman up on Cabot Ridge in Barry County. This woman lived in a dark house almost engulfed by the surrounding forest. Just as the forest seemed to consume the dark little house, so the darkness of jealousy seemed to consume who lived inside. Regina Hawksworth paid a visit to Eliza and asked her to make her a quilt. Eliza agreed, and when Regina returned the next month, Eliza presented her with the quilt. Regina said she loved it, but she asked if she could add a little more lace to the border. Eliza said she could easily do it right then. Regina watched Eliza open the cabinet door and pull out the case with her ‘Magic Needle’.

When she finished adding the lace, Eliza gave the quilt to Regina.

“Thank you so much,” said Regina. “I, uh ... um ... was wondering when you might be going into town again? I just needed one small thing, and I hate to ask, but if I gave you the money now, could you pick it up for me?”

“Sure. We should be going next Tuesday.”

When the day came for Eliza and her mom to go into town, Regina watched them leave from the distant woods. Then she snuck up to the house and went inside. Opening the cabinet door, she found the case with the golden needle and took it. When she got home, she immediately started a sewing project. After cutting the fabric and piecing it, she picked up the needle and began stitching, expecting the same exquisite work as Eliza’s. But her stitches were irregular and wandering. In fact, her work was worse than anything she had ever done before. In a fit of jealous anger, she threw the gold needle and case into the river that flowed along Cabot Ridge.

When Eliza got home, she went to work on another dress. Ready to sew, she opened the cabinet

door and discovered that her needle was gone. She looked everywhere, but she could not find it. Devastated, she didn't know what to do. After three days of seeing her daughter in such a depressed state, Agatha decided they should make a special trip into town to buy another needle. When they got home, Eliza took the needle and tried to thread it with some dark blue cotton thread. But her hand shook so badly, it took ten tries before she got it. How could she ever do such quality work without her golden magic needle? Finally, she took a deep breath, and began to stitch. The young woman found that her work was just as beautiful with the needle she bought from the store. Yes, Eliza learned that her golden needle wasn't really 'magic'. The skill that God had given her came from within. Did the golden needle that mysteriously showed up under the Christmas tree give her the confidence to blossom? Possibly so.

Meanwhile, later that week, a heavy-set, elderly man with a full white beard fished something out of the river downstream from Cabot Ridge. Appearing to be a small case of some sort, the man put

it inside his red sack, went back to his waiting sleigh, and headed over the mountain.

A DIFFERENT PATH

“Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” Charles Schulz. So read the homemade wall hanging above Becky’s sewing machine. Some have attributed the quote to Mark Twain, while others say something similar goes back as far as Confucius. Becky first heard the creator of Peanuts say it so that’s who she credited.

Ever since she was a little girl, Becky always traveled her own path. Though it could be lonely at times, she relished the time to create and quilt. Out of school, she came to a crossroads in pursuing a career. Her love of quilts overcame the seemingly unrealistic side of making a living at the craft.

Her dad built an addition onto their log house that sat on ten acres off a main county road. Becky worked hard, filling the addition with lots of quilts and fabric projects. The people in their small town admired her creativity and would

occasionally purchase some things. With easy access from the state highway that crossed the county, tourists would frequently visit the farm and Becky's Quilt Shop. This led to some sales to add to the local business. Overall, though, the harvest of sales was slim. Still, Becky did not falter in her goal.

One day, a dark car drove up to her little log studio. A lady got out of the passenger door, and a big man got out of the driver's side. The lady entered the shop and the man stood outside by the front door. Becky and the lady exchanged pleasantries and then the lady browsed through Becky's creations.

After about an hour, the lady came up to Becky and asked, "How much would you want for everything?"

"Uh ... uh ... everything?"

"Yes," answered the lady.

"Um ... gosh, I don't know," said Becky. "I've never thought about selling everything."

“Are you interested in selling everything?”

“Why ... uh ... sure.”

“Okay. I tell you what. Robert and I will go get a bite to eat, and we’ll come back. Do you think you could have a price in a couple of hours?”

“I ... I should be able to,” answered Becky.

Becky called her mom and dad and told them what was going on. Together they organized and came up with a total price.

When the lady returned, Becky gave her what price she wanted for everything. The lady, whom Becky later came to know as Martha Billingsley, did not hesitate at all.

“I’ll send a van to pick up everything tomorrow morning,” said Martha. “You do beautiful work.”

“Thank you very much,” said Becky.

Flush with new capital, Becky began rebuilding her inventory with all kinds of projects,

some that she hadn't thought possible with lean harvests.

One afternoon about a year later, Becky's mom walked into her studio and handed her an envelope.

"A special courier delivered this while you were in town, Becky," said her mom.

She opened the elegant envelope very carefully and then unfolding the fine parchment inside, she began to read:

Dear Miss Sloan,

You are cordially invited to attend a ceremony in the White House that features the First Lady's interest in Americana.

We are also going to be honoring some of the artisans who have contributed to the new collection on display.

We are pleased to announce that you have been chosen as one of those we will be honoring.

I have enclosed a card that lists the date and time for the festivities, as well as my contact

information. Please give me a call at your earliest convenience so we can go over your travel and lodging arrangements.

Sincerely yours,

Martha Billingsley

Special Assistant to the First Lady

Becky just sat there with tears streaming down her face.

“What is it, Becky?” asked her mom. “Is it bad news?”

“Um ..., no ... no. It’s good ... good news.”

“What is it?”

“Remember that lady that bought everything that I had made – Martha? Well, she is a Special Assistant to the First Lady of the United States.”

“She is? Wow, that’s something.”

“This is an invitation to come as a guest to the White House for a special celebration. The First Lady is honoring artisans from across the country who best portray her interest in Americana. And ... and ... I’ve been chosen as one of those they are honoring.”

Her mom gave her a great big hug and said, “That’s wonderful, Becky. I’m so proud of you. When is it? ... We’ll have to do some shopping. A new dress, some luggage, a hat – do they still wear hats to something like that? Oh, there’s so much to do.”

Becky just rolled her eyes.

Mom and Dad began to spread the word locally with the original social media platforms – the beauty salon and the hardware store, respectfully. The local hometown newspaper picked up the word and did an in-depth article on Becky’s

Quilt Shop with a follow-up to be done on Becky's experience at the White House later.

When the big day came to leave for Washington, D.C., a crowd of about fifty people came to the farm to bid her adieu. Martha had everything well organized with the hotel and escort services to the White House. She even arranged for a special tour of the historic sites for all those being honored.

When Becky walked into the room where many of her quilts were hanging, her hands began to tremble. She thought to herself, "It's a good thing I'm not trying to do any hand quilting right now."

The return trip home proved a little more relaxing as Becky was no longer filled with anxious anticipation. Sitting back and enjoying the scenic countryside, she did, however, often silently reminisce on the scene where she walked into the formidable room where her quilts hung in the White House. Getting to meet the First Lady and

experience the dinners and everything else – well, she would never forget it.

Walking into the studio of Becky's Quilt Shop, she looked at all the new projects hanging on the walls. As she sat at her sewing machine, she looked up and saw the wall hanging, "Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life." Charles Schulz.

The publicity generated from Becky's honor generated a whole new level of business for the quilt shop. Local traffic (something like that is a big deal in a small town) mushroomed and people who had never done any quilting were eager to learn. The Chamber of Commerce donated space on a billboard along the main tourist thoroughfare featuring Becky and her White House honor.

Through it all, Becky remained quiet and still a little shy. She knew that she would always work hard in her love of quilting. She thanked God every day for His gift and the path given for her to walk.

Not everyone, of course, will have success on the same path that she did, but Becky always reminded herself, “You never know who that next customer walking in the door will be.”

A VENTURE INTO NEEDLE AND THREAD

Every so often, my wife needs some quilt supplies that require a trip to Quilting in the Country, the closest store to Cedar Crossing. The quilt shop is located just outside Dogwood Village on the picturesque farm of Mike and Jan Moore. Jan and daughter Kelley run the store while Mike lends a hand with accounting and maintenance. This fine family goes to Zion Lutheran Church in Dogwood Village. As we approached the store, Mike saw me from his tractor in the adjacent field. Mike and I then assumed the position that most of the males visiting the store take—sitting in the rocking chairs on the front porch. After exchanging the usual pleasantries, Mike told me of his experience in the fabric arts. Mike also dabbles in stories and tales, and he tries to show the parallel between the two fields.

Pastor Arnie

Every quilt or fabric art project has a story. It may be a part of the maker's memory, a vision of the future, a reminder of what's important, a fragment of the imagination, or just a celebration of life.

Our house is a mini museum of fabric art. Every season and every holiday, a new exhibit adorns its walls. Today, on this crisp autumn morning, I'm looking at fall in all directions—a pumpkin seed quilt spread out on the bed; wool pumpkins and ghosts of every shape and size hanging on walls; appliqued autumn leaf towels draped here and there in the kitchen; harvest stitcheries occupying all the little nooks and crannies; quilted wall hangings in yellows, reds, and oranges adorning the larger wall spaces.

Some of the stories I see in all these projects contribute to my inspiration in crafting with pen and paper (an ancient form of communication). Now that I think about it, I have been called ancient myself. Some days, the walls taunt me. Will all

those jack-o'-lantern wall hangings coerce me into a scary Halloween tale? You never know.

Have you ever been lying in bed and at the stroke of midnight an idea for a quilt hits you? Or maybe you're working on a project late into the night (much later than you should be, but you just want to finish one more block) and squares start becoming circles and circles start becoming squares or stars turn into flowers and flowers into stars? Then they all become animated and rise up off your sewing table. When the morning comes, you can't remember where you left off or what you need to do next. By now, I'm sure you see the parallel with a story or tale.

An idea can strike me anyplace, anytime. But I am old, so I must compensate. A handy little black book with a pen, always carried with me, solves that minor problem of brain aging. No more "What was it I was thinking?". I have even entered the twenty-first century and sent myself an e-mail from my smartphone with an idea. I hesitate to make that method well known, though. It would somehow taint my image as simple and ancient. I have a stash

of notes as big as the stash of fabric in our house ... well, no ... I guess nothing I amass could ever be that big.

There was a point in my life where I thought I would give the craft of needle and thread a try. After all, as a well-hued, coordinated, athletic type, I did not see any problem tackling the kinds of projects I saw every day when I walked through the house.

My first attempt consisted of a cross-stitch kit purchased at the local variety store. A simple floral scene—no problem. About halfway through, the leaves on my project got the blight. The rose flowers looked like a mutated hybrid between a rose and a daisy. At seventy-five percent of completion, I abandoned construction. To be honest, I could no longer come up with a plausible story to explain away all the blood stains.

Then I thought, “You know, I’m more of a machine kind of guy. I’ve been operating and repairing all kinds of farm and construction

equipment all my life. Perhaps I should give consideration to a project using a sewing machine.”

My wife and my daughter both have these expensive computer sewing machines. Man, they are nice ... and they’ve got lots of power—argh, argh, argh. I began my foray into machine quilting with a simple log cabin project, some cheap fabric my wife picked up at a garage sale, and a small sewing machine that had a little plaque on it saying, ‘My Very First Sewing Machine’.

That project I actually completed. Of course, the simple log cabin looked more like a drunkard’s path—and I don’t even drink. My wife always signs her projects by stitching her initials and date on the front or by putting a label on the back. I put a label on the back of my quilt and signed my daughter’s name to it, at age five.

Today, I’m not even sure where my uncompleted cross-stitch lives. It’s probably in the attic somewhere gathering mildew on its flower parts—which is only appropriate, I suppose. I do know that my quilt project is behind the seat in my pickup

truck. I use it to lie on whenever I must crawl underneath a machine to make a repair.

I have since concluded that the macho neurons in my brain lack the skills of good communication with my fingers to consider myself a needle and thread artiste. My aspirations (or possibly delusions) of creativity must take another course. I did manage to design a quilted wall hanging called “Good News”. It’s a colorful display of expanding crosses with interpretive value. I left the construction of the project to the expert construction manager of the house.

Now, I won’t claim that any of the tales I contribute to *Tales, Truths, and Hybrids* will motivate you to create a grand piece of fabric art or drastically improve your eye-hand coordination for hand stitching—no, I won’t make such bold statements (although, it is always possible, but it would be too hard to authenticate). I will say that expanding the imagination by consuming such stories and tales is currently being studied by a world-famous university under the guidance of the federal government and an unnamed art society. It is my opinion that

such research is fruitless. They've never asked me for any supplemental input. Some value is so deeply buried that only an exceptional mind could ever find it.

Search the internet and you will find a plethora of sites and videos offering tips and knowledge to expand your artistic skills and creativity in quilting and fabric arts. When I need advice on something, perhaps a technique or how much flavoring to add to a story, I am not the least bit hesitant to call on my friend, Buford. He is an equipment mechanic and self-described expert on a wide range of subjects. He has a talent for getting to the heart of the matter, in a roundabout way.

If, at any point, there are not enough tales about needle and thread to satisfy your insatiable appetite for self-torment, then I would recommend that you continue to consume similar stories and tales in the other collections. They couldn't be any worse—could they?

You can take some comfort in one very indisputable fact. Just as there will always be another

quilt to quilt or another project to create, there is a parallel universe of tales and stories. As long as there are minds to consume such material, I shall continue producing these fine works and contributing to the collections. I am quite confident of the quality of these stories and tales ... okay, maybe moderately confident ... or, at least, confident enough that I'm willing to go out on a limb and put my own name on the collection instead of my daughter's.

Happy stitching and/or reading,

Mike Moore

ANNIE'S RAIDERS

Annie McFarlane bought the Ferguson place just outside Fairmont City with the full intention of making a new life for herself. For the first six months, she pretty much stayed on the ranch except for the occasional trip into town to get supplies. Annie came into town a couple of times on Sunday to go to church, but she had not yet joined. Consequently, about the only person who got to know anything about her was Sam Fuller, the proprietor of the general store.

The only thing that Mr. Fuller could say about her past was that she had been on the trail for a long time, and she wanted to settle down in a nice peaceful town. Somewhere in her decision, Annie missed the mark regarding Fairmont City. Under the present conditions, Fairmont City did not fit the description of a nice peaceful town.

One day while in town to purchase some fabric at the general store, Annie ran into Betsy Calder coming out of Sam's place with an arm full of

cloth. Putting out her hand, Annie said, “Hi, I’m Annie McFarlane. I bought the old Ferguson place a while back.”

“Betsy Calder,” said Betsy. “I apologize for not getting out to welcome you. I’ve just been so busy with the harvest and all.”

“That’s okay. I’ve had a lot of work to do fixing things around the place, too. I see you like to sew.”

“Yes, with four young’uns, there’s always something to make or repair. Some days it seems like they’re growing faster than the corn during the summer.”

“Do you ever do any quilting?” asked Annie.

“Oh, I love it, when I have the chance,” answered Betsy. “Unfortunately, it always seems to get shoved to the bottom of the pile, except for if’n we’re expecting a cold winter and firewood’s running a little shy. Then everybody wants more quilts.”

“Would you like to come over to my place next Tuesday and work on a quilt with me?” asked Annie.

“Oh, I couldn’t. I don’t know how I could spare the time. I ah ... ah ... yes, I’d love to come over. Next Tuesday, yes, that would be nice. What time?”

“How about two o’clock in the afternoon?”

“That would be great,” answered Betsy. “I’ll see you then.”

On Tuesday afternoon at two o’clock, Annie McFarlane and Betsy Calder began a long friendship rooted in a love of quilting. Not long after that foundation set out its first roots, the word spread among the ladies living on the farms and ranches near Annie’s place, and the quilters grew to number thirteen. The husbands of twelve of those ladies grumbled frequently about the womenfolk taking out valuable time from all the chores to go to some woman’s house where there was no man to cook and clean for. The twelve ladies remained committed to “their” time.

Six months into the year, tragedy struck in the form of a stray bullet from one of the many outlaw gangs that ravaged Fairmont City. Heidi Schmidt lost her life on an innocent trip to buy flour for a birthday cake for her youngest daughter. The quilters now numbered only twelve. They stopped quilting for a while so the group could help the Schmidt's get along.

When they met again at Annie's house, they all said it felt a little empty without Heidi because she always laughed at all their stories.

"It's getting to where I don't hardly want to go into town anymore," said Maggie Fostyer. "Especially not with my young'uns. Last Sunday we had to stay in the church for an extra hour cause there was so much shootin goin on outside."

"Somebody should do something about all those outlaws," added Sarah Thoms. "The sheriff, he talks a lot, but it doesn't seem like he does much. I think there are more of them now than there ever were."

“Yes, somebody should,” said Annie, without further explanation.

The following week, after all the ladies arrived and were about to sit down around the big table in Annie’s great room, Annie said, “Ladies, I want you to come out back behind the cabin. I have something I want to show you.”

“What’s going on, Annie?” asked Betsy. “Did you get a new horse?”

“Just come on,” answered Annie.

With all the quilters gathered around her, Annie unbuttoned the coat she wore and set it aside. Shock and surprise could hardly describe their expressions, for resting on Annie’s hips were twin holsters with pearl-handled six guns. She stepped away from the group and spun around facing a rail fence with twelve bottles spread out along the top rail. Lightning fast, she simultaneously drew both guns and fired at the bottles. Working from the outside bottles toward the bottles in the middle, she did not miss a one.

“Land sakes, Annie,” exclaimed Sarah.

“Annie, how did ... where did ...” said Betsy, unable to finish her question.

“It’s just part of my past,” answered Annie. “A past I thought I had left to another time, another place.”

Annie McFarlane’s past had suddenly become a part of eleven other women’s futures. For the remainder of that afternoon, no hand took up needle and thread. A heart-to-heart conversation changed the coming weeks of quilting on Tuesday afternoon at two o’clock. The details of that afternoon’s words are less important than the fact that for the next year the first hour of every quilting session had one woman teaching eleven other women how to draw and shoot a six-gun and handle a shotgun with confidence. The second hour the group resumed their quilting, working on a special project dedicated to the memory of Heidi. Several of the ladies commented on how precise their sewing had become since their weekly exercise with the hand and gun. The workouts had dramatically increased their hand to eye coordination.

Jane Conway's daughter, Amy, joined the quilting group on Tuesday afternoon. Too young to take part in the first half of the group's activities, she became their official lookout in case anyone should come down the trail to Annie's place during their practice session.

One year and one month after losing their friend and quilting companion, Annie gathered the group around the table and said, "It's time, ladies. The outlaw group that took our dear Heidi is holed up in Jackson Cove. They've been operating so long with impunity that they've grown fat and careless. Tomorrow night we'll have a full moon to help us. You all know what you have to do to get out of the house without suspicion. We'll meet here at nine o'clock. Amy, you know you can't come with us this time, but you can say a little prayer for us."

"I will," said Amy. "I'll ask God to bring all of Annie's Raiders back home safely."

"Annie's Raiders," declared Betsy. "I like it."

In their first foray into the outlaw world, Annie's Raiders descended upon the Bassett gang so

quietly and so quickly that they fired nary a shot. Stripped of their guns and their boots, the villains arrived in front of the sheriff's office in Fairmont City tied backwards on their horses. No captors accompanied them on the last quarter mile, so the mystery of the moment planted a seed that would germinate into a ghostly legend. And, of course, there stood little chance that the truth would ever see the light of day. What outlaw would ever admit to having been subdued by a group of twelve women. Their stories usually ran along the lines of "It took Wyatt Earp and fifty deputies to take them".

Amy Conway's appellation remained known to only thirteen spirits until some distant point in time. Their deeds, however, became widely disseminated throughout the region. Annie's Raiders had to make eleven more such missions over the next year before word reached even the darkest regions to stay away from Fairmont City. Not so strangely, the town became a place deemed unsafe by those whose business in life made many a quiet street unsafe. One foolish attempt by an

overconfident gunslinger ended quickly when Annie shot the weapon out of his hand before he barely got it out of his holster. No other bullets ever left the guns of Annie's Raiders during any of their raids.

Two months after their last mission, Annie met Betsy once again coming out of the general store with fabric in her arms. "Hi, Betsy," said Annie. "Are you bringing any of this on Tuesday?"

"Only this luscious little piece on the bottom."

While they continued talking, a crowd gathered across the street in front of the saloon. It seemed Mayor Fike had begun his campaign speech for reelection. The mayor tended to speak quite loudly when he got ramped up. The gist of his speech that day consisted of him taking full credit for the cleanup of the outlaws in "his" fair city.

At the height of his pomposity, Betsy said, "That mayor. Somebody should do something about him."

“Yes, they should,” said Annie, without further comment.

On Tuesday afternoon at two o’clock, thirteen ladies, including Amy Conway, gathered around the big table in Annie’s great room.

“Ladies, I want you to come out back behind the cabin,” said Annie. “I have something I want to show you.”

“Annie, what could you possibly show us this time that would top the last thing?” asked Maggie.

“Did you buy a new mule or something?” asked Sarah, as they all laughed.

Following Annie outside, they reached the same spot where Annie had made her previous revelation. But they saw nothing they hadn’t seen before.

“What is it, Annie?” asked Betsy. “I don’t see anything.”

“Just a minute,” replied Annie. “I have to get it out of the barn.”

When she returned two minutes later, two of the ladies burst out laughing, while the rest tried to stifle their giggles. But it was too much, and soon everyone was holding their sides. With mock pride, Annie stood tall in defense of her purchase.

“Annie, who sold you that mule?” asked Sarah.

“He looks tired, Annie,” stated Maggie.

“Tired?” questioned Jane. “I think we should get started digging his grave right now.”

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Annie, looking hurt.

“What exactly did you have in mind for him, Annie?” asked Betsy.

“I bought this fine animal for one reason only,” answered Annie. “I only need him to do one thing for me, and then he can retire to greener pastures.”

“And what might that be?” asked Betsy.

“Herbert, here, that’s what his name is, is a vital part of one last mission for Annie’s Raiders.

This is what we have to do ... and we must do it tomorrow.”

On Wednesday, when the sun touched the bottom of the horizon, the stagecoach from Wendell Springs approached the last mountain pass before Fairmont City. It had been a smooth run for Jake Evans and his shotgun, Harley Smith. They looked forward to it ending, though. Carrying a secret load of payroll money for the mine and a lone passenger to make it look normal added a certain edginess to the trip. They were starting to relax as they neared the homestretch when they brought the stage to a sudden stop. Staring at twelve masked outlaws with twelve guns pointed at their heads, the driver and his shotgun raised their hands in submission.

“We ain’t got nothin valuable on board, today,” yelled Jake.

“Relax, friend, we know what you’re carrying, and we only want your passenger,” said the leader of the gang. “Sorry, boys, but you’re going

to be about an hour late in delivering that payroll money.”

Leaving two riders to make sure the stage held fast for an hour, the rest of the gang headed toward town. They stopped at a little grove of trees on the way to pick up a mount for their captive.

Half an hour later, a lone rider approached the front of the saloon on Main Street. Astride an old mule, tied on backwards, and without boots, the mayor of “his” fair city drew a suitable number of cheers and a suitable amount of laughter from the onlookers. For most people, it would have been a very humbling experience, but this was the mayor. According to his testimony, it took the James brothers and twenty-four of his cohorts to put him in that position. And that was only because he didn’t have a gun with him.

In an interesting twist to his campaign, the mayor never again mentioned all that “he” had done to clean up Fairmont City. The good people of Fairmont City did re-elect the mayor, and they also elected a new sheriff who seemed more

diligent in keeping law and order. No one ever questioned whether the mysterious group had taken the law into their own hands. The decent, law-abiding citizens of Fairmont City were grateful to be able to walk the streets without fear of another innocent life being taken by a stray bullet from an outlaw's gun. They didn't want to be held captive in their churches on Sunday morning. They didn't feel that was too much to ask of the law.

The following Tuesday, the ladies finished the special quilt they had been working on for Heidi. The center block consisted of a beautifully stitched rose inside a heart that bore an inscription saying, "For you, Heidi". At the bottom of the quilt, they stitched "From Annie's Raiders". They hung the quilt next to the window overlooking Annie's back lot. The next quilting day they stitched a piece of cloth over the original words "From Annie's Raiders" and signed it "From Your Quilting Sisters".

Annie McFarlane eventually became Annie Travis, having married a man from Texas who bred

and raised cattle. They had two healthy sons from that marriage.

At the age of sixteen, Amy Conway suffered the tragic loss of her mother and father to a tornado that swept through the Fairmont City area. The young lady, already like a daughter to Annie, spent the next four years in the Travis household. She married a young lawyer who had moved to Fairmont City from back east. They built a house on the farm right next to Annie and Bart Travis. When Annie passed away, Amy got the quilt that she had helped make so many years earlier. Before she hung it on the wall of their home, she removed the overlaid piece of fabric that covered the words “From Annie’s Raiders”.

BUFORD ON QUILTING

When the Women's Groups at St. John and St. Peter learned of Buford's presentation to the Men's Groups on Auto Repair, they immediately wanted equal time. So, Buford addressed them with the same inspiring thought pattern on the subject of quilting.

Pastor Arnold Schmidt

Perhaps you should have read the entire quilt pattern, if ...

... you find that the log cabin quilt you are making looks more like The Leaning Tower of Pisa.

... you find that after quilting your quilt you think the back of your quilt feels kind of fuzzy and looks remarkably like the batting you purchased.

... after completing your quilted purse project, you discover what appears to be an extra zipper on hand even though you know you only bought one.

... on opening the zipper of your newly completed quilted purse, you question the wisdom of having the zipper on the bottom.

... you step back to admire your new creation and you don't remember there being anything in the picture on the pattern that had trapunto in it.

... after completing the project you find that you have 32 yards of fabric left over.

... you find that you had to make 23 trips to the quilt store to buy supplies.

... you discover that the 7-foot-long quilt you made for your very tall husband only seems to cover up to his waist.

... you wear out over 5 seam rippers during the construction of your project.

... you end up using over 4 layers of appliqué to hide the gaps between your blocks.

... you felt it necessary to have your pastor say a special prayer in the worship service to bless your work before you began your project, as a substitute to reading the entire pattern.

JOURNAL OF A QUILT STORE CAT

In a previous story, “A Venture into Needle and Thread”, Mike and I spent time on the front porch rocking chairs of their family’s quilt store. What follows is a continuation of that time. My wife is always telling me about this cat that the Moore’s have. I must admit some of the things she describes are humorous. I finally had a chance to ask Mike about the cat and thus confirm her stories. Just to give some level of understanding to the cat’s history, I thought perhaps I should give a brief account from the cat’s perspective. I accumulated all known facts and uh ... their variations, listened to first, second, and third hand oral communications, used my direct observation and, of course, took into account Mike’s testimony. I used liberal literary license in interpreting anything the cat had to say.

One last point—cats and dogs are part of God’s wonderful Creation and trying to understand them is a noble endeavor. Whether this story fits

with that effort or not is left up to the reader to decide.

Pastor Arnie Schmidt

My first year of life, I was pretty much a nomad. I don't know who my parents were, but they must have been quite attractive. Apparently, I inherited whatever genes account for that. One day, though, I looked in a puddle and saw some most unattractive ribs. I decided, then and there, that I needed to find a suitable home and settle down.

I stopped at several places in town, but the chemistry just wasn't there. Then one day, I followed a little old lady in an antique-looking car leaving town and heading into the country. (She was only going about 20 mph and she accelerated very slowly, so I could always keep her in sight.) Pulling into this place with a long rock driveway, she parked and went inside this red building. There

looked to be too many people in the building at the moment, so I moseyed on over to the quaint little house on the other side of the driveway.

I made my way up onto the back porch and saw a chest of some sort underneath a window. I don't know what was in the chest, but it was just the right height for me to hop up on and peek inside the window. There didn't seem to be much going on, but then I saw movement. It looked like a big human going into the kitchen, so I decided to put on some charm and let out a pitiful meow. The young man turned, walked over to the window, and smiled. For me, it was an opening. I let out another masterful meow. He brought me a bowl of milk and I knew this was going to be my home.

Every day, the people (some prefer to call them staff, but I didn't quite feel comfortable with that yet ... yet) would leave the house and walk over to the building across the driveway. Eventually, I got curious—you know what they say about cats and curiosity. I postponed trying to get into the building, because there was way too much to do on the outside—gardens to explore, cows to watch

across the fence, butterflies to chase, and so on. This hard work gained me the position of chief of outside security.

Becoming an employee had its share of perks. Perhaps the most rewarding consisted of a baby crib filled with cuts of fabric sitting next to the front door. I found it a comfortable spot for my early morning, mid-morning, late morning, early afternoon, mid-afternoon, and late afternoon naps. I still hadn't been inside and didn't know it was a quilt shop until one lady paused at the crib, looked around me at the fabric rolls, and then asked if I was the quilt store cat. What could I say, but meow. Not that I knew what a quilt store was. One morning, after completing a perimeter walk, my curiosity once again got the best of me. When a group of four ladies opened the door to the store, I casually slipped in behind them.

"Whoa," I said to myself. "I'm liking what I see. Ample places to curl up on."

My internal visit didn't last long, as someone picked me up and set me back outside. Apparently,

I didn't yet have the proper clearance to be in that area ... yet. Whatever. I continued with my duties outside until winter crept in. Then one day, it seemed incredibly cold, so cold that the fabric-lined crib outside the door felt like ice. I did the only thing any self-respecting cat would do—I jumped up onto the windowsill, looked in the window, and let out a pitiful cry. I'm writing this today to tell you it worked. I assumed security duties for inside the store as well.

I found the chenille fabric to be exceptionally good for taking a nap. It occupied two shelves in the corner, away from any distractions. One day, I slept on the second shelf of chenille rather than the one above it. It was a random decision, and we cats don't feel we have to give explanations or reasons for such things. Anyway, waking up from my nap and stretching, I heard a scream. Some lady thought I was just part of the store décor, and it scared her when I moved. I later heard from reliable sources that she had been binge watching *The Twilight Zone* all week.

Last Thursday, I heard my bosses talking about an inventory problem with the Pearl Cotton Balls. There appeared to be a serious shortage in the count of store stock. As head of security, I offered no satisfactory answer, other than I would monitor them. I do know that Pearl Cotton Balls are fun to bat around, and I would shudder to think that the bosses might consider ceasing to stock them for sale. In one of those strange instances of coincidence, when the owners rearranged some shelving, they found fifty-three balls of Pearl Cotton behind and underneath the furniture. They looked at me and I did the only thing I could think of to do—I walked over to them, rubbed on their legs, and started purring. About a week after the reorganization, I woke up from a nap on the shelf and casually reached down on the shelf below me to bat at a ball of Pearl Cotton and I came up empty-handed (or more precisely, empty-pawed). They had moved the Pearl Cotton Balls to a more secure location—without consulting with me, I might add.

Speaking of naps, on Friday, I tried a different spot to relax. I chose some dog fabric that had been

cut in panels. At some point during my relaxation, I became so relaxed that I turned over and fell off the shelf. Had I seriously miscalculated how close I was to the edge, or was it some kind of subliminal message from the dog fabric? I don't know. I do know that it is exceedingly difficult to maintain any form of princess-like dignity when falling off a shelf. (I do not recommend you trying it just to see if I am correct.) The Feline Institute of Longevity, using advanced calculus and statisticat data analysis (these guys are some cooooo-l cats), determined that I lost .483% of one of my lives with the fall.

Yesterday, a lady came into the store and purchased a sizable amount of fabric. She set her purse down on the counter and started to pull out her wallet. Then she said something about needing some thread, too. When she came back to the counter, I had my head down inside her purse. Merely doing what my job required, I heard a loud voice that said, "Princess, get out of there." The lady said, "It's okay. I have two cats myself." When I heard that, I did not feel the need to do any further

security inspection. A lady with two cats is good enough for me.

I have always tried to help the store in other ways, too. Today, I brought in a customer for them. Apparently, headless mice are not big spenders, so they quickly booted us out. Next time, maybe I'll try a mole.

You would think that, after working there for over three years, these people would begin to anticipate the needs of a cat. When I want to lie down in that chair, I should have immediate access to it, whether they are working on a money-making project or not. It also doesn't matter if there is another empty chair right next to them I could use. It is the principle of the matter. So, I have to just sit there and wait. If they give even the slightest hint that they might get up, I must be ready. The seat area of that chair shall never see the light of day. When they come back, I always hear, "Princess, you little stinker." But they always move my chair over and use the other one. We cats must fight our battles one at a time.

Along that same line, When I'm ready for love (at a time of my own choosing, of course), I expect to get it quickly. Sometimes, when they don't respond in an appropriate time, I am forced to jump up on the cutting table and lay down in the middle of the fabric. This causes them to stop what they are doing immediately and give me what I deserve. I must give one especially important word of caution, though. When you jump up on a cutting table, always keep your tail tucked in, I've heard those rotary cutters can be mean. When I was young and still traveling, an old alley cat once told me about this cat that had a similar experience with a human using a pair of scissors. Apparently, the whole timing thing lacked coordination, and they had to rename the cat 'Manxy'. Of course, you can't believe everything an old alley cat says.

Some of you might think that being a quilt store cat can lead to laziness. *Au contraire, mon ami*. When you must get across the driveway to the store in the middle of winter, you must be able to get across quickly with the minimum number of times that your paws touch the snow. My best,

according to my bosses, for the fifty-yard sprint, was in three strides. I get ample exercise every morning chasing the squirrels out of the strawberry patch. I enjoy making those intruders go up the tree, get out on a limb, and chatter away at me, like I'm really supposed to be scared. My humans always reward me handsomely when I do this, because they say the squirrels are always eating all the strawberries.

Now that I've reached cat middle age and have gained a wealth of worldly experience, I can honestly say there is still one indisputable fact. Dogs are dumb! We have this beagle that runs off into the neighbor's cow pasture on one side and then the other neighbor's corn field on the other side. There's no telling what he might have stepped in, or worse, rolled in. We don't know who he might have associated with. I used to sit on a shelf of fabric, watch this dog out the window, and worry about him. And I once had delusions that I could teach him some refined manners. But not anymore. I figure God must watch out for him, so there's no need for me to. He comes back with muddy paws

and a joyful look on his face. Then he goes to his water bowl and slurps away with half the water spilled out and what's left in the bowl all dirty. I am exceedingly glad that the owners of this little quilt shop have the wisdom to not allow dogs in the store. Okay, some lady brought in a little frou-frou dog the other day, but she was holding him, and he looked like he didn't have the slightest idea what a cow pasture was. Without dogs, this quilt store can maintain an air of dignity and class. With dogs, well ... who knows what chaos would follow. It's bad enough to have dog fabric in the store.

SECRETS OF A QUILT

Margaret led a quiet life in the small village of Wadsworth. Her parents had passed away two years earlier, leaving her with a modest house on two acres at the village limits. With two brothers lost in the war and no surviving aunts or uncles, she often felt lonely, in the family sense. Sure, she had acquaintances at the office where she worked and then there were the ladies at the church quilting circle, but the holidays sometimes led to periods of sadness.

One fine autumn day, when the wind blew crisp, and the trees flashed their brilliant hues of scarlet and orange, Margaret decided to take in fall's beauty and walk the half mile to her weekly quilt guild meeting. Not gorgeous by the world's often skewed view, she could still turn a head when she walked into town. As she rounded the corner at Mather's Pharmacy, she came to an abrupt stop. Getting off the afternoon bus from Quincy, a tall, handsome man in an army uniform caught her eye.

Quite possibly, he caught a little part of her heart as well. The soldier walked across the street to Johnson's Hotel and disappeared inside. Margaret smiled and continued her walk to the church.

Time at the quilt guild often flew by for Margaret. She enjoyed the camaraderie of others as they worked on a common charitable cause. Of course, it made her feel good when everyone marveled at the product of her nimble fingers and creative eye. At the meeting's end, Margaret packed her satchel and started the walk home. When she reached the corner of Oak and Maple, the young woman crossed to the other side of the street and walked in front of Johnson's Hotel. A curious move if you consider that one block later, she would only have to cross the street again to get back to her house.

Walking in the door to her house, Margaret turned on the living room light and picked up Smokey the cat. Not two minutes later, the front doorbell rang. Opening up the front door, she found the tall soldier whom she had seen in town.

“Miss Rose,” he said. “My name is Eric Fleming. I am on leave for a couple of days, and I just had to stop by and see you.”

“I ... I’m sorry,” Margaret stammered. “Do I know you?”

“No, Miss Rose, we’ve never met. I served alongside your brother Nathan for two years. He often talked about his beautiful young sister back home, and I had to see if his description was accurate.”

“And was it?”

“Not hardly. He grossly understated your beauty.”

“Eric Fleming,” she said softly to herself. “Eric Fleming. Oh! Flem?”

“Yes, ma’am. That’s me.”

“Sure, he mentioned you often in his letters. It’s a pleasure to meet you, except that I feel like I already know a lot about you.”

“Nathan was a genuine hero, Miss Rose. I do miss him.”

“Yes, I do, too. You know our brother Kyle also died over there.”

“Yes, ma’am. It’s been a tough time. Well, listen, besides having the opportunity to meet a beautiful young woman, I have another reason for stopping by.”

“And what might that be?” asked Margaret, coyly.

“Nathan cherished the quilt you sent him. He always made sure I noticed the fine handiwork that his ‘beautiful young sister back home’ had done. I did notice. In fact, I studied it so much that it seemed like I knew every stitch.” Pausing for a few seconds, Eric continued, “I have a favor to ask of you. I was wondering if you could make a quilt for me?”

“Sure, Eric. I’d be happy to make one for you.”

“There is a catch, though, Miss Rose. I need to have it by tomorrow evening when I leave.”

“Eric, I’m sorry. That’s just not possible in such a short time.”

“I know it’s a huge thing to ask, but it is very important to me. I have a drawing here of exactly what I want. I also have an envelope here that contains five-hundred dollars that I want you to have.”

“Eric, you don’t have to pay me. That’s not the point. It’s a matter of time.”

“I know, but in this case, we can just call it a little extra jam on the bread, so to speak. Seriously, can you do it?”

“Show me the drawing.”

“The fabric can be anything, but the design must match the drawing exactly. The stitches must be precisely placed.”

“Well, the design is simple enough, but it is an odd mix of solid, four-patch, nine-patch, and flying geese blocks. Do the stitches have to be this exact pattern and length?”

“Yes, Miss Rose.”

“Tomorrow is Sunday. I would have to miss church.”

“I’m sure the Lord would understand on this.”

“Okay, Eric. I will do the best I can. There is one thing, though.”

“And that would be, Miss Rose?” the soldier asked.

“No more Miss Rose. It’s Margaret, okay?”

“I can do that, Margaret. I know you have a lot of work to do, so I am going to get out of your way. If you need me to get anything for you, just call me at the hotel.”

“I should be fine. I’ve got a large stash of supplies.”

At eight o’clock on Sunday morning, Margaret found the soldier at her front door with breakfast in hand. He set the table for her and served her the morning meal. Then he left. At noon and at six o’clock that evening, Eric returned with lunch and

dinner, respectfully. She felt she could live with such amenities.

Margaret buried her last stitch at nine o'clock that evening with the soldier looking over her shoulder. Having studied every stitch and block compared to the drawing, Eric pronounced her a miracle worker of the first order. He folded the quilt and put it in his suitcase.

“One day you will know how much this means to me, Margaret. Until then, this will have to do.”

She felt small and fragile as the soldier wrapped his big arms around her.

“And, of course, there is this envelope, too,” Eric reminded her.

“You keep the money, Eric. The quilt is my gift to you.”

“It’s a whole lot more than that, Margaret. I’ve still got time to catch the midnight flyer bus. I will write to you when I get back over there.”

Margaret never heard from the soldier again. She made numerous attempts to find him, but she couldn't get through the cloud of secrecy that surrounded him. She feared the worst, but the passage of time found her thinking less of it all each day.

One year later to the day, Margaret Rose answered the door to find another soldier standing there.

"Miss Rose, my name is Jack Schmidt. Eric Fleming was a friend of mine."

Her eyes filled with tears when she heard him say the word "was".

"I have something that I'm sure Eric would have wanted me to give to you."

Trying to muster up some vague sense of hope, Margaret managed to ask, "Is Eric alright?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am. Eric died two days after he came back. He had just completed his mission and was headed back to camp when his plane came under fire."

The soldier opened his case and pulled out the quilt that Margaret had made for Eric. He carefully unfolded it, removing a plaque and an envelope that lay tucked inside.

“I’m sorry it took so long to get to you, but as you can see, the envelope only had the name Margaret on it. I only recently came into possession of the quilt and the plaque. It took me awhile to piece it all together.”

Margaret tried to read the plaque, but she couldn’t stop the tears from clouding her eyes. She asked the soldier to read it for her.

“We, the people of Valeria, give this plaque to Captain Eric Fleming, posthumously, and to the unknown quilter in thanksgiving for all they have done to save our town.”

“I don’t understand,” Margaret said.

“Eric was in Army Intelligence. This quilt you made for him proved to be very special. The layout of the blocks represented troop positions with each block conveying troop strength. The odd stitching pattern that he so carefully had you do is,

in fact, Morse code that detailed how to interpret the map. By successfully delivering this quilt to the field commanders, he helped stop the invasion and destruction of the town of Valeria.”

“I always wondered about that stitching.”

“Eric was a bright guy. He figured if he got caught, they would never look at the quilt as something that revealed military plans. Well, ma’am, I’ve got to go. I wish we could have met under different circumstances. Before I leave, let me just say that you have a tremendous gift and sometimes we don’t have any idea where the gifts we’re given are going to take us.”

When the soldier left, Margaret opened the envelope that came with the quilt. She began to read, “Dear Margaret, I want to thank you once more for the beautiful quilt. Someday maybe you’ll come to know that the meaning of your gift encompasses far more than you’d ever imagine. When this ordeal is over, I want to return to Wadsworth and see you again. Until then, I will cherish the

memory of that short time for as long as I live. Love, Eric.”

Margaret Rose wondered if the love that never returned was all that would ever be for her. A month after that day, a young man bought the 100-acre farm across from her house. Margaret watched as several men helped him unload the truck that carried his worldly goods. She never saw a woman at the house on moving day, so in the back of her mind a seed of interest began to grow. By the third day, she had still not seen a woman around. On Friday, she decided to take over a plate of cookies, just in the spirit of being a good neighbor of course. She put on her favorite flowered cotton dress, combed her hair back in a little flare, and grabbed the plate of cookies. Just as she opened the front door, she saw the young man coming up her sidewalk. A beautiful raven-haired young woman held onto his arm and laughed at his words. When she saw the young man up close, a flood of emotions rushed at her. The young man who now walked up her sidewalk had been at her door before.

“Good afternoon, Miss Rose,” said the young man. “Do you remember me?”

“Yes, of course, it’s Jack, isn’t it? You were Eric’s friend.”

“Miss Rose, this is Rebecca, the love of my life,” said Jack.

Margaret greeted her with a smile, even though she felt a brief pang of disappointment.

“Miss Rose, my sister, here, has just told me she’s getting married next month, and we thought we would bake some chocolate chip cookies in celebration. But with my novice homemaking skills, I neglected to purchase any sugar. We’d love to have you come over and help us celebrate ... if you could bring your own sugar.”

Her heart leaping at the revelation that Rebecca was his sister, Margaret replied to their invitation, “No, I’m sorry, Jack and Rebecca. I don’t have any more sugar. I used the last I had to make these chocolate chip cookies that I was just getting ready to bring over to you as a welcome.”

The three young people standing at Margaret's door burst out laughing. A year later, Miss Margaret Rose changed her name to Mrs. Margaret Schmidt. She and Jack had four children—Emil, Dora, William, and Henry.

Margaret never forgot the day that Jack read the plaque dedicated to Eric and the unknown quilter. The quilt has remained in the family ever since. From that day forth, every quilt that Margaret made had a meaning that ran much deeper than what meets the eye. She kept the secrets of each quilt in the secret rooms of her heart.

Although this story dates back many years, it has a connection to the present at St. John. The youngest son of Jack and Margaret Schmidt is my father, Henry Schmidt, and Miss Margaret Rose was indeed my grandmother. The special quilt that Margaret made for Eric hangs in our living room today. The faith foundation instilled in me by my parents and grandparents led to my contribution in the annals of St. John.

Pastor Arnie Schmidt

QUILTER'S MIRACLE SALVE

One of the dangers of too much late-night television is that it can almost become addictive. Although I do not yet have a problem walking away from it, I have begun a quest for the spiritual significance of, not only the shows, but also the commercials. I was on the fence about sharing this commercial, but I ran it by my wife, who is a member of the quilting circle here at St. John. She thought it a bit humorous and said she would bring it up at the next meeting. With that clearance, I share it with you here. As you may notice, it has a familiar format to some others I have shown you. Undoubtedly, the same marketing firm that produced it feels it is as winning a strategy as the others it airs. I'm still working on any spiritual angle, but Deceivo pills appear to be marginal by ethical standards (yet there is a side of me that thinks them understandable).

Pastor Arnie Schmidt

Larry: (Walking on to the set) Larry Money here. I want to introduce you to a revolutionary new product that is guaranteed to give you peace of mind whenever you take on a quilting project. Yes, that's right. QMS, Quilter's Miracle Salve.

Ladies, throw those seam rippers away. You won't need them if you use QMS. Just a dab rubbed into your hands before starting, and Quilter's Miracle Salve will instantly activate its powerful nerve stimulation compound. Your hands will become super sensitized to finesse your way through any project completely without mistakes.

Ladies, don't buy lots of expensive feet for your sewing machine. After just three days of QMS treatment, you will be able to sew any kind of stitch on any kind of seam with perfect ease and accuracy.

Haven't got the knack of that rotary cutter yet? Are the trips to the emergency room for stitches becoming expensive? Keep a jar of QMS on your cutting table. Next time you slice your finger, spread QMS

liberally on the wound, and it instantly cauterizes the area and stops the bleeding. Once more, QMS's anti-bacterial properties prevent any infection from occurring. And what's even more amazing, just cover the blood stain on your fabric with QMS and press with an iron—presto! The stain disappears.

Ladies, do you suffer from PMS? Clinical studies have shown that QMS can dramatically reduce the symptoms of most PMS attacks. When the other members of your household begin to feel the effects of your PMS on their lives, they will quickly reach for this little jar and say to you, “QMS for PMS”. Why is this so important? It practically guarantees you a lifetime supply of this amazing product, and they will gladly pay for it.

What would you expect to pay for this wonder salve? \$59.95. no! \$39.95, no! For a limited time only, have complete quilting security for the paltry sum of just \$19.95.

Do you really have a lot of problems with your quilting? Do you make an extraordinarily large number of mistakes? For just \$5.00 more, I will

(pulls out a 5-gallon can) supersize your order with this whopping 5-gallon supply. That's QMS, Quilter's Miracle Salve! Call 1-555-XXX-XXXX to place your order. Our operators are standing by. This product is not available in stores.

But wait, there's more! If you call within the next thirty minutes, I will also send you, free of charge, a thirty-day supply (pulls out a bottle of pills) of Deceivo pills. What are Deceivo pills, you ask? These pills are specially formulated to improve your thinking power. With a patented hormonal compound, Deceivo works quickly to enhance and bind the receptors in your neural pathways, thus opening up a whole new, previously untapped region of creativity within your brain.

(Pulling out a card, Larry reads) Martha J. from Pittsburgh, PA writes, "My husband is a lazy bum who hates to do anything around the house. I end up making all the household repairs. And he is always on my back about any fabric that I buy to make quilts. Since taking the free supply of Deceivo pills that you sent, I have been able to solve this problem I face when wanting to purchase more

fabric. Now, when I'm coming home from the quilt shop, I just slip the fabric into a Home Depot bag and my husband runs the other way."

Sara M. in Dallas, TX writes, "My husband won't ever give me any money to buy fabric. He always gives me plenty of money to buy him food at the grocery store. When I began taking Deceivo pills, I was a little skeptical, but I've been able to come up with a wonderful plan. Now, when I go to the grocery store, I always buy a few things that I know are returnable and that I won't use. The next time I go to the grocery store, I return those items, get cash back, and go buy fabric."

That's 1-555-XXX-XXXX. 1-555-XXX-XXXX.

THE RELATIVE QUILT

About twenty miles west of Douglas Crossing sat Clarkville, a prosperous town, at least for one man. That one man went by the name of Amos Clark, landlord for two-thirds of Clark County. Situated at the confluence of the Saragonda and Hapshot rivers, Clarkville also served as the hub for the G & E Railroad. Brisk commercial activity lined the pockets of Amos and a few fortunate others with ample rewards. By and large, the general populace languished in debt to baron Clark, and frequently lived from one meal to the next.

The frigid air surrounding Jacob Morrow's entrance into Clarkville proved too much for a welcoming committee. No colorful banners flowed overhead. No band of musicians played jubilantly on the street corner. In fact, even if it had been a bright spring day, no such welcome would have awaited the man, for no one knew of Jacob Morrow and his arrival.

Well-worn, loose-fitting buckskin hid Jacob's muscular frame. He looked no different from most of the other men who came into town for a brief respite from the rigors of travel in that part of the country. But there was something different about Jacob Morrow that the citizens of Clarkville would soon find out.

For one week, Jacob Morrow went to every shopkeeper in town with the following proposition, "I will shovel all the snow off the walkway in front of your store for free if you will but do one thing for me. On Saturday, January 21st at eight o'clock in the morning, I need you to come down to the church at the end of town with a six-inch square of fabric."

What could the shopkeepers do? The offer seemed too good to refuse.

The next week Jacob visited the home of every citizen living in Clarkville. While the people shared a common hatred for Amos Clark because of his price gouging at the stores on Main Street, they shared little else. Chinese immigrants lived at

the east end of town. Germans settled to the west. Mexicans kept to themselves in the south. People of color slept in ramshackle homes to the north.

Jacob offered the following to each citizen, “I will chop enough firewood for you to last the rest of winter if you will but do one thing for me. On Saturday, January 21st at eight o’clock in the morning, I need you to come down to the church at the end of town with a six-inch square of fabric.”

This proposal likewise seemed too good to refuse for all but one man, Amos Clark. Amos said he had all the firewood he would ever need. He slammed the heavy iron gate to his front door in Jacob’s face.

Jacob lived up to his word, completing all the work he had agreed to. At the appointed hour, he waited at the church. Slowly, people began showing up at the church with their scraps of fabric. After a while, the church overflowed with men, women, and children of every age and every description. Hundreds of people stood outside in the

freezing cold, trying to catch a glimpse of what was going on inside the church.

Jacob instructed dozens of ladies to gather all the squares of fabric and bring them to him at the altar. From there, he distributed them to numerous groups of other ladies he had organized into circles to sew the pieces together. He moved quickly from group to group, encouraging the workers, and reminding them that time was of the essence. As each group finished their blocks, they brought them to one last group who put the entire project together. With the last stitch made, Jacob threw the quilt over his shoulder and headed out the front door. The crowd parted for him to pass through as he headed west.

Everyone wondered where Jacob was going and what he was going to do with the quilt. The lone figure of a man leading hundreds of people down the streets of Clarkville in the dead of winter evoked even more curiosity from those visiting the town for the day. As Jacob turned the last corner of Main St., he headed straight for Amos Clark's house. When the huge crowd behind Jacob arrived,

they found the stranger standing over the shivering body of the Baron himself. Apparently, Amos had stepped outside for a minute and the enormous iron gate had closed behind him. He had not expected the gate to lock and, being without his key and only dressed in a light outfit, he soon felt the effects of the bitter cold. Were it not for Jacob Morrow and the huge quilt that now gave warmth to Amos, he most surely would have died.

As the crowd of people watched Jacob and Amos, they began talking amongst themselves. Jung Chai began speaking to Herr Schultz. Senor Lopez said some words to Mrs. Brown. Delbert Smith shook hands with Edgar Martinez. Pretty soon, the scene took on all the appearances of a large family reunion. The people who had only lived among their own for so many years seemed to find long-lost relatives from the larger family of man.

When Amos Clark finally arose from the frigid snow, the people became eerily silent.

From the middle of the crowd, Nessie Gilbert said, “Would yas look at old Amos. The richest of the rich, near dead cept for what we’s, the poorest of the poor, could give him. It’s kinda like it was all backwards.”

“Amen,” said Rachel Gunders.

From the back came, “It’s all kinda relative.”

“What did he say?” asked several in unison.

Bobbie Thompson answered, “I said it’s all kinda relative. The riches and all, I mean. Ain’t it all kinda relative?”

There was an eerie silence again until Jacob Morrow responded to the complex question from the simple man saying, “Yes, it is, Bobbie. Yes, it is.”

“There’s one thing I don’t understand,” said Nessie Gilbert. “Jacob, how did you know old man Amos was out here?”

The crowd turned to hear Jacob’s answer, but the stranger was gone.

“Well, ain’t that curious,” said Nessie.

And curious it remained, for no one ever saw Jacob Morrow again. The years following that eventful day in Clarkville proved a little less harsh for the common folk of the town. Debtors who fell a little behind in their payments never felt much pressure from Amos.

Ten years to the day later, Amos Clark passed away. Having no living relatives, the Baron left his entire estate to the little church at the end of town. His will made only two conditions about the dispensation of his assets. First, all the money must be used to help people in times of desperate need. Second, the quilt he had grown so fond of must serve as a testament to man's relationship to God and his fellow man.

And so, you will find that, even in the poorest section of town, the streets are clean, and the people take pride in where they live. You will also find, at the end of town, a quaint little church that has a faded patchwork quilt hanging on its narthex wall. And, underneath that quilt, you will see the words, "It's all kinda relative".

