

## BRANSON MEMOIRS 2007

By Millie Lill

### PREP TIME

In preparation for our 1500-mile trip from Hyas, Saskatchewan to Branson, Missouri this year, Jaan and I had my accessible van safetied and registered. Everything was ready to roll, \$3500 later. Sheri Rojers has been staying with me, so she offered to drive. We loaded up all our gear, wheelchairs, my little scooter, and both dogs and on May 1, we headed for Denison, Iowa to spend a few days at my sister Nitize's, resting up for the remainder of the drive.

With many stops for rests and food and walking the dogs, we arrived in Grand Forks, ND that night. It had been a long, tiring drive, so we hit the sack. The next morning, we got on the road again and arrived in Denison, Iowa about 10 PM.

The rest of the month was spent attending my grandson's graduation and visiting with my family. A little shopping, too, we are women, after all. At last it was time to leave for Branson.

My grandson Dillon had volunteered to dog sit with Buddy, my sister Nitize's dog and my granddaughter Stephie took my two dogs, so there were just us three women and about 3 tons of clothing and other supplies in the van. Once again, Sheri did the driving.

### WHEREIN WE GO TO A CONVENT INSTEAD OF TO PRINCETON

In an attempt to avoid city traffic, we took Route 136, which would have connected at Princeton, MO with highway 65, taking us straight to Branson. However, the van decided it wanted a new alternator. Amidst a lot of popping and groaning from the van and loud laments from me about how I'd just spent a small fortune on that money pit of a van, we turned off the highway at Clyde, MO. We hoped to find a gas station or something! Once we saw the sign saying 'Clyde, MO, population 74,' we pretty much gave up that idea. We did see a cluster of buildings on a hill outside of town, though, and aimed for that, hoping it was some form of civilization. Perhaps a mall?

The buildings were a convent/nursing home complex. The van limped to a halt partway up the driveway. A woman who turned out to be the Director of Nursing came down the driveway. We flagged her down and she went back up the hill and sent Larry, the maintenance man, down. He jump-started the van and we knew it was the alternator. We got the van up to the parking lot and Larry took over.

While Larry was contacting a mechanic, we had lunch and a nice visit with the nuns. They have a beautiful chapel, completely accessible, which they offered to show to us. Larry put Nitize and Sheri in the golf cart and I followed with my little scooter, since without the alternator, we could not run the lift to unload the wheelchairs. My poor little travel scooter got an inferiority complex trying to follow the golf cart. That's probably why it quit working for Nitize as she exited the elevator in Branson a few days later.

Don't you just hate a broody, pouty scooter? Come to think of it, this might partially explain why it bucked Nitize off on Thursday night.

The chapel was absolutely gorgeous, with mosaics and stained glass windows. We also toured a room full of artifacts, including some fabulous embroidered pieces sent from Germany.

Three hours later, the mechanic had the van ready to go. He'd had to try four different alternators before he found one that mounted the same way mine did, but there was not a word of complaint. Larry saw us off and we headed for the mechanic's place of work to pay another \$200 on the Van From Hell. A visit to the convent seemed to have satisfied it's money hungry little heart, though, and the rest of the trip was relatively uneventful.

We could not possibly have found a better place to break down. Had we been on the Interstate, I doubt we'd have had such a wonderful time. Maybe next time, we'll try breaking down at a monastery, just for comparison. Anyone know a good monastery between Denison, Iowa and Branson?

We arrived at Branson at long last. Kathy was waiting for us and helped us get our gear to our room.

OOPS!

Thursday night was our annual visit to Lamberts in Springfield. I'm not sure how many of us attended, but it did look like what it was: a convention of crips. Lots of wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, canes and limping. It is always so nice to see this family of my heart, and this was no exception.

On arriving back at the Settle Inn, we spied Lucy and Dale Powers in their trike. Lucy blew their musical horn and Nitize, on my little scooter, forgot that I'd raised the seat 5", got a little over enthusiastic in her greetings and tipped the scooter over on herself. She said she was fine. Little did we know. I'm still wondering if the scooter was being ill natured because of its jealousy of the golf cart and bucked her off on purpose.

#### PRIZE WINNERS AND FIRE ALARMS

Friday was spent gabbing and enjoying meeting each other. That evening, Kathy came into the hospitality room looking for Toni. She said it was Publishers Clearing House and that Toni may have won \$12,000. Toni took the phone and asked whom it was. Publishers Clearing House, she was told. Then the caller asked if Toni was attending the Floozy convention and what was she wearing. Did her T-shirt say anything and if so, what? Toni, nice obedient child that she is, was answering the questions, although puzzled as to who was doing this. Finally, it dawned on her. Rain. It was Rain Bleck, playing a practical joke on Toni. Good one, Rain, we're so proud of you!

While all the above was going on, the fire alarm sounded. Later, after we'd all exited the building, we discovered that someone on the third floor was using a George Forman grill to cook some hotdogs. The heat from the grill set off the sprinkler system and water

squirted everywhere. The maintenance staff soon had it under control, but a few people had to switch rooms because of soaked bedding and floors. I had a moment of panic when I thought of Sheri's and my laptops taking an unexpected cold shower, but they were perfectly safe. No one was hurt and the perpetrator undoubtedly had a well-deserved hangover the next day.

That night was our usual Survivors/Supporters meeting. Each group meets separately and discusses our ongoing difficulties. This time, I suggested that we might want to have a panel discussion next year. That idea was met with a good deal of enthusiasm.

#### BREAK IN

I believe it was Friday night that Judy tried to break into the Dulaney's room. She said she saw the Do Not Disturb sign on the doorknob, but thought it was Don, playing a joke on her. She tried the key several times and finally went clear back to the desk clerk to see why her key wouldn't open the door. She was gently told that it would work just fine if she tried it on her own door, which proved to be the case. I doubt she'll ever live this down. Not if I can help it, anyhow.

#### HAPPY BIRTHDAY, EVERYONE

Saturday night was our big dinner. This year, Pat Grimes, who is in charge of feeding us (and a wonderful job she does, too) decided on a Birthday Party theme. The tables were decorated with party hats and noisemakers. While we ate, two Jacks, one of them Charlotte Key's husband and the other a friend of his, entertained us with song. Very nice. Every year, we each bring a gift for door prizes. This year, the gifts were piled on the tables according to how many birthdays there were in that particular month. My table was September. There were Roma, GG, Liz, Jeremiah, Nitize and I at that table. Once dinner was over, we took turns opening our 'birthday presents.' It was so much fun! Afterwards, some people played board or card games, others just visited.

#### CONFUSION AT THE ER

About 9 o'clock Saturday night, Nitize showed us her leg, which was bruised in Thursday's scooter accident. She takes coumadin, a blood thinner, and her leg was black from the knee down and swollen and hot to the touch. We called an ambulance, but due to the fact that the injury was several days old, Medicare would not pay for it. It was decided that we'd load her in Rick Dillon's Tahoe and get her to the hospital that way.

Rick Dillon, Dale Powers, Kathy Greulich, Nitize and I, in two vehicles, sped off to the hospital with Nitize. Since I'm not walking much these days, I was given a manual chair, too. So we were sitting in the waiting room and Kathy took Nitize to the bathroom. While she was gone, a nurse came bustling in, grabbed my chair and was going to take me to a room. I finally convinced her that a: I was not the injured party, and b: Rick was not my husband, c: the Real Patient was in the bathroom and d: Kathy was not married to Dale.

Having straightened that out, we proceeded to a cubicle where Nitize was eventually treated. She was X rayed and nothing was broken, so she was given some Vicoden and a

prescription for more when those ran out. We made a quick stop at McDonald's because Nitize and I were hungry, and then back to the hotel.

Rick and Dale had left the hospital earlier because Lucy was ill. But Dale waited up for us and helped get Nitize up to our room. Finally, about 3 AM, we were all tucked in and asleep. The Vicoden had the same effect as smacking Nitize in the head with a brick. She was asleep before her eyelids were completely shut.

### SURPRISE, SURPRISE!

Sunday morning, although I was by no means rested, I was up at my usual time of 7:30 and went down for a badly needed caffeine infusion. As I was sitting in line in my wheelchair, someone kissed the back of my neck. We are a friendly group, but this seemed a bit excessive. I turned around and there was The Big Pink Teddy Bear! (My husband Jaan earned that nickname when we were choosing colors for our T-shirts. He said, 'any color but pink. I get enough funny looks at Texas truck stops when I sit in the truck doing my cross stitch without wearing a pink shirt, too.' Of course, Gleason had to special order a hot pink T-shirt for Jaan and Jaan had his picture taken wearing the pink shirt and holding his cross-stitch. He's been The Big Pink Teddy Bear ever since.)

As a surprise for me, Kathy had made arrangements with his dispatcher to send him to Branson on his way to Tulsa with a load. Jaan is a long haul trucker and we never have enough time together. That night, he took me to Landry's for a seafood supper to celebrate, somewhat early, our fourth anniversary. Thanks, Kathy! It was wonderful to get an unexpected visit from my sweetie.

### NO, NO...YOUR *OTHER* LEFT!

We got back in time for Karaoke Night. GG and Paul Genereau had purchased cowboy hats for everyone. After some singing, the Bransonettes started their performance. This is a group of men who get up on the stage and do something they seem to consider a Can Can dance. This year, they had pieces of paper taped to their knees with L for left and R for right printed on them. It didn't help much. Jaan got to join them. He was somewhat lacking in enthusiasm for the idea, but the Bransonettes do not take No for an answer. They even got me to describe his shoes so they could spot him if he attempted to hide in a bathroom stall. The videotape of the performance didn't turn out, but if any of you want blackmail pictures, I believe Betty will let you have some stills she took of the dancing.

### CHACO'S ORDEAL

At some point during the festivities, Don and Sharon Hansche's Pomeranians got into a bit of trouble, resulting in the male Chaco having to go to the vet. I promised Don I would not go into details on this story, so if you are curious, you have to talk to Don. He claimed that Chaco would never be able to face another female if his story got out. Suffice it to say that Chaco is now recovering nicely and is thinking seriously of joining a monastery. Isabelle, the little female, recuperated from her share of the trauma by spending the afternoon belly up on my lap, being pampered and skritchd.

#### UHAUL AND I HAUL AND WE ALL HAUL FOR HOME

Monday was our last day. The festivities wound down, we had leftovers for lunch and most of us left. Sheri, Nitize and I stayed one more night and left the following day. Since Sheri's things had been stored at Kathy's house, she rented a U Haul to get them back to Denison. The van was not done causing trouble and one mile from the U Haul rental place, it spit out the hitch and we had to have someone come and rehook us.

We then picked up Melody Rayl and headed for the Greulich homestead. As usual, the gabbing and joking took up a little bit of time, but we did get everything loaded by forming a wheelchair brigade. Kathy handed us boxes and we wheeled them out of the shed to Charlie and Don who put them in the U Haul. Then they decided to load up a sectional couch. It was touch and go, but we finally got the door down and took off, leaving Melody in Kathy's capable hands.

We got as far as Sedalia, MO before stopping for the night. Sheri got up very early, before daylight for heaven's sake, and stepped outside where she was accosted by something small and fuzzy. It turned out to be a tiny black and white kitten, which helped us pack our things up, escorted us to the van and then left us to get on with it.

#### HOME OR A REASONABLE FACSIMILE THEREOF

We are now at Nitize's getting rested up for the remainder of our trip back to Hvas. Sheri had a sleep study Sunday night, and has to wait for the results of her last mammogram to be sent to the hospital for comparison. Once the results of all that are in, we are on our way back to the Frozen North to await the next Branson Bash. As usual, this was the best one ever, and, as usual, the next one will be even better.