

Scarlet Letters

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*BACK ROW: Dorothy Paulonis Zeni (D), Carolyn Montgomery, Carolyn Bemis McCallum,
Ellen Birk Kallman, Eleanor Roos Faber, Joan Ward Lasley
FRONT ROW: Barbara Booth Moses, Beth Lebovitz Segal, Marjorie Scheminger Wilson (D)*

Comments, Contributions, Inquiries Invited

Claudia Lauper Bushman
claudia.bushman@gmail.com

Sheila Owen Monks
smonks341@gmail.com

Designed by Jane Nieuwenhuis Baker
jbaker651@woh.rr.com

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Sally Blumberg Linden, President
sallylinden@comcast.net

Toni Holland Liebman, Web Manager
toelieb@aol.com

Recipe Corner—Send Yours!

You want me to try to find my favorite recipes? Have you any idea how long I have not been cooking? This is tongue-in-cheek, of course, because I do whip up tasty morsels when I am invited to bring something to a party. But that is not often.

I moved into a CCRC (Continuing Care Retirement Center) ten years ago. I love my cottage. I have two bedrooms, two baths, an office/den, a large living room/dining room and a sun porch—and a lovely kitchen, where I eat my breakfast of Cheerios or oatmeal and fruit. I have two large pantry closets too—one for dishes, etc, and one for various canned goods, dry foods, and wine. I have an almost empty refrigerator, a very clean oven, and a microwave that reheats food, if I have it delivered from the main kitchen.

(continued on page 3)

Teaching in Malawi

My husband Spike and I have had the privilege and joy of teaching at universities in Southern Africa nine times. One of these was the Polytechnic—both a trade school and engineering college in Malawi. Barrett had the contract. I came along with hopes of teaching or at least being useful.

We arrived on a Monday. The next day Spike asked the Dean of Engineering about a teaching position for me. He was very dubious, so I asked senior staff members, who were British, about what their spouses did. I hoped to hear about community social service opportunities. Instead I learned that they played mahjongg and bridge and swam at the club. I needed to teach as I had in Zambia or do something meaningful. We thought we might need to go home.

On Wednesday we walked over to the campus. In the lobby we were greeted by the Dean of Science who introduced himself to us and told me that my class was waiting! My assignment was to teach math to the auto mechanics and the auto technicians and freshman calculus to some of the freshman engineers. That first day was a little chaotic.

The level of math for the technical students was similar to that of a U.S. high school. The students were interested in who I was and what I knew about how automobiles work. When they asked why I knew anything about engineering, I told them my daughter was an engineer. They didn't know that women could be engineers. My students felt free to ask questions—not always pertaining directly to math or autos. They were well informed but wanted to know more about how things were in the U.S.

The engineering students' course refreshed high school trig and then moved into calculus. The students were bright and eager to learn. Only one of thirty high school graduates is admitted to the University. We were there shortly after independence, and Malawians were beginning to replace the expatriates who were running the big parastatals, or non-governmental groups with political interests. Students knew that there were many opportunities for them. They would be running things soon.

In the mid-morning there was a break in the class schedule. All the faculty members tended to gather in the senior staff room. There was a very clear seating pattern in the room. The Malawian men sat on one

side. The Malawian women sat on another side. Another area was for the expatriate (British) men. Spike and I and a young woman were the only Americans.

Where was I to sit? Everywhere and anywhere. My colleagues were mostly young Malawian men, I was a woman, and I was an expatriate. It was interesting sitting with the women who enjoyed chatting and telling stories. The Malawian men loved to play Bao, a game that they taught me and that I would often play with them while waiting for Spike to finish his afternoon class. The expatriates talked about their social life and their club.

One November afternoon, Spike told me that his student, Reginald, had invited us to spend Christmas in his village. I asked other expatriates about their experience visiting villages. No one had ever gone to one! We decided that this was an opportunity not to be missed.

Our car was old, so we chose to travel with Reginald on the local bus. Bags of cornmeal, boxes of clothes, furniture, and pots and pans were piled high on the top of the bus. Inside, along with the passengers were chickens. The trip took a couple of hours. I held a baby for the woman next to me.

We stayed in a small tin-roofed house, the home of Reginald's aunt who worked for the U.S. Ambassador. We were treated royally. Everyone was eager to meet us—the beer maker, the village head, the clinic worker, the school teacher. We were well-fed. There seemed to be fewer chickens running around when we left. It was difficult to graciously decline the chickens they offered as parting gifts.

We had a very rewarding year. We hear from former students about their successes and how the courses made a difference in their professional lives.

Mary Fenn Hazeltine (“Muffin”)
mary.hazeltine@gmail.com



Reginald's Aunt's House



My Automobile Mechanics

(Recipes, continued from page 1)

I did a lot of cooking in my other lives. I thoroughly enjoyed the process (not the menu planning). There were six of us, and when I started cooking for one, I kept cooking for six for a year or two until I figured out how to pare down the recipes. I have a little bookcase where I keep my favorite cookbooks from long ago. They are held together with tape or rubber bands, and the greasy pages are difficult to read. I had to replace one favorite book because it caught fire when I had it too close to the burner.

Now they just sit there, looking not as pretty as they used to. When I get an invitation to bring food to an event, I do have a few go-to appetizers. I may have to change those, however, because I usually see the same groups of people and they are getting tired of my offerings.

As you can tell I don't do cooking anymore. I eat in one of our dining rooms, or I order in food, depending on how convivial I feel. So, asking me for a recipe? A bit out of my realm—except for one. I found this in a Wellesley magazine, several years ago, and everywhere I take it, it gets raves. It was submitted to the magazine by Ann Higgins Benedict '64. I made a few changes.

Stuffed Little Potatoes

8 new potatoes
4 t. chopped chives
salt
white pepper
1/2 c. sour cream
4 slices bacon, cooked, drained, crumbled

Wash new potatoes and boil in salted water until just tender, not overcooked. Cool, but do not chill. Scoop a small round out of each potato.

Mix chopped chives, salt, and white pepper with sour cream and fill each cavity with mixture. Sprinkle top of each potato with crumbled bacon. Serves four.

These are not exact amounts, and I double the recipe (at least) because they go fast!

Carolyn Evans
evans.carolyn@comcast.net



Quilting With Friends

When I was four years old, I learned to sew clothes for my dolls. I loved sewing so much that I made my own clothes, hats, pillows, and I even upholstered a chair! I took piano and violin lessons and learned to play Early Music and to perform in concerts. I designed and created costumes for our musicians who wore them during performances and tours.

When I was a student at Wellesley College, I met my future husband, Rodrigo Botero, who was studying at MIT. We married and flew to Bogota, Colombia, where he began his career as an economist. We traveled the world, but after thirty years, my husband was invited to Harvard University as a visiting scholar, and we returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In the first month of our arrival, we drove to the countryside to see how the area had changed in our absence. In Sudbury, we saw a sign that said “Quilt Show” and stopped to take a look. In the main hallway there was a stunning 1930s quilt. I was surprised and amazed to see that it was made by Louise Bell Nichols—my maiden name! I was named for my paternal grandmother, and she had made this quilt! But I was sure that she had not made this quilt alone, because she had crocheted, not quilted, all the time. This could only be a generational quilt. I talked to relatives and did some research, and I discovered that one of my cousins had found unfinished pieces in my grandmother’s attic chest and had decided to finish it.

I was reunited with my two aunts in Concord, and they taught me to quilt. After quilting for three years I was invited to start a quilting class to be named “Quilting American Style” at Harvard Neighbors, where I taught for eighteen years. I asked my students to give away the very first quilt they made to charity. We made quilts for hospitals, veterans, and women in rehab. We also made quilts for exhibitions and silent auctions.

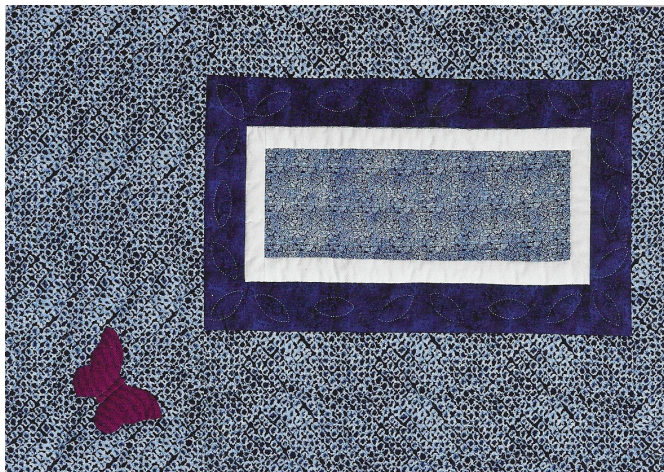
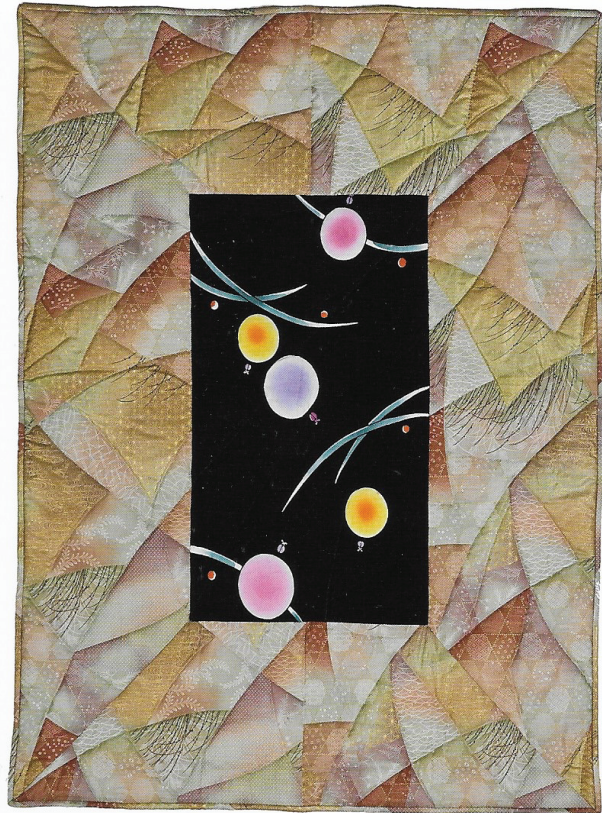
As my group of students grew, the Charles River Bend Bee was born. Our quilters continue to meet weekly, and I still hold office hours. My students have gone on to create their own quilting bees in their respective countries. In fact, several of my students designed and created a quilt for me. Each



student made a block and then mailed the pieces to another group of students who pieced the quilt together and shipped it to me. What an amazing gift, to see their mastery of the craft and their deep bond of friendship. For me, quilts provide warmth and comfort, as well as expressing the feelings of the heart and mind, friendship and love. As Arlene Raven of the Museum of American Folk Art says, "Making a quilt was taking fragmented pieces of living and making of them something solid and whole. Quilts thus had great value as powerful agents of healing and transformation."

My quilts have appeared in several shows around New England. They exist in private collections in Colombia, Japan, Canada, India, France, and the United States. I am currently working on my 157th quilt.

Louise Nichols Botero
(not online)



The Window

Sheila chaired the committee that caused the new stained-glass window in St. Michael's Church in Milton, Massachusetts to be. The following is excerpted from her sermon, "The Window," which she presented at the church on October 20, 2019.

The Women's Guild at St. Michael's was formed almost as soon as the church itself. I imagine it took a bit of doing for the women to get the men to listen to them.

I first came to St. Michael's as a new bride in 1958. My husband, Arthur, was clerk of the Vestry and finally prevailed on me to stop sleeping late on Sunday mornings and come with him to church. Many years later, as usually happens with the dowagers and patriarchs of a church, I found a pew I liked and claimed it as "my" seat. Most of you know where that is, second row in on that side. From there, in the rare times when my attention wandered from the sermon (!), my eyes strayed to the blank window in the Chapel, obviously intended to be stained glass but after sixty plus years, still never consummated. I wondered why.

Meanwhile, the Women of St. Michael's flourished as an integral part of the church. For much of that time, women did not work outside the home, and they met during the day and did projects to aid the church. Much of the work The Women did was invisible: fundraising, educational events, suppers, coffee hours, altar guild. Every four years there was a Christmas Fair, with the proceeds going to the Church.

Gradually, as more and more of the women began to work outside of the home, they didn't have time for meetings and fairs. The older women, many of whom are honored today by memorial donations, began to die off. The Women ceased to exist as a group.

However, there were still a few thousand dollars in their account. When the church treasurer decided to move those funds into the general account, the old group came back to life. We asked for time to poll the current female parish members, asking them how they would like the money spent. We reached about 95 percent of the current women



Sheila Owen Monks with "her" window.

by email or phone, giving them the choice of using the money to bring in speakers on topics relevant to women, to donate the money to charity, or to use it as seed money to create a stained-glass window in the Chapel. The majority voted to create the window. This pleased me very much, as I had been getting poked in the ribs from above by this time. A voice in the night was saying to me, "How long are you going to wait on this window thing? If you wait much longer, you will be the color of that dingy gray glass over there—and then don't expect anything else from Me!"

To be honest, there were skeptics. We had to raise a lot of money to achieve our goal. Most churches were selling their stained-glass windows, not putting them in. We decided to ask the families of some of the old-time members for help and sent out letters to those we could find. We were able to send letters to the children of The Women about our plan. To our delight, many responded and sent donations. The majority of the funds for the project, however, have come from current parishioners—and we thank you all! We actually raised more than we needed. We will use whatever is left over for other repairs and renovations.



Refreshment at the Reception



Something unique about this window is the wildlife that inhabits it. There is a turkey, a fawn, an owl, and lots of other birds and plants. We cannot look at the window without remembering the importance of preserving our earth and the creatures that inhabit it. The outside world enters our consciousness and begs for our help.

A window is a great symbol for the Church, especially this kind of window, with its clear glass bringing the outside world in and letting us see what is out there beyond the confines of our building. For centuries, the church was a closed entity, sure of its mission and very careful who came through its doors. Now we look beyond those limits, expand our horizons, wave to those outside who look in asking for our help. And perhaps as we look, we will catch a glimpse of those women who went before us, the ones who cooked and made ornaments to sell at the fair, who dusted the pews and needlepointed the altar cushions. If you see one, wave. She'll be wearing a skirt, and sensible shoes, and her hair will be in a pageboy. There's nothing you can't see out of that window. Amen.



Sheila Owen Monks



Window from Inside and Outside

