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When one thinks of the mythical place called Eden, images of lush trees and tame beasts appear. I think of summer, warmth of the sun and the refreshing rain. During the summer of 2005 I did many things I did not think possible. I conquered demons, extinguished old fears and took a journey far away from home. I brought my children along to meet with their elders and kinfolk. We rode the winding roads into Quebec's Eastern Townships, into the land of Lilith, "Adam's first wife". There, my children reconnected with their lost sister, patched the gaping holes in their history and mended old wounds. I revised history as recounted from a different perspective.

It sounds kind of mythical, doesn't it? Well, it's the truth, a story told by a broken yet redeemed woman. For obviously symbolic reasons, some names have been changed.

It had been five years since my family's last reunion. It was our mother's wish before she passed away in 1984 that we maintain contact with each other. Due to the demands of my own young family in the 1990's, I was only able to make it back to our hometown for one reunion with a six-year-old in tow.

Due to embarrassing antics on the part of my three children's father in 2000, his abuse of our finances and unsociable behaviour, I knew that I would not have the strength to make it for the one that year. Even if we could make the trip happen financially, I knew I did not want to be on any kind of journey with him anywhere, anymore. My children were tired of his antics yet disappointed with me that we did not go. My youngest son so much wanted a chance to meet Grandpa Jim. They all were upset because I had also promised them a ride on a train. Grandpa Jim passed away in early 2001. My regret and grief were immense.

My siblings had already started making plans in 2003 for our 2005 reunion. This time it was to be held in Quebec, at one sister's in-law's cottage, almost a four hour drive from Ottawa. I knew that after carrying three large babies, my bladder was going to be up for a challenge with the

journey.

Now, to make a long story short, my husband and I became separated after a violent argument in late 2003. One of the many subjects was my family's reunion which he didn't seem to want us to attend. I had started speaking up against his controlling nature even more after an incident in which he berated me in front of our children. That December, my children and I took exodus from our old residence. With the help of family, friends and community we established ourselves in a bright, peaceful home.

During 2004, we re-established connection with the children's older sister, born of their father's first wife. We also became acquainted with "Lilith", a woman I was well-trained to despise and avoid at all costs.

As 2005 progressed, I started making plans for my children and me to attend the family reunion in late August. Lilith wanted us to visit her home, a ranch of alpacas and llamas just hours from Montreal. The children were very excited about the offer. They also wanted to visit with their older sister again.

All summer we budgeted well and I put to good use my project management skills by making lists and holding weekly status meetings. I was apprehensive about travelling by car and about dragging my children on this journey. They were very excited about going and reminded me about the long-promised train ride.

My fears of tragedy were trying to overshadow the positive aspects of this trip. What if there was an accident? What if one of the kids drowned in the lake? What if? What if? I was sounding like their father. I'm pretty certain this was due to lingering symptoms of my PTSD. I pushed myself to face these fears and vowed to prove them wrong. I did what I could to expect the best, to make sure this was going to be a memorable and special reunion for them. I relied on those lists and meetings as a way to gain control over the fears.

As August drew nearer, e-mails danced back and forth with arrangements for accommodations,

meal plans, transportation and driving directions. I had secured rides for the kids and me in two separate cars with my own siblings. Just like the royal family, we were not going to travel there in one vehicle.

The boys travelled with their uncle, a retired Major who had been to this chalet before and always planned well before any trip. My daughter and I travelled with one of my older sisters and her husband of 39 years. Reflecting on my failed 15-year marriage I noticed their ability for pushing each other's buttons while under stress from being lost. I was wishing they wouldn't do it while driving in a foreign land with piss-poor road signs and precious cargo in the back seat! After some detours and a quick lunch break, we finally made it safely to the chalet. I didn't actually fall to my knees and kiss the ground but I sure was visualizing it!

It rained almost constantly the three days of the reunion. Despite the weather, our host sister and her husband had planned well. She wanted this to be a successful reunion - the best ever. I think she went beyond expectations as she is a vegetarian but arranged for a wild boar on a spit to feed the omnivores in the family. I seem to remember her mentioning this from time to time while scurrying back and forth and giving orders.

The time there with family was blurred by the quiet locale and the misty air. The stress was softened by the plentiful liquid spirits. We caught up with each other's lives as well as those of offspring - and their own wee offspring.

On the morning of the last day, I was feeling a bit ripe and suggested the kids join me for a swim in the lake, to freshen up for the drive into the Land of Lilith. Chalet guests were warned about the aging septic tank so showering and flushing were limited luxuries. So, in my new, modest bathing suit, I gingerly crept into the lake that was fed by a cold water spring. I unintentionally located the chilly outlet and quickly splashed in, swimming slightly away from shore and swishing limbs around to stay afloat and cleanse the rank off of me. Oh, those poor fish!

Soon we dressed and packed our bags. We hugged our family and said our tearful goodbye's. One of my nephews and his girlfriend chauffeured us to the next point of our journey. It was

great to get caught up with their lives and plans for the future while watching the countryside and ferrying across the St. Lawrence.

We waited and even napped in the assigned place for Lilith to come pick us up. I was happy to have made it this far safe and sound. I took the time to air dry my wet hair, to write in my journal about the activities of the past few days and the hopes of the days to come. When she arrived, we all greeted and hugged. We then drove for hours deeper into the countryside.

Almost as soon as we arrived at the ranch, she took us on a tour. The kids were delighted to see their sister again, to meet the llamas, the alpacas, the dogs and cats. They once again got to chat with Lilith's "partner" of 19 years, a quiet and generous man. They spent the next three days connecting with the people, the pets and the large, ranky mammals as well as Lilith's plentiful satellite TV channels. They even got to spend time in the workshop, making felt-covered soaps to take home as souvenirs.

I spent much of my private time writing, walking quietly around the grassy spread, enjoying the peacefulness of the surroundings and the late summer breeze. I engaged in staring contests with the regal yet smelly beasts. I gave quiet thanks for being alive, being with my children and finally learning more about this mystery woman.

Lilith and I had many discussions about someone whose actions had affected all of our lives. The parallels. The sick control. The hidden truths. She had become a stronger woman and very outspoken. She was angry about my experiences and concerned about our safety. I no longer doubted her nor feared the unknown. We had become soul sisters.

On the day before we were to leave for Ottawa, there was a heavy rainstorm. Shortly afterward we saw a large bright rainbow stretching across the valley then another on top in reverse colour pattern. We were all awestruck by this beautiful sight, and to me, this symbolic event.

The next morning we woke early. Lilith's partner was going into the city on business so they arranged that we would ride with him. We ate quickly and made sure our bags were gathered. We

said our goodbyes to Lilith and her daughter, promising to keep in touch. We waved goodbye to the animals.

As we drove through Montreal, we were amazed at the bridges, tall buildings and herds of vehicles compared to our peaceful surroundings just a few hours ago. We were swiftly delivered to the “Gare Centrale” by our gallant chauffeur. More goodbyes ensued.

Finally, we were on board the train. The children were tired out yet excited to finally have that long-promised ride. I settled into my seat, breathed a deep sigh of relief and smiled at them as we began our departure.



Photograph taken August 2005