

Bonnie's Hobby

School had only been underway for a week when I encountered Bonnie in the office.

"Here, put your finger on this, will you?"

She was tying up a large parcel. I put my finger on the knot. "What is it?"

"It's a gift package for Brooke."

"But ... she's only been gone a week!"

Brooke is Bonnie's oldest daughter. She'd left for college the week before. Two hours south. She'd probably be home every other weekend.

"I know. But I miss her. I wanted to send a few of her favourite things.

"OK. So what are you sending?"

"Well, there's a pair of her favourite socks that she left behind. The ones with Math symbols on them. And all those posters of Justin Bieber. And I made some cookies. And there's a noodle casserole ..."

"Wait a minute. You put a casserole in there? Won't it go bad?"

"No, the post office lady assured me that if I spent an extra fifty dollars it might get there tomorrow. And I packed the box with bags of frozen peas."

"But won't ..."

"Brooke loves peas."

There was no arguing with that.

I went in to talk to Val. She was on the phone with Amanda, who had also left for college the week before. It had taken six trips to move all her stuff.

"What? Another seven hundred dollars? Why do you need a La-Z-Boy reclining lounge chair anyway? And it won't even fit in your room!"

I left them to work out the details.

Bonnie had finished tying up the parcel, and was busy writing 'This End Up' next to the arrows she'd already drawn. She looked at me.

"Bill, do you realize that in four years, *all* my girls will be gone? What am I going to do?"

I wanted to tell her how wonderful that could be. But she wouldn't understand until it happened. So instead, I said "You'll just have to get a hobby. You should try to find one now, so you'll be ready". It seemed like the right thing to say.

"Hmmm. You might be right. Any suggestions?"

I thought for a moment. "Well, I find drawing cartoons and writing short stories very relaxing. And Jesse likes to paint garden gnomes ..."

Jesse was my daughter. To relieve the stress of her last year in teachers' college, she painted garden gnomes in her spare time. Although I didn't think she'd have much spare time this year. Elementary education students have a *lot* of work!

She was good at painting gnomes, though. The last one had looked very much like her husband Cole. She kept it in the bathroom. I hadn't known there were bathroom gnomes.

Then I thought of something. "Why don't you try scrapbooking?" I knew lots of people who did that.

"Oh, that would be awful! I'd always be looking at pictures of Brooke and Paige and Jessie, and it would make me sad!"

She had a point. It's not fun when Bonnie is sad. Last year when one of her cats had died, she'd been sad for a week. And she hadn't even liked the cat much. We'd all suffered along with her.

"OK ..." I was thinking hard. "How about photography?"

"I already do that. Besides, my walls are filled with photographs already!"

"Let me guess. Brooke, Paige and Jessie."

"Of course!"

"Darren has a hobby!" Kate had wandered into the office. Kate was always wandering into the office. We suspected she got away with it because her husband was the Principal.

"He's collecting the periodic table."

I asked her to explain.

“Well, he’s trying to collect a pure sample of every one of the ninety-two elements in the periodic table. He has a little cabinet to display them in and everything. He’s very organized about it ... he’s trying to collect them in order”.

“How far has he gotten?”

“He’s up to helium.”

“But ... that’s only two ...”

“I know. But helium is really hard. He keeps it in a little bottle in the cabinet, but every time someone comes over for a visit, he shows them, and he has to open the bottle, and, well ...”

“Uh ... lighter than air!”

“Right. And lithium will be really hard. He doesn’t have any idea where he’s going to get lithium. What the heck is lithium used for, anyway?”

I didn’t have any idea. Batteries? But she wasn’t finished.

“And I have a really cool hobby too. I collect samples of different kinds of barbed wire!”

I hadn’t known there was more than one kind. Wire, and barbs. How complicated could it be?

“There’s lots of different kinds. I don’t have a display case yet, though. My samples are sort of spread out on the bedroom floor for now”.

That explained why Darren was limping every morning. We’d thought it was because his shoes were too tight.

Bonnie was still waiting for ideas. I was grasping at straws. “Well, you could try pottery. We have lots of clay, and there’s a kiln at the school in Hines Creek. I’m sure they’d let you ...”

“Pottery? Sculpture? With clay?? What a great idea!”

Apparently I was a genius. Some people have occasionally told me that. Well, one person. But she *has* to say things like that ... she’s my wife.

And so Bonnie began her new hobby.

She lugged home a fifty pound bag of pottery clay and all the tools to sculpt with. Brooke’s old room became an art studio. We weren’t sure how Brooke felt about that. Maybe she *wouldn’t* be coming up every second weekend.

Two weeks later Bonnie brought her first creation into the office to show everyone. She lovingly placed it on the office counter.

It appeared to be a head. With numerous holes in it.

“It’s a sculpture of Brooke. See? There’s her nose. Such a cute nose. And it’s also a pencil holder. I thought I’d send it to her in her next weekly gift package. It’s for her desk. At least, it will be ...”

At the moment Brooke’s desk was in storage. She shared a dorm apartment with Amanda, whose reclining La-Z-Boy lounge chair was currently stuffed into a corner of Brooke’s room. It hadn’t fit into Amanda’s room, what with the treadmill, 50-inch plasma TV, and wet bar that were already in there.

“It looks ... very nice!” Actually, it did. Once you knew it was Brooke, and you overlooked the several bumps on the face that probably weren’t meant to be warts, it did bear a striking resemblance to her oldest daughter.

“Thanks. I’m doing Paige next.”

She left the sculpture on the counter while she went to look for a box to put it in.

I was in my room when I heard the crash, and the scream. I rushed back to the office. Maybe Tracy had gotten her hair stuck in the photocopier again while trying to fix it. I hated when that happened. The repair man charged us extra for cleaning up the mess.

But no ... Darren was standing by the counter. Bonnie was yelling. “You killed Brooke!”

Yes, there on the floor. In little tiny pieces. The remains of Bonnie’s first attempt at sculpture.

Darren was apologetic. “I didn’t see it! Honest!”

He wasn’t sure what had happened.

But Bonnie had pulled herself together. “It’s OK, Darren. I just overreacted. You didn’t really kill Brooke ...” I think Darren had figured that out. “It was just a sculpture of her I’d made. My first ever sculpture.” There were still a few tears.

But Bonnie continued. “I can make it again. And Jessie wants to try making some things too. Maybe she can decorate your office for you!”

Darren didn’t say anything. How could he? He’d just killed Brooke.

So Bonnie went back to her hobby.

Pretty soon Bonnie and Jessie's creations started appearing around the school.

Bonnie, Jessie and I were in the office one afternoon when Darren appeared in his doorway. "I like the Remembrance Day sculptures. Remembering Hiroshima, right?"

I went in for a look. There were about fifty little atomic bomb explosion sculptures scattered around his office.

Jessie appeared in the doorway. She didn't look happy.

She looked Darren in the eye. She wasn't smiling. "They're mushrooms!"

"Oh, OK" Darren looked embarrassed. "And they're really beautiful mushrooms, Jessie. Thank you!"

A very diplomatic recovery for a Principal. That must be why they paid him the big bucks. But it was a week before Jessie would speak to him again.

Bonnie's sculptures were a little more ... abstract.

There was a big one on the floor outside the staffroom. It looked sort of like a very angry spider. A very angry spider ... with hemorrhoids!

Bonnie claimed it wasn't meant to represent anything real ... it was abstract art ... just an indication of how she was feeling when she'd made it.

I'm glad I hadn't been around when she was feeling like ... that. Poor Glen!

I'd seen abstract art before. Melanie had made an abstract woman from leftover junk as an Art 30 assignment. It was a very angry-looking woman. Angry angry angry! I'd kept out of Melanie's way for a few days after that.

I really liked the sculpture that Bonnie made for my math room. I hung it from wire at the front of the room, and admired it every time I looked up at it. I assumed that it too was an abstract. If so, she must have been feeling pretty mellow when she created it. It was very soothing to look at.

I told Bonnie how much I enjoyed looking at it, and how her abstract art abilities showed a lot of promise.

"It's a horse. And I probably should have given it to Mindy!" She stormed off in a huff.

Things came to a head after Bonnie had been reading about the various types of art. She seemed particularly fascinated by Pop Art.

Pop art involves creating something that represents an everyday object, but taken out of context. It might be a huge Coke can, for example, or three spoons glued to a board. Pop artists could create anything and call it art.

It was Bonnie's first pop art creation that sort of killed her enthusiasm for sculpture.

She'd had to buy another fifty pound bag of clay. It took her three weeks to make.

It appeared in the hallway one morning. It had taken her whole family and their truck to get in to the school and set in place outside the senior high washrooms.

When I first saw it, I wasn't sure what it was. Bonnie enlightened me.

"I was inspired by some flowers I had in my garden last summer. It's a giant crocus!"

OK, I saw it now. It did sort of resemble a crocus. A really, really big crocus. She'd painted it white.

"That's terrific!" I was speaking truthfully. I really did like it. "Are we going to ... uh ... leave it ... here?"

"I didn't know where else to put it. I've used up just about all the hallway space ..."

It was true. There were abstract giraffes outside the office, and what looked to be a very skinny hippopotamus next to the gym. Or maybe it was an otter, I wasn't sure. And there were other abstract artworks scattered everywhere. And all the ledges were lined with Jessie's mushrooms.

"OK, we'll leave your crocus right here. Right across from the washrooms ..."

What neither of us noticed was that, while the sculpture did indeed resemble a crocus, it also bore a striking resemblance to a urinal.

But others noticed.

"Hey! Why is there a giant urinal in the hallway?" That was Mindy.

And unfortunately, the Junior High boys felt that it was pretty funny to have a urinal in the hall. Apparently some of them decided that it needed a little something ... extra.

It was until nearly noon the next day that someone discovered that the crocus sculpture ... or urinal sculpture, depending on your point of view ... contained a small pool of yellow liquid ...

We were pretty sure it was orange juice. But none of us really wanted to find out for sure.

We let Pam handle it.

Bonnie was devastated. “No-one is taking my art seriously! Maybe I should just take up knitting!”

That seemed to be her new plan. It seemed pretty safe. We didn't complain.

Paige and Jessie have been wearing thick knitted blouses and pants ever since. We didn't know you could knit pants!