A Canoer of Shorelines by Anne M. Smith-Nochasak

Anne and I, self- published authors through FriesenPress, both of us rural people, she in Nova Scotia and I in Manitoba, got to know each other on Twitter and decided to exchange books. Anne’s book got lost for a while in our local postal system between our post office and the local substation, and when I did finally find out where it was, I had trouble retrieving it because of spring flooding and water damaged roads. Oh, some of the joys of rural lives!

I soon realized however As I began the journey Anne describes so brilliantly, I soon realized that my experience was an excellent prelude to reading her book that leads to the mystical realism that can be rural life. Here are the lives of two women magically connected through their experiences of living in the same house, in different eras. They experience similar dreams and influences sparked by the rich history and tragedy of a community filled with people as colorful and complex as our two heroines, and all intertwined with the old house and farm at Meadowbrook Acres.

This is a journey of facing life’s many challenges, joys and heartaches, coping with the tragedies, betrayals and disappointments with a strength and determination both admirable and inspiring. Julie’s experience encountering child abuse is a sensitive and realistic portrayal of the ugliness and heart wrenching reality of these situations. The description of Julie’s father’s response to his wife’s death was touching and beautiful. Rachel’s journey seems even more desperate, seen from the distance of her diary and second hand accounts.

The old house is full of ghosts, dreams and mysticism that force itself on any who have lived there; Rachel and Julie are no exception. The story helps the reader realize the thin line between sanity and insanity and describes the struggle of the human condition to remain on the right side of that line. Julie is no different, facing the uncertainty of employment, costs of heating the old house, disintegration of her relationship, struggling to become independent from her parents and on top of everything else, dealing with the spirits of the characters both living and dead that are connected to this house.

Anne’s portrayal of Julie is realistic and believable, so much so that the reader feels that they could just as easily have been reading about their own experiences. Julie is a heroine, entering the story of Meadowbrook Acres at a critical time in its history and probably saving it from destruction. The spirits of the house realize this and crowd in upon her to save them and their home. It eventually becomes what it was meant to be, renovated and its future secured. As far as the people in the story are concerned, what lies ahead is uncertain as it has to be with any of us, but one is left with a feeling of contentment that the story has been told, at least for now.

Thank you Anne for this telling. This is not a book for the faint of heart and it describes deeply and realistically the difficulties and joys of rural living. It portrays a way of life that is disappearing for many in our world of urbanization and needs to be told and retold. The journey into mysticism is fascinating and inspiring for anyone who is interested or indeed has experienced similar events in their lives. I highly recommend this book and I’m looking forward to your next one.

 An honest tale!

Well done Anne!