

## Hiking with Nancy - Where do we go next?

"Where do you want to hike today?" I asked my friend Nancy on the phone.

"I want to go to Crimson Lake sometime this summer, but today we could go to Lacombe Lake," Nancy said. Gord wants some help with the cows this afternoon.

The last time Nancy and I hiked at Crimson Lake was ten years ago. We took a lunch because it was an hour's drive and ten miles around the Lake. We enjoyed the long hike, but were aware of the likelihood of meeting a bear.

Last year, I couldn't go because of Achilles tendon issues, and this year I am recuperating from pneumonia.

*I don't want to let my friend down. I know she would like to go. Besides, I am not sure how long she can walk because of osteoarthritis in her knee.*

I first met Nancy in junior high. I was from a rural school, and she already had friends in Lacombe. In grade twelve, Nancy asked if I wanted to join them hitchhiking to Ponoka, a town twenty miles away during school time. At the graduation party campout at Gull Lake, we wanted more beer in the Bentley bar. Nancy, three other girls, and I expected that since we were of legal age, we would be able to walze into the bar and pick up a twelve pack. The bar owner had another idea and refused to sell it to us because he thought we were already too inebriated. With ripped jeans and bare feet, we made our way back to our campground, made a campfire, told stories, and retreated into our separate nylon tents in the wee hours of the morning.

We didn't see each other after graduation until I was at the Calgary Stampede with my two boys.

"Nancy, is that you?" Nancy yelled from the curb.

I was surprised to see my high school friend.

"Nancy Burris," I said.

"Well, it's Graves now," she said.

"These are my two boys, Aaron and Matthew," I said, pointing to my adult children.

“I have a boy named Aaron, too,” she said.

We discovered that Nancy and Gordon lived three miles down a country road from our house.

“I will call you,” I said.

After that chance encounter, we found out we both love hiking in the countryside, so every week from April to November, we hiked on various trails. The routine started every Monday morning, when we called each other and planned where and when we were going to hike.

Throughout the years, we had plenty to talk about. Gordon had attended Red Deer College with me and became a teacher. They bought Gordon’s parents’ farm, so Nancy farmed with four children in tow, and Gordon taught school in a small town close by. We had traded places. Nancy, the town kid, and I, from a farm, had reversed roles. I enjoyed listening to her stories of birthing calves and riding horses. We caught up on the lives of our school friends and discussed everything from politics to genealogy. I found out she was my fifth cousin, once removed. We shared an aunt from Nova Scotia.

Because I have been sick this spring, we haven’t been able to go for a walk, but I hope we can start small, and walk for an hour— even if we have to cut it short. One step at a time. Maybe we will make it to Crimson Lake or even to Dry Island Buffalo Jump and Big Knife Provincial Park.