

Mary Beth Danielson's

# Prairie Dog Quadrilateral

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*"Hope is the thing with wings." Emily Dickinson  
Advent is November 29th to December 24<sup>th</sup> this year*

Quadrilateral: "How do we know if something is true?"

- Scripture – Whatever document we hold as True. For most Americans, that is the Bible.
- Tradition – The history of how people have handled themselves and structured their comings and goings in situations of ordinary and extraordinary life.
- Reason – The logic of the world around us, i.e. the Sciences.
- Experience – Our own paths through life; what has and has not worked for us.

Dear Friends,

A week ago my cousin Judy, who lived in North Carolina with her husband Dave, near their daughter and her family, went for a walk with the dog. Somehow she fell. The hit to her head was so overwhelming that several days later, she passed away.

My family is reeling.

Judy was the first Anderson cousin of what would be the eleven big-headed grandbabies of Esther and Joe Anderson. Joe was one of the sons of the founding members of Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Ludington, Michigan. His parents emigrated from Sweden to live in a place where the land was good enough and the dang “nearly Catholic” Lutherans could be held at bay.

Joe married Esther. Joe and Esther had three kids. Those kids had kids, and Judy was the first of us. WWII was over August 1945 -- May 1946 (hah) was the beginning of the American Baby Boom. Judy was born that May. My sister was born June 2 ... and we were off.



*Judy is the smallest of us, in the middle, with the awesome big smile.*

We all lived in the same town and went to the same church. If we kids ran wild in the church, we were related to EIGHT(!) adults who felt free to tell us to slow down and behave. I could tell you now which cousins slid down the church’s front steps bannister and which ones didn’t and how that fairly accurately predicted the trajectory of our respective adult lives.



Judy and my sister didn’t slide on bannisters. Their dresses stayed clean as they coped with the weird, high expectations around them by disappearing into far corners together. They would stay best friends until my sister died in 1989. One of the first reasons I liked my cousin Judy so much was that she kept Karen occupied so that she couldn’t bother me.

Karen and Judy were the kinds of girls who did their homework, learned how to play musical instruments, and were leaders in the church youth group. They didn’t have boyfriends which set a fortunate precedent for all Anderson cousins, i.e. that adolescence is for more than puppy love. We didn’t all go to college, but most of us did. And those who didn’t still had serious goal-oriented heads on their shoulders. We weren’t here to be cute. We were here to take care of things and be responsible and not whine. Judy and Karen set that path for us.

Anderson cousins who did go to college brought their college friends home for weekends and holidays; we went to schools where there were students from around the country and even around the globe. I knew where Iran was early on because Judy was friends at the University of Michigan with a girl from Iran. It seemed ordinary to me for years, that at family events, there would be one young woman with beautiful dark hair and eyes. Remember, we were and lived in a ghetto of blonds; Judy's friend was one of the first people in my world to break that barrier.

Judy married Dave, another person who was a new-to-me type. Dave reads the PDQ and I hope he is laughing when I call him my first "Geek". He had had a PhD in Science Stuff (bio-chemistry I believe). When I brought home my own geeky husband years later, I was possibly over-proud that my husband could easily talk with Judy's husband. I'd found an egghead all of my own.



To this day, fairly often Len will tell me about some article about science or railroad engineering or something odd about steam engines – that he read in an article that Dave emailed to Len. It's like these two guys, both married to Anderson granddaughters, found a common thread that has nothing to do with

Anderson granddaughters; one of those spectacular serendipities of human life.

In our adult lives Judy and I didn't often cross paths, but when we did, we had a simpatico. I was a writer making very little money but still devoted to this thing I do. Judy did nature photography. She took thousands of photos in her life of trees and water, flowers and landscapes. Some week when he isn't as overwhelmed as this one, maybe Dave will email some of her art to me, and I will show it to you.

I saw her work on the walls in her home. She would take photographs that made you feel as if you were the bumblebee that just crawled into a universe of light-drenched pink velvet; or the ladybug swimming in a bright aster; trees in morning fog looming like dreams; she showed us the impossibly delicate muscle of the veins in leaves. Judy found worlds within worlds and took pictures there to bring back to the rest of us. When we talked about this once, that both of us had found these ways of seeing our worlds, we commented with some humor that we were, in our family, more than a little odd. And that it was definitely related to the ways we had learned to say and live our faith to ourselves and among others.



Judy also, and I'm not sure if she ever realized this, was one of the people in my adult life who helped me understand my strong feelings about my childhood. I asked once, "Was my dad as strict as I thought he was?" She answered, "I was always nervous at your house that he might turn and look at me and be disappointed." We talked about my family and hers. Neither of us wanted to shred or judge, we just wanted to understand who we were. Judy helped me figure it out.

As those who knew her much better; who were her close family and friends and neighbors all would all attest to - Judy was kind and generous. Her house was calm, painted with pale colors, filled with her serene photographs, open to others. She was faithful. She laughed easily and when I see her in my minds eyes, she is smiling and asking a question, her head cocked just the slightest bit to the side, a gesture that disarmed as she paid attention to whomever was in front of her.

I found this quote by Henri Nouwen, a theologian of our time. This is my cousin Judy.

*"A waiting person is a patient person. The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something there will manifest itself to us."*

Today is the first day of Advent, which those of us related to Christian faith, know is the season for waiting and for hope.



Or, for all of us in the northern hemisphere, this is the season of shorter days, less light, more darkness, deepening cold. Of Artic clippers, sleet, chill, and way too much inane stuff to do.

So, thinking of the unexpected, awful, way-too-soon loss of Judy, I guess I have just this. Hope is not where we are going; it is the path we take to get there. It isn't questions answered, it is questions asked. It isn't presents in our lap, a to-do list all done, our lives in good order. It is the path of seeing, compassion, longing for peace, yearning for a good home for children. It is a way of seeing our chaotic and violent world from the perspective inside the swirl of a flower's beauty.

*Wishing you a week with light in it...*

*Mary Beth*

