



DISHPAN HANDS
SHEILA QUINN

Ever find yourself somewhere, where you sat looking around yourself, maybe even a little numb, wondering, “What the heck am I doing here? What is the universe’s grand plan for this moment? Is there a higher purpose to how in this very moment I could be anywhere else? I could be in pajamas for Pete’s sake. I could be eating a bowl of soup, or cookies fresh out of the oven. This is a Saturday morning. I could be anywhere else but here.”

If you’re a person who tends to be on the active side, community-wise, you’ve probably

had this situation play out more times than you can shake a craft sale flyer at. You’ve likely been at any variety of fundraiser, volunteered your time for some event at your child’s school, or maybe that your kids aren’t even involved in any more ... you just didn’t say no.

Community involvement is so important. Putting ourselves out there is important too, to contribute to the flow of energy and vitality in a community. Hard work in planning, and yearly traditions (especially around this time of the year) often means that plans pay off, and the usual suspects attend said event. If it’s a sale, then perhaps they look forward to a certain kind of homemade goods each year, perfect for stocking stuffers, or for a teacher’s Christmas gift.

There is that moment though, that one where you think, “Why did I decide to do this again?” You look around yourself for some glimmer of the universe’s plan. Your inner accountant is doing the math on how much your gas cost, and your contribution to the day ... and perhaps you already know

you will likely head home with a day that not only meant you weren’t sitting on the couch, relaxing on a Saturday in the sweatpants your loved one hates, but that feel so right.

Around you there is hustle and bustle, and people are setting up and getting ready, so you watch their excitement, and hope that they do well. You bump into your one good friend at the event, and the knowing glance back in her eyes says that she is feeling exactly the same way as you are.

Sometimes it’s not even your own event, but something you decided to become involved in because the greater meaning of it would reveal itself at some divine moment in the day. Peering around you though, you don’t spot it. You see a ton of interesting things, but know that today is not a shopping day — there are too many events in the coming weeks to afford even a little spending. The extra coffee you picked up on the way to the event was perhaps a bit much. You are grateful for the bottle of water someone brings around to all kioskers.

It’s not that you haven’t “bailed” before. You’ve had mo-

ments where you just knew it couldn’t happen. Such as that child who barfed all over his bed during the night, and was feverish and still sick, or the last minute babysitter cancelation, and even though there was a tug on your wish to honour your commitment, you were oddly more comfortable dealing with gastro detail than at the event in question....and you felt guilty for that. You knew you weren’t irreplaceable — there were plenty of others on hand. But, you felt guilty that you were off of the hook, guilty because you were off of the hook because of a sick child. Oh, you felt like a terrible mother, and that little guilty creep hung around your conscience all day. You were relieved when a phone call at the end of the day said that either it was terribly quiet, or that extra help showed up and you weren’t needed.

There it is, that oozing, sticky word — guilt. It just sucks the sunshine away ... seeps into our worry lines, crow’s feet and whatever that great big dent is between your eyebrows.

Don’t get me wrong, a sense of duty, and enthusiasm for

community events is extremely important in life, and in community vitality. Even if typically the same small groups of people organize the same things, in the same places.

At the end of an experience like this (the one where you start peering around and looking for silver linings hidden under tables and chairs, in the chatter of the day, in the articles on tables, some of them hand-made, others carefully assembled, all of them connected to some form of hope and progress, and in some cases tradition) sometimes the silver linings swell up, they come in the form of regulars, or of someone home visiting, of news from friends, acquaintances and loved ones, and we go home feeling that our sense of fulfillment outweighed our longing for jogging pants, comfort movies and the couch. Even if it’s just a little.

So, for all of you out there preparing, or who have endured and managed your events for the year, you deserve thanks and gratitude, and I hope the silver linings glow. Oh, and every once in a while, spend some time on the couch.

Still something magical in a “Thank You”



THE SCOOP
MABLE HASTINGS

It hasn’t been the best of weeks. As the Director of the Missisquoi North Volunteer Centre’s Youth Programs, there are times when a variety of happenings can leave one feeling overwhelmed.

That is the kind of week I’d been having with what seemed like one thing after another and deadlines seemed to pile up like a nagging pile of dirty laundry with other things getting in the way.

It was Friday morning and as I sorted through the pile of paper on my desk and prepared my “to do” list, I was feeling a little down.

From the youth centre window I saw a group of elementary aged students descending the hill heading in our direction; clearly on a mission. The pessimist who had come to nestle inside of me for the day surfaced and I couldn’t help but wonder what was coming. In

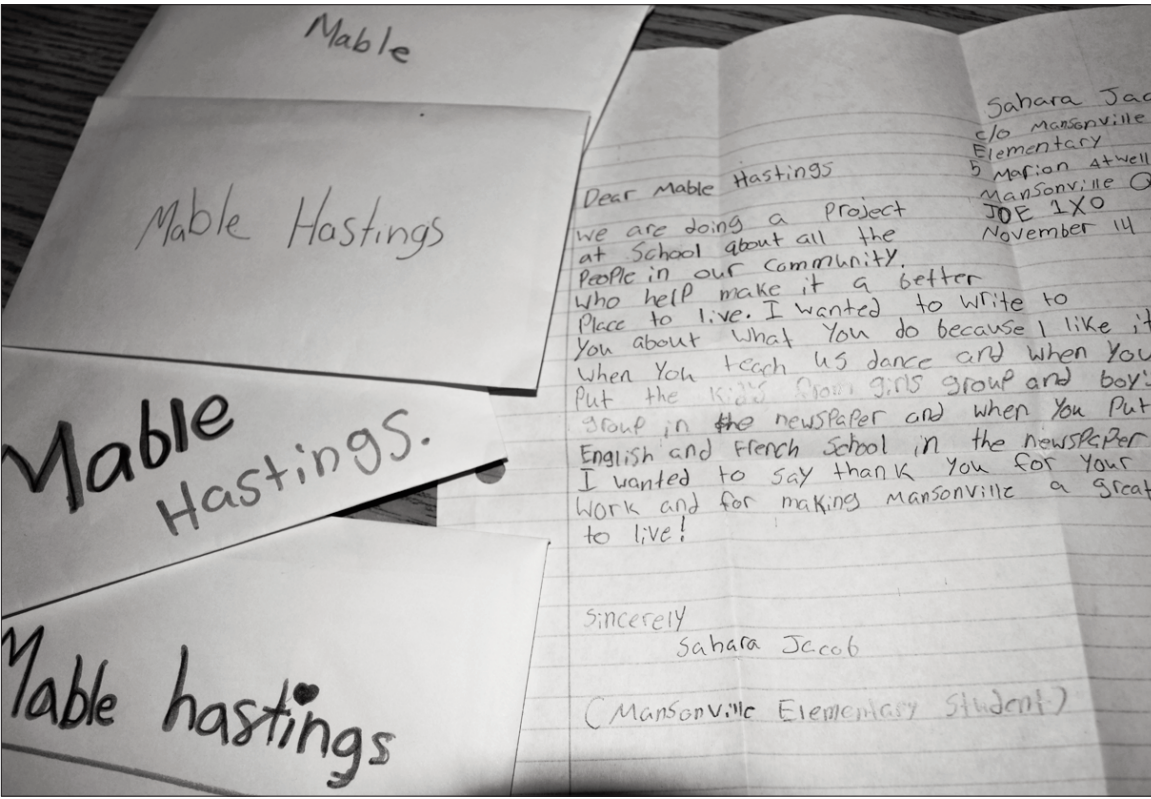
moments, the banging of snow filled boots and the sound of giggles and then, a knock on my door.

Laura Teasdale, whose claim to fame ranges from drama and music teacher to actress and all-around wonderful person, stood smiling with a troop of beaming youth all around her. Laura explained that she has been working with the students at Mansonville Elementary School on a project that focuses on “community.” As a finale, she encouraged the children to write to people in the community that they feel make it a better place.

“Today,” said Laura, “We are delivering the letters the students wrote, in person to the people in Potton that the kids chose to write to and, you are one of those people.”

With a cheerful good-bye and smiles wider than those they were wearing as they scurried down the hill, they were off to deliver other such letters, their laughter blowing in the November wind with the snowflakes as they fell.

A hot cup of tea in hand, I now sit with the letters given to me. In the letters I am thanked for dancing with the youth, for writing for The Record newspaper and putting in stories and photos about “them” and others in my community. I am told that I work hard and make a dif-



Some of the “thank you” letters that Mansonville elementary students wrote that they delivered last Friday.

ference in contributing to making Mansonville being a great place to live! One of the students even thanked me for the difference I am making in the World!

And, while sometimes it feels the world expects a lot and that work can be demanding, one student added a “ps” to the bottom of her note that was oh so respectful bringing a smile

to my face...

“Please write me back... if you have the time.”

My teacup is almost empty now but my heart feels full. Happy tears fall from what can best be described as Mr. Scrooge getting a second lease on life. The demands of a work day, the realities of life’s everyday priorities can all be soothed by a “thank you” and when it comes

from some beautiful kids, well, for me...that is just a bonus!

Thank you Laura Teasdale and the students at Mansonville Elementary School for making my day! I will do my best to “pay it forward” but most of all to remember to count my blessings as I continue to make a difference not only in Mansonville but in the World as well!