

Author reflects on Beaverlodge's Mennonite heritage during motorcycle tour

By Brad Quarin
Town & Country News

Ontario-based author Liz Jansen returned to her family's former home of Beaverlodge Monday, sharing her exploration of her Mennonite heritage during a motorcycle book tour.

Her stop at Beaverlodge Public Library, where she signed copies of her memoir *Crash Landing*, also coincided with Mennonite Heritage Week.

"Coming here and seeing and being on the land (is important), and Beaverlodge is a big part of ... re-connecting with my roots," she said.

"This is where (my family) started."

During the visit, Jansen also participated in an "honour parade of motorcycles" from Grande Prairie to Beaverlodge.

Jansen's dad only lived in Beaverlodge until he was two, but her family arrived in the fledgling Peace country community all the way back in 1926, as refugees from Ukraine. Her grandfather is buried near the Beaverlodge airport, at a Mennonite cemetery now hidden by overgrown trees.

Records of who was buried at the cemetery were lost and the grounds were forgotten until rediscovered decades ago, Jansen said.

(A sign marking the location of the Beaverlodge River Mennonite Cemetery was erected in 1977).

After Beaverlodge the family went to southern Alberta and Jansen was born in 1954, she said.

Jansen described the church as centred on beliefs in peace,



Author Liz Jansen embarked on an "honour parade of motorcycles" from Grande Prairie to Beaverlodge where her grandfather is buried.

non-resistance and charity.

However, she said her personal response to the Mennonite Church as a child was that it was "fear-based," emphasizing eternal punishment for sin.

Jansen said she left the church, got married and became a nurse,

keeping her Mennonite heritage hidden from others.

However, at 50 she said she began to "wake up" and became interested in how "understanding how the stories we were told shaped us."

At that age, she also became re-



Jansen gave copies of her books (reflecting on her Mennonite heritage in Beaverlodge) to reader Frank Lowen.

(Photos by Brad Quarin)

acquainted with another key piece of her roots - motorcycles.

She loved riding motorcycles since she was 16 on the farm and describes it as "very spiritual" to her.

"You're out there and demonstrating you're open to what's around you and your connection with God," she said.

"That connection is there, and I feel it more when I'm on my motorcycle."

During her first motorcycle tour in 2014, intending to visit lands her family had been, she experienced an accident in southern Alberta.

The crash gave her time for

introspection, she said.

The accident partly inspired her book title, but *Crash Landing* also references her grandparents' "many" crashes throughout their lifetimes.

"They were the ones who showed me how to deal with adversity, and those strengths resided in me because they showed me that," Jansen said.

"I did need their strength, their faith and those values they had that I always honoured and found so important.

"It was re-connecting with my roots that made me realize who I was."

Two charged after stolen goods found in Clairmont

On Aug. 27, members of the Western Alberta District Rural Crime Reduction Unit (RCRU) located and arrested two suspects in relation to a rural crime spree.

The spree had occurred over a period of approximately 10 days.

"These arrests were the result of targeted effort to locate the suspects after RCRU members were able to link several incidents that occurred in the northeast area of the County of Grande Prairie," said the RCRU's Cpl. Chris Power.

Power said residents reported "multiple events involving the same vehicle and suspect descriptions."

RCMP located the pair at a campsite in Greenview, where they recovered a stolen pickup truck, a stolen travel trailer, a stolen quad and thousands of dollars worth of stolen property.

Following the arrest, police executed a search warrant at a storage unit in Clairmont.

In Clairmont, they recovered a significant quantity of stolen property believed to have been obtained from multiple rural break and enters that occurred over the past several weeks.

Jeremi Daniel Riopka, 30, and Tabatha Whitney Willier, 23, (both from Grande Prairie) have been charged with a total of 24 Criminal Code offenses.

Charges include multiple counts of possession of stolen property, multiple counts of



Stolen property seized in Clairmont and Greenview include generators, pressure washers, air compressors, power tools, a gun safe and survey equipment. Victims of recent property crime who believe some of their property may have been recovered should contact RCRU at 780-831-2382.

(Photo supplied)

failure to comply with recognizance and possession of break-in instruments.

Riopka was also charged with resisting arrest and assault with a weapon after attempting to evade arrest.

In addition, the suspects were also charged with assault with a weapon after a rural homeowner and his dog were bear sprayed after confronting two people near his property on Aug. 24.

Police anticipate that several additional charges will be laid in upcoming days in relation to the search of the storage unit.

Willier and Riopka had previously been charged by RCRU after being found in a stolen

truck on Aug. 11 and were out on bail at the time of their arrest.

Willier and Riopka have been remanded into custody for Grande Prairie Provincial Court on Sept. 9.

"We strongly encourage residents to report crime and suspicious activity in rural Alberta so we can identify specific areas where a spike in crime may be occurring and focus our efforts on identifying, arresting, and prosecuting those responsible," Power said.

RCRU is also requesting assistance to identify the owners of a large portion of the stolen property. Recovered items include generators, pressure washers, air compressors, power tools, a gun safe and survey equipment.

Victims of recent property crime who believe some of their property may have been recovered should contact RCRU at 780-831-2382.

Sgt. Kristopher Kyle, RCRU supervisor, said in June the RCRU covers an area from Whitecourt to the Northwest Territories, which can be beneficial to track offenders who cross the areas of multiple detachments.

The RCRU overlaps in territory with 20 detachments, including Grande Prairie Rural's and Beaverlodge's, Kyle said.

The RCRU also works more undercover and can follow a suspect into British Columbia, he added.