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Mary Zika - Warming Up in Seldovia

by Tamara Blodgett



A native of the ultra small town of Orr, Minnesota, Mary Zika is no stranger to small towns. With a population of a scant two hundred souls, Mary enthused, "This <Seldovia> is a boom town!" Having just shared a "teleconference" Thanksgiving with her large, extended family of six siblings, she was languishing in our wet and warm fall while the extended family experiences negative twenty-five in her hometown. Weather aside, the similarities of small town life appeal to Mary, she feels like she has "come home." Interestingly enough, owners of the Seaport Cottages, Missy and Gary Corradi grew up just forty-five miles from Zika. This welcome coincidence helped cement the feelings of welcome she has received.

A lifelong bachelorette, having brushed the altar twice in her life, Mary is firmly "married" to her position at Susan B. English serving as the special services teacher. Zika mentioned that it has been a refreshing change from her decade long job teaching special service students with the dual challenge of being emotionally disturbed. Recently, she taught at Point Hope, Alaska, just a couple of degrees north of the Arctic Circle.

Ethnic diversity key to Mary...

Mary feels strongly about her ethnicity, happy to be a mix of different nationalities. Having done her research on her family tree, she was happy to find that she was a portion Chippewa Indian of the Algonquin Nation, Bohemian and French. With that happy combination, she says she fits in wherever she goes. She became very interested in her culture as she came of age during a time when public consciousness was heightened and

people became interested in their collective histories. Although Mary is at least thirty-five percent Chippewa, she was raised in a traditional "American" family all practicing Catholics. As time has moved on, Mary feels religion continues to evolve for her on a personal level. She prides herself on allowing everyone his or her personal religious pursuit. Her family embraced people's individuality and shunned the 'lumping together' of groups of people tied to their race or religious bent. She has carried this moderate liberal attitude with her, which has been the key to her adaptability in a multitude of different situations. Mary's self-description is apt, "I am a bubbly, down-to-earth, and outgoing person."

Too close for comfort...!

An interesting story Mary told of a 'Polar Bear stalking' occurred while she lived there. Zika was taking her trash out to the community dumpster just before eight in the morning. Gusting winds were howling with near-blinding snow swirling all around her. She used the tundra as a marker from the short distance from her house to the dumpster. Later, she took off around town, "running" errands in near blizzard conditions. Having arrived at the local store, she purchased her groceries, when the clerk casually asked Mary who had given her the ride she replied, "No one." The clerk's eyes widened in surprise. She then told Mary some of the men of the town were trying to trap a fifteen foot Polar Bear all day that was spotted by her home's community dumpster at eight o'clock that morning. Mary thought she would have a heart attack on the spot, having unknowingly and effectively "fed the bear" with her trash leftovers of the morning.

A self-professed "eccentric" our differences in Seldovia are not frowned upon but accepted. Mary feels like she has been included and invited. A clear favorite is the local knitting club. There is always something fun to do when her busy schedule allows. Company waits at home in the form of Buddy and Sweetie, two devoted cats that Zika rescued in Minnesota during some sixty below weather. Overall, a quite night at home with the cats and the cookbook holds appeal for Mary. She has a fine rapport with her students, having thirty-two nieces and nephews as practice, she very well should!