

A DIFFERENT PATH

“Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” Charles Schulz. So read the homemade wall hanging above Becky’s sewing machine. Some have attributed the quote to Mark Twain, while others say something similar goes back as far as Confucius. Becky first heard the creator of Peanuts say it so that’s who she credited.

Ever since she was a little girl, Becky always traveled her own path. Though it could be lonely at times, she relished the time to create and quilt. Out of school, she came to a crossroads in pursuing a career. Her love of quilts overcame the seemingly unrealistic side of making a living at the craft.

Her dad built an addition onto their log house that sat on ten acres off a main county road. Becky worked hard, filling the addition with lots of quilts and fabric projects. The people in their small town admired her creativity and would occasionally purchase some things. With easy access from the state highway that crossed the county, tourists would frequently visit the farm and

Becky's Quilt Shop. This led to some sales to add to the local business. Overall, though, the harvest of sales was slim. Still, Becky did not falter in her goal.

One day, a dark car drove up to her little log studio. A lady got out of the passenger door, and a big man got out of the driver's side. The lady entered the shop and the man stood outside by the front door. Becky and the lady exchanged pleasantries and then the lady browsed through Becky's creations.

After about an hour, the lady came up to Becky and asked, "How much would you want for everything?"

"Uh ... uh ... everything?"

"Yes," answered the lady.

"Um ... gosh, I don't know," said Becky. "I've never thought about selling everything."

"Are you interested in selling everything?"

"Why ... uh ... sure."

"Okay. I tell you what. Robert and I will go get a bite to eat, and we'll come back. Do you think you could have a price in a couple of hours?"

“I ... I should be able to,” answered Becky.

Becky called her mom and dad and told them what was going on. Together they organized and came up with a total price.

When the lady returned, Becky gave her what price she wanted for everything. The lady, whom Becky later came to know as Martha Billingsley, did not hesitate at all.

“I’ll send a van to pick up everything tomorrow morning,” said Martha. “You do beautiful work.”

“Thank you very much,” said Becky.

Flush with new capital, Becky began rebuilding her inventory with all kinds of projects, some that she hadn’t thought possible with lean harvests.

One afternoon about a year later, Becky’s mom walked into her studio and handed her an envelope.

“A special courier delivered this while you were in town, Becky,” said her mom.

She opened the elegant envelope very carefully and then unfolding the fine parchment inside, she began to read:

Dear Miss Sloan,

You are cordially invited to attend a ceremony in the White House that features the First Lady's interest in Americana.

We are also going to be honoring some of the artisans who have contributed to the new collection on display.

We are pleased to announce that you have been chosen as one of those we will be honoring.

I have enclosed a card that lists the date and time for the festivities, as well as my contact information. Please give me a call at your earliest convenience so we may go over your travel and lodging arrangements.

Sincerely yours,

Martha Billingsley

Special Assistant to the First Lady

Becky just sat there with tears streaming down her face.

“What is it, Becky?” asked her mom. “Is it bad news?”

“Um ..., no ... no. It’s good ... good news.”

“What is it?”

“Remember that lady that bought everything that I had made – Martha? Well, she is a Special Assistant to the First Lady of the United States.”

“She is? Wow, that’s something.”

“This is an invitation to come as a guest to the White House for a special celebration. The First Lady is honoring artisans from across the country who best portray her interest in Americana. And ... and ... I’ve been chosen as one of those they are honoring.”

Her mom gave her a great big hug and said, “That’s wonderful, Becky. I’m so proud of you. When is it? ... We’ll have to do some shopping. A new dress, some luggage, a hat – do they still wear hats to something like that? Oh, there’s so much to do.”

Becky just rolled her eyes.

Mom and Dad began to spread the word locally with the original social media platforms – the beauty salon and the hardware store, respectfully. The local hometown newspaper picked up the word and did an in-depth article on Becky’s Quilt Shop with a follow-up to be done on Becky’s experience at the White House later.

When the big day came to leave for Washington, D.C., a crowd of about fifty people came to the farm to bid her adieu. Martha had everything well organized with the hotel and escort services to the White House. She even arranged for a special tour of the historic sites for all those being honored.

When Becky walked into the room where many of her quilts were hanging, her hands began to tremble. She thought to herself, “It’s a good thing I’m not trying to do any hand quilting right now.”

The return trip home proved a little more relaxing as Becky was no longer filled with anxious anticipation. Sitting back and enjoying the scenic countryside, she did, however, often silently reminisce on the scene where she walked into the formidable room where her quilts hung in the White House. Getting to meet the First Lady and

experience the dinners and everything else – well, she would never forget it.

Walking into the studio of Becky's Quilt Shop, she looked at all the new projects hanging on the walls. As she sat at her sewing machine, she looked up and saw the wall hanging, "Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life." Charles Schulz.

The publicity generated from Becky's honor generated a whole new level of business for the quilt shop. Local traffic (something like that is a big deal in a small town) mushroomed and people who had never done any quilting were eager to learn. The Chamber of Commerce donated space on a billboard along the main tourist thoroughfare featuring Becky and her White House honor.

Through it all, Becky remained quiet and still a little shy. She knew that she would always work hard in her love of quilting. She thanked God every day for His gift and the path given for her to walk.

Not everyone, of course, will have success on the same path that she did, but Becky always reminded herself, "You never know who that next customer walking in the door will be."

