



# Cathedral Script

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## **ST MARY'S SNETTISHAM AND CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, MONTREAL**

*By Ann Elbourne*

### **Fall 2007: Focus on Architecture**

This issue takes a look at the history of our church buildings and furnishings, and how they influence our experience of liturgy; a worldwide worship community that exists without the need for buildings at all; and an interview with the man who has taken care of our cathedral for two decades. We hope you will enjoy this rich autumn harvest, and find in it food for thought!

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When the Cathedral was completed in 1859, its neo-Gothic style was newly fashionable, replacing the Palladian and neo-classical architecture which had been popular until the early 1800s. It has been suggested that more Gothic architecture was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries than had been built in the Middle Ages!

The first neo-Gothic church in Montreal was Notre-Dame Basilica, built in 1824, but on the whole neo-Gothic was the style associated with English Protestant churches and with government buildings such as the Houses of Parliament. In contrast, most French Canadians favoured the neo-Baroque style, partly because Monseigneur Ignace Bourget actively sought to dissociate the Catholic faith from the Gothic revival style.

Consequently, Marie Reine du Monde, begun in 1875, is modeled on St Peter's in Rome.

Frank Wills and Thomas Scott, the architects of Christ Church Cathedral, modeled their design on St Mary's parish church in Snettisham, a small village on England's Norfolk coast. The eastern counties are full of tiny villages dominated by enormous churches built by grateful wool merchants and landowners who were making their fortunes out of the wool trade in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Francis Fulford, the first bishop of Montreal, had a parish in Cambridgeshire, the county just south of Norfolk, so it is a pleasant conceit that he might have visited Snettisham. Certainly he would be familiar with many of the Gothic village churches dotting the flat green landscape of Eastern England.

Wills and Scott both emigrated from England where they were familiar with the ideas of the Ecclesiologists propounded in the 1830s by Augustus Pugin and a group of Cambridge undergraduates known as the Cambridge Camden Society. Author of *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, Pugin was a devotee of 14<sup>th</sup> century Gothic architecture which he considered the true Christian form. He believed that architects should make a close first-hand study of medieval buildings in order to recapture the "religious perfection of the

Middle Ages”. A member of the Camden Society wrote, “We know that (medieval) Catholick (sic) ethics gave rise to Catholick architecture; may we not hope that, by a kind of reverse process, association with Catholick architecture will give rise to Catholick ethics.?” Wills was himself a member of the New York Ecclesiological Society and wrote a book called *Ancient Ecclesiastical Architecture and Its Principles Applied to the Wants of the Church at the Present Day*. In keeping with ecclesiological principles, Wills copied Snettisham parish church for his designs of two Christ Church Cathedrals, the first in Fredericton, (completed in 1853), the second in Montreal, (completed in 1859, after his death).

I have always been curious about Snettisham, so when I was in England this past summer I seized the opportunity to visit the church one beautiful Sunday morning. We approached the village through lush green fields where fat white sheep were contentedly grazing. The village is quintessentially English. Its curious name is Anglo-Saxon, meaning Snaet’s homestead. It is recorded in Domesday Book and many of its houses look medieval, their weathered brick walls a perfect backdrop for pink hollyhocks and riotous cottage gardens.

The church is perched on a slight hill, just outside the village. Built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – the masons’ signatures can be seen at the top of the pillars – it was almost complete when the Black Death struck the village, killing most of the workers. When the sickness receded, the houses were burnt down to purge the village of the plague and new homes were built a little distance away, thus isolating the church.

It was a strange feeling to walk around the church, so alike and yet unlike Montreal’s Cathedral. The spire with its belfry, the triple-arched porch, the large east window, steep roof, clerestory windows, Decorated style arches, windows and turrets are all there. However, St Mary’s church is set in a typical English churchyard, sheltered from the North Sea gales by tall old trees and surrounded by tumbled gravestones whose inscriptions are too old and weathered to

be legible. The church is shorter than the Cathedral because the chancel was burned down around 1700 and not replaced. There is only a ruined buttress left of the original structure. When you go inside you see that the church ends at the crossing and so the altar and East Window are much closer to the congregation than ours. St Mary’s is also less elaborately decorated than the cathedral. The pillars, for example, are plain and there are no gargoyles. Our baptistery is their vestry, containing, among other documents, pictures of Fredericton and the first register of marriages written on parchment which is dated 1682. Some of the plainness of the church is due to Henry VIII and his minister Thomas Cromwell who forced the parishioners to whitewash over the painted walls. The churchwarden told me the story of the magnificent but clawless medieval brass eagle lectern. Apparently, it originally had rubies on its feet. When Thomas Cromwell ordered a visitation of the church, the canny villagers buried the eagle in a farmyard. When the English church reverted to Catholicism under Queen Mary, the eagle was dis-

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Ann Elbourne

**St. Mary’s Snettisham** is easily mistaken for Christ Church Cathedral. Ann Elborne visits the church, which the architects used as a model for our cathedral.



Have you noticed that Al, our senior Cathedral verger, doesn't wear a tie? His reason demonstrates well the hazards of his job. He hadn't been verger for long when he was approached for money. When he refused to give a hand-out the man grabbed his tie and nearly choked him.

However, Al survived, and has now spent nearly 20 years caring for the Cathedral building, dealing with visitors and supervising the many services, concerts and other events which take place here. Before joining the Cathedral staff he was at St Peter's for 11 years and St Edward's House, also for 11 years. Although his first job was in retail merchandising, Al says he has always been involved in the church. He was a boat boy and server at St John's: a trouble maker, he claims, but much valued because he was the only server willing to get up at 5:30 for the early service.

That ability to get up early stands him in good stead now, as his day at the Cathedral normally starts around 7 a.m. when he opens the doors wide to let in the cool early morning air and prepares the altar for the Eucharist.

His first years at the Cathedral were particularly hectic because he joined us during the period of the development when a major renovation of the Cathedral and its offices was under way. The Cathedral was supported by pillars while the shopping centre below was being built. He still remembers the piles of plaster dust

and mud which had to be cleaned out of the church and the noise and vibration of the heavy construction machines.

Maintenance is easier now. Al says he "still swings a mop occasionally", but he injured his back 3 years ago moving the harpsichord, so most of the cleaning and lifting is now done by the junior vergers and volunteers who do things like cleaning the brass. "Volunteers," says Al, "are very important. You have to respect them." Respect, patience, and organization are the keys to Al's success as a verger. It is his responsibility to plan events, including the daily services. He co-ordinates with head server, George Deare, the clergy and the musicians. Everything has to be thought out in advance, so that events run smoothly without mistakes. People ask him "Why are you always ahead?" Al's answer is "You have to be, you have to be ready for last minute changes. You have to be patient and make it as good as you can for the public." "You can't argue with a priest," he adds with a twinkle.

I asked him about the verger's ceremonial robes. He replied that dressing-up is part of his role. He is the same person with or without his robes. They don't make him particularly proud.

Patience and respect are also key to dealing with the many visitors from around the world. He has to be a fount of information: about Anglicanism, about the history of the Cathedral and about Montreal. He has

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEWS

By William Converse

For the first 1000 years of Christianity, churches did not have pews. The term “pew” is derived from ME *pewe* [Old French *puie*, meaning a balcony or balustrade from the Latin *podia*, plural of podium, balcony] the Latin podium, a seat raised up above floor level. This etymology suggests that pews were a medieval innovation.

Traditional seating arrangements in churches were originally designed to fulfil a number of functions other than simply providing a convenient place to sit down. Pews restricted movement and thereby kept the people in their place. They served to maintain existing social hierarchies and to perpetuate social and class distinctions. Many English parish churches still have their Squire’s pews. A few churches like St. Martin’s in the Fields in London even have a Royal Pew, as does the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Quebec City, which was modeled on St. Martin’s in the Fields. Pews also reflected and reinforced the ingrained individualism characteristic of Protestantism from its beginnings in the 16th century.

We have inherited these seating arrangements and tend to accept them without question. Today, however, worship space needs to be much more flexible, for example, to allow for the introduction of liturgical dance and the use of the new media.

In an article in *The Montreal Anglican* (June/July 2007) about the Taizé Pilgrimage, the editor noted that l’Église St-Alphonse was chosen for its size and its flexibility: “they removed all their pews.” It is perhaps time, then, that we re-examined the place of pews in our churches.

In the early centuries of Christianity, seats were provided for the presbyters in the apse of the basilicas and

the bishop also had his chair there (Latin, *cathedra*, from which the expression *ex cathedra* derives). The early Roman basilicas were originally secular buildings. These were later adapted for both Jewish and Christian worship. The congregation stood in the nave or the aisles or sat on stone benches along the walls.

Because the synagogue and church have common origins, both architecturally, liturgically and musically, we begin the brief history of pews with the seating arrangements in the synagogue of the 1st century BCE and the 1st century of the CE, in what is now referred to as the Second Temple Period, which ended in 70 CE with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. In Palestine, synagogues were called the “house of assembly,” (Greek, *synagôgê*.) This term referred to the building rather than to the assembly itself. In the Diaspora, the preferred term was “the house of prayer,” (Greek, *proseuchê*).

Stone benches and columns are ubiquitous among archaeological finds of ancient synagogues and early Christian church buildings. The stone benches were either placed along two or three walls of the main assembly hall of the synagogue, principally along the eastern and western walls, or they ran along the pillars. (Portable wooden benches and mats were also used.)

The synagogue discovered in 1998 in the ruins of the Maccabean winter palace, near Jericho, and dated between 50-70 BCE, had a bench that ran along the pillars of the basilica-shaped hall. However, the Gamla synagogue, located in the southern Golan, dating from the latter part of the 1st century BCE and the first half of the 1st century CE, the oldest known synagogue discovered in Israel, probably best illustrates the layout of a synagogue building of the NT era. It was an elongated hall (20 x 16 m), with its principal entrance to the west, facing Jerusalem. The main hall was divided by four rows of

columns into a central nave (9.3 x 13.4 m), surrounded by four aisles. Four rows of basalt benches, enough to seat 300 people, surrounded all four sides of the main hall. (It was destroyed by the Romans in 67 CE.)

The very design of the Palestinian synagogue, with benches along its four walls, helped to focus the congregation's attention on the reader. It should be noted that the synagogue was always a lay institution, unlike the Temple, and that it was also democratic.

The synagogue service in the 1st century was already structured, with the recitation of the Shema<sup>6</sup> Israel (Deut. 6:4-9. Mishnah. Berakoth, 1)), readings from the Law (Torah) and the Prophets, followed by a translation of the Hebrew text into Aramaic (targum), an exposition of the texts read and occasionally a sermon (Lk. 4:16-30). It is the prototype of our Liturgy of the Word whose links with the synagogue service are quite evident (Mk. 6:1-6; Cf. Matt. 4:23).

The seating in the synagogues was arranged in a very definite order, according to age and status, with prominent places reserved for the most distinguished members of the congregation and also for visitors, such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13-43). Matthew refers to the scribes and Pharisees sitting in "Moses' seat" and preferring "the best seats in the synagogues" (Matt. 23: 2, 6. Mk. 12:39; Lk. 20:46).

Early Christians, whether Jews or "God-fearers," living in Palestine or the Diaspora, would certainly have been familiar with these seating arrangements and their attendant problems.

The Letter of James, which some scholars date as early as the mid-50s of the 1st century, is addressed to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion (i.e., the Diaspora) and retains the word "synagogue" for the Jewish Christian assembly for worship. It likewise cautions against partiality in seating and making social distinctions among believers (Jas. 2:2-4).

Jewish Christians probably had their own synagogues, based on whether they were Aramaic or Greek speaking (Acts 6: 1-7,8-9). According to rabbinic sources there were some 480 synagogues in Jerusalem prior to 70 CE. (Y Megillah 3,1,73d ). The number may be symbolic or hyperbolic. In any case these synagogues were probably very small, the size of a room and seating was not a problem. (Such synagogues exist even today in Israel.)

Beginning in the 4th century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the model of the Roman basilica was widely adopted for

Christian worship as it had already been earlier by the synagogue. Examples may be seen in Bethlehem, Rome, and also in Trier. These were originally public buildings, designed for secular or civic purposes. Here the people were accustomed to stand and move about. The Greeks prayed standing with arms outstretched. This is still the norm in traditional Orthodox churches in Russia, the Balkans and Greece. In North America, however, pews have been introduced into some Orthodox parishes.

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***[Pews] served to maintain existing social hierarchies and to perpetuate social and class distinctions ... Pews also reflected and reinforced the ingrained individualism characteristic of Protestantism from its beginnings in the 16th century.***

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In Montreal St. George's Greek Orthodox Cathedral has pews; the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul does not! However, as a general rule, pews are architectural features peculiar to Western Christian churches, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant.

Pews appear relatively late in the Western Church, replacing the earlier stone benches. In the 13th century, backless stone benches were sometimes placed along the walls of churches or occasionally attached to the piers of the nave. These were for the elderly and the infirm, whence the familiar expression. In England fixed wooden benches were common, even in village churches, by the end of the 13th century.

However, pews, in the modern sense, were only introduced in the 14th century and were not incorporated into church architecture until the 15th century when wooden benches with backs, sometimes elaborately carved, with symbols or grotesques, replaced the stone ones.

In the 19th century, in England, to pay the salaries of the clergyman and the clerk for new churches, the Church Buildings Act of 1818 allowed for payment for the exclusive use of certain pews. These were known as pew-rents. To obviate pew-rents, St. John the Evangelist opted for chairs instead of pews. However, Christ Church Cathedral had pew rents. There are some old pew rent books in the archives. Designated pews, with cards indicating the family name, lasted until the time of Dean Bothwell. The brass holders remain.

The history of the synagogue and of the Christian church over the past two millennia suggests that while seating of same sort is consistent component of religious architecture, it is by no means a constituent part. In fact, a number of Anglican churches in Canada have either removed or reconfigured their pews. Perhaps it is time for us to re-examine the place of pews in the Cathedral. ✠

*Notes on the sources for this article are on page 7*

## TAIZÉ IN MONTREAL... AND IN MY LIFE

By Krishanu Dasgupta



The first ever Taizé Community gathering in Canada was held in Montreal at the end of April, 2007. Over two thousand youth from across the country and the northern US spent three days together in silent prayer and song at the St Alphonse Church, in Crémazie.

Walking into the huge edifice of the St Alphonse Church, on a blustery April evening, I was not quite sure what to expect. I had heard about the Taizé meet earlier in the year and although I was looking forward to witnessing the event, I wasn't very certain how the gathering would take shape in Montreal. In Québec, one can confidently say that the Church holds no sway anymore and religion is almost a taboo subject especially among young Québécois.

It was therefore a great surprise to see the huge rambling edifice, stripped of its pews, bursting at its seams, coming to life again with the drone of thousands of young chanting the simple Taizé hymns. For me it was like a homecoming and very reassuring to know that the magic of this form of prayer was able to transpose itself to here and bring so many young people together.

The music of Taizé has always been a source of inspiration and, strangely, it was this that led me to an Anglican Church many years ago. At the end of one Christmas holiday in the late eighties, when I was in Africa, I inherited a pile of cassettes that my sibling couldn't fit in her bag to take back to University. Among a strange assortment of 80's popular music that she left behind, the Taizé cassette, with its simple purple cover, stood out and caught my attention. The music was contemplative and captivated me although I could not always understand the various languages it was being sung in. I listened to the chants regularly for the next few years whenever I wanted some quiet, and found great solace in the simplicity of the singing.

A few years later, it was my turn to go to University. In the first term, at the Hall of Residence I was staying at, I was constantly bombarded by flyers and invitations to various churches in the parish. I even allowed myself to be courted briefly by the friendly members of the Christian Union who were seeking actively to rescue my soul. I resisted them all, firm in my faith, unwilling to be part of any Church/club; I found church liturgy difficult and the membership rules restrictive.

Once again, it was a simple flyer among the pile that I kept receiving that stood out. It had the words TAIZÉ printed on the cover and it was an invitation to silent prayers and Taizé chanting at 8 pm on Sunday eve-

nings at the Anglican Church of St Mark in Broomhill, Sheffield. Gradually, I was drawn in by the weaving of silent prayer with simple chant, the gathering around on the floor over the Taizé icon in candlelight, the sharing of reflections in the intimacy of a small group, and I found the absence of the pomp of a liturgical service welcome and meditative.

I slowly became a regular on Sunday evenings for the Taizé prayers at St Marks and then one thing led to another. But that is another story. The whole experience of the Taizé prayer was very special for me. It was welcoming, inclusive drawing people from different denominations and walks of life together without any judgment. It was so refreshing and so unlike what I had experienced earlier with my brief flings with the Christian Union, the house churches, and the high churches of the city.

Here I was not a heathen who needed to be rescued – I was simply welcomed the way I was without being judged! For an outsider to the Christian faith, this was perhaps the best possible introduction.

The Taizé community has always been inclusive and welcoming to all people. Brother Roger, the founder of the community, was a Protestant who during World War II sheltered Jewish refugees and, later, German prisoners of war. Many of the brothers today are from other Christian denominations. The community has at its core, the mission to live out the essential Gospel realities of simplicity and kind-heartedness.

By distancing itself from Church dogma, the Taizé Community has been able to focus on the essentials of the Gospel message. The simple chants continue the tradition of sung prayer often focusing on the first lines of a psalm and call for reflection. The whole focus of Taizé is to make the expression of faith as simple as possible, without at the same time watering it down. The message is universal and simple: all are welcome to pray together whoever they may be. The simplicity of the Taizé message and its medium of meditative song and silent prayer surprisingly speak to hundreds of thousands of youth from all over the world today. Looking back at my experience, as a young person, I found the Taizé prayer meaningful because it is about simple worship.

The thousands of young people from across Canada and the States who came to Montreal were drawn to the message of simplicity and kindness of the Gospels intuitively or maybe knowingly. They have all em-

barked upon a journey and were there, as I was many years ago, perhaps because they appreciate the meditative chants or perhaps because they recognize a need to worship simply in silence.

Whatever their motives, I felt a strange connection with them on that blustery April evening. I was blessed to be able to sing the simple chants with them and pray with them here in Montreal! One of my favorite chants is a simple one-liner: "Laudate Omnes Gentes, Laudate Dominum" – or "Sing praise all you peoples, Sing Praises to the Lord."

For those who are interested in Taizé, UNITAS in Montreal holds Taizé prayers every second Friday at 8pm. The phone number for more information is: (514) 485-0009. ☪

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*AL BACKMAN, continued from page 3*

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to know where to refer people in need. He sometimes contacts Joyce Sanchez and asks her to come down and talk to a particularly troubled person, but usually he deals with people himself. He often acts as a counselor and has taken courses in counseling and sociology. He also has to deal with the increasing problem of the street people camped in the porch.

Security is an important part of the verger's job. He always carries his cell phone and keeps an eye on people as they wander around the church. He impresses on all the vergers that they must never leave the Cathedral unwatched.

Al is about to complete his many years of faithful service in the house of the Lord, for he is retiring next year. Asked about his plans, he comments that he has never taken 2 consecutive weeks off since he started at the Cathedral. He plans to take a 3 week holiday, visiting his family out West.

Al has much to be proud of. He has received the Bishop's Award for service to the Diocese, the Governor-General's Award of the St John Ambulance Society, a plaque from the Grenadier Guards for retrieving goods stolen from the Guards' chapel (and one other award he can't remember.) "The place was a mess" when Al arrived. He leaves it in good order. He says he will be back to visit the Cathedral, "a place with so many memories".

It will be hard to replace Al, a man of God who truly loves and serves the Lord. ☪

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*SNETTISHAM, continued from page 1*

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interred from its hiding place – but alas, the ruby claws were missing!

The service, billed as an "all-ages service" was simple, informal and fun. Diana led the service and Margaret,



Ann Elbourne

the lay reader gave the address. The vicar, who has charge of three churches, only appeared at the end to announce that the organist is moving away so they are looking for a replacement. At this service I think he was playing the piano in a lively group which included violin, recorder and coco-nut shells. The whole congregation sang the blessing at the end of the service to the tune of a Victorian ballad, 'Love's Old Sweet Song'. The service was focused on Gideon and the theme "Why Me?" We reflected that with God's help, we can do anything. Some young people read and hilariously mimed the story of Gideon's successful attack on the Midianite camp. Coffee, tea, cookies and fruit juice were served at the back of the church, near a wall oven which was once used to bake communion wafers.

I had been introduced as a visitor from Canada anxious to learn about their church because my church was modeled on St Mary's. Many people introduced themselves. All said, "You must be from Fredericton!" Some had even visited Fredericton. Nobody knew about the Montreal connection, even though the church had sent us a donation to the restoration fund in 1980. I think it would be exciting to re-establish a link with this charming church and friendly congregation across the ocean. Their style of worship was very different, but I felt completely at home in this Anglican Church, the mother of our own Cathedral. ☪

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*Sources for A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEWS, page 4*

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See David D. Binder's study of Second Temple Synagogues: *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogue in the Second Temple Period* (The Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman, article "Synagogue," p. 1260. *The NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, "Ancient Synagogues," p. 1783. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., edited by E.A. Livingstone, articles "pew," p. 1270, and "synagogue," p. 1567; Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2000); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (2003).

## VIEWS FROM THE INSIDE

by Kent Farrell (an excerpt from *SCRIPT*, Aug/Sept 1992)

A brief walk around the Cathedral interior in a quiet moment can't fail to impress and inspire. Stained glass, wood and stone carvings, paintings, inscribed tablets and decorative objects seem to cover every nook and cranny of the building. Whatever your tastes or interests, there is probably at least one among them which will please, intrigue, tantalise, excite — or even offend.

How many of us have noticed the carved stone angels at the bases of the wooden transept and nave arches where they meet the cathedral's exterior walls? I counted 31 of them in the church — nine along each of the east and west walls of the nave, three along each of the north and south walls of both transepts and one on the west wall of the Meditation Chapel.

The angels have been keeping watch over successive generations since the cathedral was completed in 1859. Their presence in the church is said to have been inspired by Francis Fulford, first Bishop of Montreal, who wanted them placed there as a reminder to churchgoers that their worship is always offered in association with that of the whole company of heaven.

Of interest too are the pillars in the nave and chancel. The carved wreaths of foliage which adorn their capitals represent trees and fruits native to or commonly cultivated on the island of Montreal in the mid-nineteenth century. The designs are said to have been copied from plants brought to the building from the garden of Mr. Justice Samuel McCord, a warden of the old Notre Dame Street church and member of the Building Committee formed in 1856 to oversee the erection of the present cathedral. Unfortunately he died several years before the completion of the cathedral... ❀

*We are grateful to Janet King for finding several articles about the cathedral's details, which will be drawn from in subsequent issues.*



## THANK YOU, TANIA!

Tania Lesack, who has designed and prepared *Cathedral Script* for publication for many years, has stepped down from that job due to her current family and work responsibilities. Thank you, Tania, for your fine work and dedication toward a result that everyone sees and appreciates, but that's accomplished through a task - often under time pressure - that most of us take for granted. Good luck, and we'll look forward to reading your writing here in the future. ❀

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