

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing Don McCormick

BY PAULA BOON

Don McCormick wants to do everything – and do it as well as he can. “I don’t want to miss out on any of life’s experiences,” he says.

The retired high school chemistry teacher was born in Whitney. His grandfather was Algonquin Park’s first full-time ranger and later became its chief ranger.

For many years, McCormick’s family didn’t have electricity or indoor plumbing. “I consider myself privileged in that regard,” he says. “I’ve experienced different ways of living.”

To attend high school, McCormick had to leave his home and board in Huntsville. “I had a charmed experience,” he says, describing the good athletes, motivated students and social people who were his classmates. “We had a wonderful time and did incredibly well in sports. In one year I was on Ontario championship teams in hockey, lacrosse and basketball.”

During this time and at Queen’s University in Kingston, McCormick met the two men who influenced him most. “Jim Bishop, my lacrosse coach, and Dr. Moir, my organic chemistry professor, both set really high expectations and were absolutely uncompromising,” he says. “They made me extend beyond what I thought I could do. They wouldn’t accept anything less.”

McCormick adopted this same approach when he became a teacher. “My job was to show students how good they could be,” he says. “I had to push them.... I was prepared to be disliked, but the vast majority of the students responded positively. Everybody loves success.”

Making science accessible to his students was also a priority. “For example, I explained how equilibrium was like a high school dance, and they got it,” McCormick says. “I had a lot of fun developing those concepts.”

McCormick taught in Hamilton for five years before he met his wife Diana. They and their daughter Kelly moved to Huntsville in 1968, and McCormick became head of the high school’s science department. Their son Jamie was born in 1969.

During his 28 years at Huntsville High School, McCormick coached sports such as tennis, cross-country skiing and downhill skiing as well as minor hockey.

“I just love hockey,” he says. “To me it’s the beautiful game.”

For about a decade, McCormick also played on the Huntsville Oldtimers team. When he got tired of traveling and putting in time between games, he turned his attention to triathlons. “I had been involved in swimming, running and cycling individual competitions,” McCormick explains. “When Huntsville hosted its first triathlon around 1990 it seemed like a natural transition.”

Beginning in 1993, McCormick spent four years with the national team, winning provincial and national championships and recording two 13th-place finishes on the world stage.

From 1996 onward he worked with the company Trisport to make Huntsville a triathlon destination. “I take great satisfaction that it has become probably the number



one triathlon town in the world,” he says.

A collision with a car when he was cycling on Aspdin Road in 2001 effectively put an end to McCormick’s triathlon career. “I’m slowly working my way out of the triathlon scene,” he says.

This has left more time for travel, one of McCormick’s long-time interests. He devoted his early adulthood to exploring North America, and in 1987 he and his family backpacked around the world for a year. Since then he has continued to visit as many places as possible. “We’ve been in more than

60 countries,” he says.

Wherever he goes, McCormick carries a camera. “I enjoy capturing moments,” he says.

Over the years, McCormick has done a great deal of public service as well. He spent two terms as Chaffey town councillor, sat on the parks and recreation committee for many years, spent time on the town’s planning board, and was on the trails committee that was responsible for the construction of the Hunters Bay Trail.

After his retirement in 1997, he began doing freelance work for various Muskoka publications and took up golfing, which he loves.

At the moment the grandfather of four says he has reached a hiatus point. “I have evolved out of some activities and haven’t evolved into a new set yet,” he says. “I’m waiting for them to reveal themselves.”

Thanks to Bob Atfield for suggesting that Don McCormick be profiled.

## LETTERS

### There’s more going on in Afghanistan than meets the eye

Re: Canada should put its own house in order, letter to the editor, Huntsville Forester, April 22.

I find the letter very insulting to those men and women in the military and their families as you clearly believe that they are nothing more than a flock of sheep with no capabilities of making decisions, choices or having opinions of their own. Don’t think for one second that my opinion isn’t my own regardless of my husband’s profession.

Why don’t you ask yourself why so many reservists choose to go to Afghanistan when they don’t have to? Why do the families of the soldiers support the mission? I’ll tell you why. Unfortunately, it’s because we are all more informed than the general public and all you have to go on is the predominately negative biased opinions of so many reporters. You might want to take a look at the “Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan” website for some actual information on the mission.

We did not go to Afghanistan because George Bush told us to but because it was the consensus of all of the nations we are allied to around the world, that the Taliban’s support for violent terrorist groups was a threat to the people of most of the world.

The combat mission we are on is a fighting mission but we are not at war with the Afghan people, as Mr. Wahl implied. We

are there in support of the democratically elected government. (We tend to forget that over 75 per cent of eligible Afghans voted, and over 80 per cent voted for President Karzai, a far cry from the pitiful turnout in our elections). We have always known that we would not achieve a decisive military victory in Afghanistan, but rather a political and social one by the Afghans themselves. All the military forces can do is to make things secure enough so that Afghans can make their own choices without fear for their lives.

Canada is in no way trying to make them something they’re not. Believe it or not, we are one of the few nations thoroughly trained in their culture and beliefs; we are in no way trying to make them into a western society.

There are 25 330-person Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) from nations around the world throughout Afghanistan who combine the expertise of diplomats, corrections experts, development specialists, civilian police and the military. Canada agreed to take responsibility for the one in Kandahar province, in the very heartland where the Taliban was born. They support key initiatives in the provinces and carry out a broad range of enabling roles such as police training and strengthening local governance capacity, in line with Canada’s priorities in Afghanistan. This team is

acknowledged to be our main emphasis in Afghanistan, with our battle group there primarily to reduce the threat to the PRT. If the military were there only as reactive peacekeepers these people would be in much more danger and there would be a greater number of casualties coming home in flag-draped coffins. I wish you people would understand that. Peacekeeping is not as nice as it sounds. It’s more dangerous.

Mr. Wahl stated the police are crooked and yes, many are, because the fact is that their \$60-a-month wages were passed down to them through a series of corrupt politicians and each time a portion was taken out, so that, by time they get paid, there is very little left, often less than \$20 a month, making it hard to support their families. The Canadian government has now put in place a system where they can access their wages directly, basically an ATM direct deposit system, so they get their full wage and are able to live without requiring a supplementary income with the Taliban.

These Afghan police are put at posts (one or two men) far from any potential backup and given a handful of ammunition and no means of communication. Because they are softer targets, they get attacked more often than the Afghan army. When attacked they are often killed, as they have no assistance. Over 600 police die each

year in Afghanistan. I rather doubt if many Canadian police officers would serve under these conditions. Canada is trying to ensure they have proper communications, training, and equipment, as without it, this job is a death sentence, and nothing will change.

Afghanistan was a prosperous country many years ago, but once the Russians exhausted their funds, and the American-funded warlords, and then the Pakistan-backed Taliban took hold, it slipped back into the dark ages.

As for our safety: it’s not Afghanistan we’re in danger of, it’s the conflict between nuclear armed enemies in South Asia and the Middle East that could very easily take place if Afghanistan and Pakistan were to fall. As for why we should care, don’t forget who our neighbours to the south are, and where an increasing percentage of our own population comes from; both would be potential targets.

For the Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Wahls of the world, I’m not trying to change your minds. I’m just trying to show you there is more going on here than what meets the news media eye. Talk to a soldier who’s been to Afghanistan, you’ll be surprised by what you learn and how proud we should be as Canadians.

Laureen Parsons  
Kenora

### Local dog has its say about the issue of euthanasia

Let me introduce myself. My name is Bailey. I am a nine-year-old Golden Retriever. I have been a constant companion to my mom and dad, Sharon and Don Stinson. Then my dad died, and now my job is to bring happiness and love to my mom.

I’ve been listening to my mom talk about the problems between the town and the animal shelter. Last week we took part in the walk to the town hall to show our support for the shelter.

There have been many letters in the newspaper recently with regard to what is good for animals. I think it’s time I stand up and voice my opinion.

I know all dogs have not had the great life I have had, to be placed in a loving family. Not all dogs go for car rides, sleep in comfy warm beds and get to go swimming

in the summer. I realize I am lucky. It’s been asked if it’s fair for animals to be kept in the shelter for months. That doesn’t seem so bad, when you compare it to the alternative. I see dogs that owners have tied up on short ropes. Some are left outside in the freezing weather, and some are only fed when their owners think about it. Is this better than two square meals a day in the warm, friendly, loving environment of the shelter? I don’t think so.

The word euthanasia has been used in the newspaper. No matter how nice the word sounds, it still means kill. My mom says that’s not an option. If it was I would not be here today.

Last June I was diagnosed with cancer in my mouth, a malignant melanoma which spread to my neck. I didn’t hear the word

euthanasia at that time. Instead, it was, “What can be done to stop this cancer and make me as healthy and happy as possible?”

We started with surgeries and then I was accepted into a research program with a veterinary oncologist in Toronto. For three months my mom drove me to Toronto every second Wednesday, where I had x-rays and received my injections. Again, I didn’t hear the word euthanasia.

I know this treatment was very expensive but my family thinks I am worth it. Afterward I had to go to Toronto for periodic check-ups. Things were going very well. Last Friday I had another check-up in Toronto and my results were not what my family wanted to hear. The cancer has come back and is now in my lungs in the form of two large tumours. There are no more treatments

for me, but we’re not giving up.

Even in this bad time, I still do not hear the word euthanasia. I am told I will still be loved, have a comfy bed and enjoy every last minute of my life. I will be kept comfortable and free of pain. When it’s time to go to heaven and see my dad, my family will be there to share in my journey. Euthanasia will be the last resort, but should never be the option just to reduce the number of healthy animals, as has been suggested.

I thank you for taking the time to hear what I have to say. I know that I am just a dog, but like you, I have life. I breathe the same air and feel the same pain. Even though my time on this earth is now limited, it doesn’t mean my friends have to be.

Bailey and Sharon Stinson  
Huntsville

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