

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Verna Porter

BY PAULA BOON

The chair of the Moon River Metis Nation is proud of her heritage. She makes bannock, hunts, fishes and flies the blue Metis flag beneath the red maple leaf at her home.

But Verna Porter didn't know the truth about her family history until she was 35.

"My father held a respectable job and kept quiet about it," says the Huntsville woman. "Back then, if people found out you had Indian blood, you could lose your job."

Porter grew up in a small, isolated community called Gogama between Timmins and Sudbury. She and her siblings heard rumours that their grandmother was native, but their questions were discouraged.

Married in 1970, Porter and her husband Doug lived in Gogama, Hearst and Timmins before retiring to the old homestead on the canal between Fairy and Pen lakes where Doug was raised.

At age 35, Porter decided she was going to find out about her heritage once and for all. The lawyer for whom she was working helped her to fill out forms requesting government records.

She learned that her Scottish great-grandfather, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, had held the top post at Fort Mattagami, now known as the Mattagami Reserve. This meant he was "the law, doctor, judge, and probably father confessor to the

Ojibway and others," Porter says.

He married a native woman and they had 11 children, one of whom was Porter's grandmother.

When she went looking for more personal information and anecdotes, Porter wished she had been able to talk to her grandmother, who was 91 at the time, about these things when she was younger.

"You feel a bit of a loss," she said. "I regret not finding out more about my family history."

Porter did manage to glean some information from two uncles, a taped interview with a great-aunt, and a family history written by several cousins. Her father still wasn't talking.

Since retiring to Huntsville in 1995, Porter has been active in embracing her heritage.

She was one of the original members of the Moon River Metis Council, which hosts two general meetings annually and has organized the National Aboriginal Day celebrations at Muskoka Heritage Place for the past two years.

The group also holds an event each September called the Rendezvous, where members hunt for and package meat for Metis who can no longer get out to hunt themselves.

Porter has always fished, but she only started hunting after learning she was Metis.

"My husband is a hunter, so our interests blend well," she says.

"I never thought it would be so peaceful, sitting

there waiting," she adds. "And it makes you think back to when they had these huge families and had to come home with meat."

Porter is frustrated that Metis people are still fighting for their hunting and fishing rights. The Metis are listed alongside the First Nations and Inuit in the Constitution, she says, but nonetheless her people have had to appear before the Ontario Supreme Court as recently as last spring over hunting and fishing disputes.

"We don't hunt for the kill, but for the meat," she says. "We put tobacco where moose or other animal dropped to thank the Creator, and we do all our own skinning, butchering, wrapping and freezing."

Porter is a firm believer that you have to know where you come from to know where you're going. She says she wants to educate her children and granddaughter to be proud of their heritage.

"My granddaughter Victoria loves it when I make bannock," she says. The little girl also knows how to do the jig and wears a traditional ribbon dress while doing so.

Looking toward the future, Porter says, "I hope my granddaughter and other young Metis will be free to fish, to hunt, to harvest, and be recognized."

Porter envisions a time when Metis people, wearing their distinctive sashes, are included in cultural festivals alongside Ukrainians and Scots. "That would be great," she says.



LETTERS

Hospital staff misses the boat

Since its inception in 1955, the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary members have given thousands of hours of patient services in the Huntsville hospital and in fundraising efforts to buy essential equipment for our hospital.

The residents of our catchment area, both seasonal and permanent, have always been most supportive of our many efforts in these regards. To date, one of our best fundraisers has been the Dragonboat Festival, done in conjunction with the Rotary Club of Huntsville-Lake

of Bays at Avery Beach each summer. This is a great, fun-filled weekend and brings many participants and spectators to our vacation paradise.

It is very discouraging to us, personally, to find that the Dragonboat entered for the last two years in the races by the Huntsville hospital staff was pulled at the last possible moment. We can certainly appreciate that our hospital staff puts in many extra paid hours with the busy summer season, but we feel that other

groups and businesses are also stretched at this time and they still come forward with volunteers to paddle for wonderful local causes.

Surely with the many staff, and perhaps their younger family members, a team could be found for a special event like this. We are very disappointed by their absence.

Peggy Hern
(30-year volunteer)
Jack Hern
(21-year volunteer)
Huntsville

Saddened by the end of an era

The end of an era comes with the closing of the Pioneer Memorial United Church's pancake frolic.

In 1948 the late Mrs. Mabel Brooks organized a social to raise money for the church at Brooks Mill on Limberlost Road. A large bunting donated by Claude Wardell of Wardell and Co. was stretched across the road where the first pancake social was held.

In 1950 it was moved to Hillside. The late Hugh Hill gave use of his field at Friendly Acres, where the women's auxiliary set up an open fireplace and added the word frolic.

The following year the present pancake house was built. The huge cookstove, which was used through the years, was donated by Betty (Emerson) West of Tally Ho Inn.

In 1961 lumber was purchased by the women's auxiliary and a bake booth was set up for the bake sale and the bazaar.

The Pancake Frolic has now reached the end of an era. Pioneer Memorial United Church Women, on behalf of the church's congregation, wish to thank the late Hugh Hill for donating his field for the use of the frolic and when Tom and

Jan Roberts purchased Friendly Acres they agreed to allow the Pancake Frolic to continue.

We wish to thank the ticket sellers, batter mixers, pancake fryers, chore boys, dishwashers and those who donated to the bake table.

We wish to thank all the people who supported us by coming to enjoy pancakes and real maple syrup. Without your attendance all those would not have been possible. The Pancake Frolic has been replaced by a new fundraiser for the church.

Marion Campbell
Huntsville

We can't afford not to ban motorboats on area lakes

Everyone from Huntsville knows when they are getting closer to home. The air becomes less brown and starts changing to the most beautiful shade of blue imaginable.

The clouds on a sunny day look like they have been painted by a feathered brush. And if you are coming from the south the land starts to change slowly, from vacant fields to soft, sloping rock mixed with pine until you reach the Canadian Shield. Then you see the wire mesh holding the rock face on Hwy. 11 just at the edge of town and you know you are home. There is nothing in this

world that can pay for what we already have.

So, knowing this, why do we not respect what we have? Jet skis, wake-boarding competitions and motor boats are pouring toxins into not only a natural habitat for numerous species but the drinking water we give to our children. When the government of Canada starts taxing SUVs maybe they're missing a point? In most cases these people are driving their vehicles for business or transportation. Most power boaters are polluting for pleasure. We are not the Great Lakes. Our small lakes will not be able to maintain their eco systems

under the amount of pressure that is being applied to them.

The noise and smell and slime on our valuable water systems that these few produce has to stop. Eight million people a year travel to Algonquin Park for its beauty and wonder. But there are very few places where these dirty machines are allowed. The reason I say this is that some say banning motor boats would hurt tourism. I strongly disagree. I think that if we do not ban them from the smaller lakes we will have no tourism in the future.

Philip Orr
Huntsville

It would be a mistake to relax Official Plan standards

Last year council allowed a developer to build higher than the Official Plan. I wrote to the Forester warning that this was an appalling mistake and would lead to more aggravation in the future. Well, lo and behold, here comes another developer wanting a relaxation of the Official Plan.

I can only hope that the present council, including the mayor with his vast experience as a developer, will have enough backbone to hold fast

to the Official Plan this time, because there will be a next time and another developer only then it will perhaps be for an increase in number of properties per acre or less space around buildings or smaller sewers and bigger ditches and so on.

I am sure that readers will realize that most planning consultants are nice co-operative individuals, but they are representing the desires of a developer and are hired for the promotion of these desires which

are not necessarily in the town's best interest.

If council votes to allow a relaxation of the building code or Official Plan, they will be contributing to the breakdown of laws and standards in place for all of your readers and you may wake up one day to find a high rise and other buildings are approved because of a simple relaxation. Thanks to the Forester, ignorance will be no excuse.

Julian Spear
Huntsville

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