

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Susie McLean

BY PAULA BOON

Like many other people, Susie McLean enjoys shopping, going for walks and saying hello to her neighbours. She just needs some help while doing these things.

After living for almost 50 years at the Huronia Regional Centre for those with developmental disabilities, McLean relocated to Huntsville in April and appears to be enjoying life here.

Born in Toronto in 1950, McLean lived at home with her parents, older brother and sister until she was seven, when the decision was made to institutionalize her.

"That was traumatic for all of us," says her older sister Mary, who has lived in the Huntsville area for over 30 years.

When the institution began relocating its residents in 2005, Mary was not happy about the idea that her sister would be taken away from the place she knew as home.

"At first I was negative about it," she says. "I didn't think it was a good idea."

But since last April, when McLean moved to a Huntsville group home, Mary has changed her tune. "The people at Community Living are fantastic," she says.

She notes that McLean used to live on a ward of about 10 people with one staff member watching over them. At her new group

home, there are four women with intellectual disabilities and two or three caregivers to guide and assist them through their daily lives.

"She's settling in very well," says Mary, "and everyday life is good most of the time. She has her good days and bad days, like anyone else."

Amber Gordon, one of MacLean's primary caregivers, agrees.

"Susie moved here with another woman who was on the same ward, and that helps," she says.

"She rearranges her furniture the way she likes it, which shows that she is comfortable," Gordon continues. "Next we would like to get her involved in decorating her room, maybe put up a mirror, because she likes looking at herself."

When asked how much McLean is able to communicate, Gordon says, "On a good day she asks for things she wants; for example, she'll say 'van' if she wants to go out."

McLean expresses herself in many other ways as well. "She's a wonderful dancer," says Gordon. "And she sings a wonderful gospel song that we don't know where it came from."

Conversations with McLean follow a different kind of

rhythm, Gordon explains: "She understands what you're saying if you use simple sentences or short phrases, and she often repeats words you say when you're chatting with her."

Most days McLean wakes up before 7 a.m. and spends the morning at home. "She's very helpful with chores around her house, like laundry and making her bed," Gordon says.

After lunch it's time to get out and explore Huntsville. "We try to find something fun to do," Gordon says. "Today we went shopping at the mall and she picked out a top. She really enjoyed trying things on."

Sitting at a picnic table at the locks, McLean avoided eye contact with me at first. It may have been because she was too busy savouring the last of the french fries from her lunch, was more interested in the bright flowers on the ground nearby, or the fact that I was a stranger.

But later she beamed when I complimented her pretty running shoes and was delighted when her own image appeared on my digital camera, pointing to herself and laughing.

I asked Gordon whether she would describe McLean as shy or social, and Gordon thought for a moment before replying, "She would like to be social and needs help learning how."

Gordon says McLean loves to say hello and wave. To people who are unsure of how to interact with McLean and other people supported by community living, Gordon suggests, "Talk to her, say hi. Don't run up and shake hands or anything; just a hello, a wave and a smile are huge."

"Smile," McLean echoes. "Smile."



SUSIE MCLEAN

LETTERS

Too many pat answers at all-candidates' debate

Duckspeak has become our politicians' third official language.

It had its origin in George Orwell's novel *1984*. Duckspeak means to quack like a duck. It enables politicians and government agents to articulate speech without involving thought or intellect. Its primary aim is to identify the speaker with the political party or group he/she is aligned with and blindly loyal to.

Last Wednesday's local candidates debate was an interesting exposure to duckspeak. Cliches and political platitudes were the order of the day. Questions were asked by the audience and the varying answers, mostly rote non-answers, were predictably phrased along party lines.

Norm Miller, the PC candidate, has mastered duckspeak. When asked his opinion re the PC party's platform to equally fund all private, faith-based schools, he played the "aw shucks" embar-

assed farm boy. He said (for our benefit) that he would rather not go there, but he hastened on, that he respected, yes, respected the PC leader John Tory's attempt at fairness in funding education.

To fund only the Catholics — as is done at present — isn't fair to other religions and institutions.

When has fairness become the prime rationale for educating our youth? Some of us naively thought that effective transmission of knowledge, or serving the developmental needs and achievements of students were the primary goals of education, not religious or cultural partiality.

One has to wonder how much thought and research went into this ill-advised quack-like-a-duck pronouncement and Miller's defense of it. During the question and answer session, Michael Yale asked the candidates what their respective parties' comprehensive poverty reduction strategy was, things like housing, minimum wage, support

for the disabled, etc.

He specifically asked the incumbent MPP Norm Miller, how he could justify voting in favor of a \$22,000 pay increase for MPPs yet expect a disabled person to live on \$986 per month — well below the established \$18,000/year poverty line.

The only answer Norm Miller was able to give him was the duckspeak party line that the higher salaries for MPPs will help attract better candidates.

The majority of individuals who run for office are not in it primarily for the money. Many give up much higher incomes in the private sector to serve their community. The NDP offers the best example of this mistaken notion.

The NDP has traditionally voted against unjust increased perks and pay raises for politicians, yet they have attracted some of the best and scandal-free candidates: J.S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles, Donald McDonald, David

and Stephen Lewis, Ed Broadbent, Audrey McLaughlin and Jack Layton, to name a few.

At last week's candidates' debate in the Algonquin Theatre, the NDP candidate Sara Hall was unquestionably the best informed and articulate of the four debaters. I believe she is attracted to the job not by the perks and financial rewards but by the opportunity the job offers to improve the lives of the general public, not just lobbyists and special interest groups.

If Mr. Miller wishes to attract better candidates to Queens Park, he should strive to improve the behavior of MPPs in the Legislature. I sat in one of the sessions some time ago. Kindergarten tots behave more maturely. Let's start there, and let's unlearn the duckspeak and re-learn how to give candid answers to serious questions and concerns.

Harry Wahl
Huntsville

ELECTION 2007

NDP plans to upload costs, freeze tax assessments

BY SARA HALL
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Municipalities have been struggling to cope since the '90s when the costs of provincially mandated programs were downloaded to them by the Conservative government. As a result Ontario residents pay the highest property taxes in Canada. These provincial services must be uploaded back to the province in order to rebalance the fiscal relationship between provincial and municipal governments. Municipalities will benefit by having more money available to maintain roads and bridges and a lot of the pressure will be taken off of the property tax base.

The NDP will resume responsibility for paying for all of the services that were downloaded to townships in the late 90s. As of Jan. 1, 2008, the NDP would ensure that the provincial government has assumed full responsibility for 50 per cent of the operating costs of public transit in return for a two-year fare freeze. At this time an NDP government would also pick up the full cost of court security and would honour the provincial government's agreement with Ontario municipalities by assuming its rightful share of administrative costs related to the original downloading agreement.

In its first term, the NDP would begin to assume costs for all other provincially mandated social programs such as Ontario Disability Support programs, Social Housing, the Ontario Drug Program and child care. Uploading the full costs of the Ontario Disability Support Program and related drug benefits would be completed in the first term.

Ours is a concrete plan that will ease the pressure facing Parry Sound and Muskoka. Property taxes are generally viewed to be a regressive tax, as it is difficult to gear the tax to the income of the person paying it. I think this is a fair statement. Taxing income directly is a more equitable way to make sure that the tax burden is shared fairly among all the different income levels that make up our community. Still, property taxes are likely here to stay and it is important that they be as equitable as possible.

The NDP's 'Freeze till Sale' plan would reform property tax assessment and address this problem somewhat. It would change the way a home is assessed by first freezing property values at 2005 levels. The assessed value would remain the same until the home was sold, or upon the

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Liberal policies are going to benefit the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka

BY BRENDA RHODES
LIBERAL PARTY

The current provincial government is dealing with the difficulties caused by downloading that took place from the Harris and Eves Progressive Conservative governments.

The McGuinty government is beginning to upload some of the social service costs. This will greatly help some of the burden felt at the municipal level. It will take time to reverse the problems created in the past from the extensive downloading across the province.

If re-elected, the current Liberal government is committed to:

- Upload the full cost of both the Ontario Disability Support Program and the Ontario Drug Benefit over four years, relieving over \$900 million per year in pressure from local property taxpayers province wide.

- Make sure families can depend on modern infrastructure, by investing at least \$60 billion over the next 10 years in critical infrastructure such as public transit, roads and bridges, water

systems, waste solutions, and cultural and community recreational facilities.

- Preserve the unique character of small-town Ontario by redeveloping historic downtowns through a new partnership.

The average household income in our riding is well below the provincial average. Alleviating some of the costs incurred from social services will benefit Parry Sound-Muskoka municipal taxpayers.

The geography of Parry Sound-Muskoka has special considerations when it comes to infrastructure grants. Capital infrastructure in roads, bridges and water and sewer plants often requires construction companies to factor in the cost of blasting through granite outcroppings, but still protect water courses through the region. The cost can be astronomical at times. I will fight to have the geography of our area considered when grant money is being given out from the province.

I will do my best to see that our area has a strong voice in the provincial legislature. You can depend on me to fight for the needs of Parry Sound-Muskoka.



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