

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing the Grinch

BY PAULA BOON

Most people are aware that Huntsville has some celebrity residents: well-known actors, musicians and other personalities who make their homes among us.

But it may come as a surprise that someone known by everyone, young and old, has been living here for several years virtually undetected.

Did you know that the Grinch — whose story was made famous many years ago by Dr. Seuss — retired to Huntsville in 2003?

It's true. He lives high on a secluded hill just outside of town. The Grinch says the natural surroundings remind him of Mount Crumpit, where he lived for most of his life, and he enjoys taking long walks and snowshoeing with his loyal dog, Max the Fifth.

However, the Grinch's main pastime for the past four years has been watching the comings and goings of happy townspeople through his powerful binoculars.

"I've been wanting to get to know the people of Huntsville," he sighs. "They look very friendly, much like the inhabitants of my beloved Whoville. But unfortunately, my fame makes it difficult."

When asked why he has been so reluctant to make his presence known, the Grinch answers in one word: "Paparazzi."



He didn't want to leave Whoville, he says, but he was unable to live a normal life because of the photographers hounding him. "Every week there were stories in the tabloids. I just couldn't take it any more," the Grinch says. "Even if I wore a disguise I couldn't do my business in town without being recognized. It's not easy being green."

Finally he chose to move away from Whoville, only returning a few times a year to visit dear friends like Cindy-Lou Who and her children.

Not wanting to cause a stir in Huntsville or to give up his privacy, the Grinch has chosen to enrich his adopted community from behind the scenes.

He has made many anonymous donations to good causes, and nothing gives him greater joy than performing random acts of kindness throughout the town.

"The best part is seeing a person's face light up when they realize someone cares about them," he says.

Have you ever returned to your parked car on Main Street and found that someone had put more money in the meter? Or come home to find your garden weeded and your grass cut? Or found a bouquet of balloons on your desk at your workplace? You may have witnessed the Grinch at work.

Ever since his heart grew three sizes in one day about 50 years

ago, the Grinch has wanted nothing more than to make other people happy — and year-round, not just at Christmas.

In wintry weather, he has been known to use his superhuman strength to lift cars out of the ditch and back onto the road, always swearing the occupants to secrecy afterward.

So why did he finally decide to out himself in this newspaper?

"I feel like a part of this wonderful community, and I decided it was worth the risk," he explains. "I've actually moved openly around the town twice, during the last two Santa Claus parades. But it's time everyone knows I wasn't just pretending to be the Grinch for the parades, I really am the Grinch."

The Grinch wants to wish everyone a happy holiday and to remind them to be patient with each other even when travel and other stresses might make them feel... well, grinchy.

Asked how he feels about the term grinch being used to denote a cruel, antisocial or Christmas-hating individual, he says sometimes it's difficult, adding, "I've changed, and it's too bad people only remember me for the way I once was."

On the other hand, he says, he hopes his story will provide inspiration to others.

"It's not always easy to embrace the people around you," he says. "If I could start where I did and end up recognizing the importance of love, peace and sharing, anyone can."

Happy holidays. If there's a real person you'd like to see profiled in this space, please call Paula at 789-5541 or e-mail pboon@metrolandnorthmedia.com.

Forester readers share their best Christmas memories

In praise of wintry ponds

I grew up beside a golf course that provided wonderful year-round childhood activities. We had a small community of six families and we would all congregate on the ponds in the winter.

My mother would put a whack of potatoes in the oven for an hour, then wrap them in foil before heading out. A few of us would be pulling a toboggan, as one of the great thrills was to start at the top of one hill, whoosh all the way down, slide across the pond (once cleared of snow), and see how far up the opposite hill you could go, all the while squealing (that was the girls) and whooping (that would be us macho males).

The fathers and two teenage lads would do the worst of the Zamboni work. We would clear an area for the men to have a game of shinny plus a sufficient area for the girls to practice their twirlie things. Once the rink was cleared we would sit down on the benches kindly supplied by the golf course, and take off our boots and put on our skates.

My mother would drop one of her hot spuds in each of our boots and she would show us how to connect our boots at the opening to further keep in the warmth.

Even after a few hours out in a frosty afternoon our boots would still be warm for the trek home. Shinny! Does anyone under the age of 40 know what this word conjures? I grew up idolizing the players of the Big Six NHL teams. I watched them fanatically with my family every Wednesday and Saturday night. The voice of Foster Hewitt was part of our family.

I followed every game and team statistics. Then a new kid appeared with the Boston Bruins.

As a defenceman myself, I was entranced by his mystic moves when he got control of the puck as he bobbed and weaved around, not only the opposing offence, but also their defence. He was phenomenal, and my idol, Bobby Orr.

For shinny we had the two teenage boys, fathers and myself, plus an assortment of friends. So, I had some tough competition. Considering I was a 50-pound runt (yeah, those that know me now can't imagine that) I had to develop some different methods against those Goliaths in my way. So I learned how to skate. Fast. Change direction quickly. Control the puck. Just like my idol, Bobby. And when I got a goal I would ride my hockey stick down the pond like a horse.

Several years later a famous NHLer stole this stick from me. I'm still waiting for the royalty cheques from Tiger Williams. I am ecstatic when I hear of a father taking the time and effort to make a rink for his children and neighbours. Get the kids away from the tube and video games and outside to enjoy fresh air, exercise and fun.

Last winter I awoke on a Sunday to find a glorious day. After pattering around Idle Acres I decided to check out my own five-acre pond for possibilities of skating. Perfect conditions! I proceeded to clear a sizeable area, then made trails through the snow. And I reminisced about playing shinny on the pond of my youth. Hot spuds in boots. Sipping hot chocolate. Children squealing in delight. Neighbours having fun. Outside in the fresh wintry air.

Will Perry
Huntsville

'Tis the season for surprises

"Christmas is not Christmas unless we enjoy it as children: a little gluttony, a little silliness, and surprises." — Peter Gray, b. 1928

A tradition in our family every Christmas is to get together at one of our aunts' homes for breakfast, which includes scrambled eggs, peameal bacon and Christmas goodies. This is accompanied with many laughs and family stories.

Now that our aunts are 90-plus years and living in a retirement home, we try to carry on the family tradition.

One year we were having the relatives from Newfoundland. This, in itself, was a real adventure as they had never been off the "Rock." Imagine, spending Christmas in Dwight!

Many months prior to Christmas we were trying to plan some memorable activities for the Newfoundlanders and the elderly relatives.

We decided on the traditional breakfast, but

we would invite a special guest: Santa Claus. We could hardly keep it a secret.

As the guests arrived, ages 30 to 94, the excitement was building. In the middle of breakfast the doorbell rang and, being busy in the kitchen, I asked for someone to get the door. It was just like teaching children as the jolly man appeared. He had everyone sit on his knee and he gave out a prepared bag of goodies. What a thrill.

Santa and his driver enjoyed breakfast with us and as they were leaving they were entertained by the deer in the front yard.

All 20 guests agreed it was the best Christmas ever.

One guest wrote, "To sit on Santa's knee after all these years was a real thrill."

What will we do to top this year?

Roy and June Gates
Dwight

A reminder of what's important

Our family would come downstairs to open our Christmas stockings on Christmas morning, all eight of us kids, stockings filled with an apple and orange with a candy cane and a few more unwrapped Christmas candies.

Our tree would be surrounded by gifts, but before opening any presents we would read the Christmas story from the Bible. We were excited to start to open one by one of the presents for us. We were happy if it was a pair of socks, a truck or car.

As I grew older Christmas had a different meaning for me. It was not what I would get but it was what I could do for others. I can remember many years ago going down to our little Salvation Army Corps in Windsor helping pack up hampers for the needy families in Windsor.

When I was old enough I can remember standing out on the Salvation Army Kettles in front of many stores in the cold and shivering away receiving money to help those in need.

When I moved to Huntsville back in 1969 that same feeling followed me: how would I make a difference for children and their families in our town? My first encounter was when I played in the Salvation Army Band. Here we used to go up and down the streets on the chilly, windy nights with dipping sub-zero temperatures and play Christmas carols. Our brass instruments would be covered with old blankets and coats to keep them from freezing. We would see families opening their curtains and doors listening to us play as volunteers went door-to-door collecting money and handing out our Salvation Army Christmas War Cry. After being out in the blistering cold some nights people from our church such as the Scotts, Perriers and many others would open up their homes and have hot soup or chili and something hot to drink to make us warm again. It wasn't what we received but it was the fellowship that we had with each other. Many of nights the same faithful ones such as band master Wilfred Brown carrying a lantern and playing the coronet and with him his family, Ivan Cryderman and family, the Carrs, the Hunts, the McEacherns down through the years just a few to mention and many others also many of our officers would join in for a time of carolling.

We were not just playing our instruments but having fun, ending up in the snow banks or throwing snowballs at each other trying to keep in the spirit of what we were doing together.

I needed to do something else to help others and that was to get involved with the toy and food drive with the help of so many volunteers down through the decades. I was not the director of these operations but would love to do my part as a team that would and do work together. I would love doing public relations, going and receiving cheques, gifts, toys, food and just thanking groups and schools full of students who got involved helping other kids have a Christmas they deserve.

I also loved going on the radio and announcing the totals and telling the listeners how great the food and toys were coming in and thanking the volunteers for their time.

I can remember one year when I got a call from someone around 11 p.m. on Christmas Eve saying there was a family that didn't have much. We went down to the corps and made up a Christmas box and delivered it to their home. The smiles and the greeting we got just warmed my heart and I knew it was meant to be. These are just a few memories of what I got a lot of joy from doing, not for my satisfaction but in knowing this was part of God's plan for my life in helping others in need.

This Christmas, before it is even here is even more memorable. It is because the Savior in the name of Jesus that came so many years ago helped me through the surgery that I had in October because He loves me and I love Him.

My wife Sharon asked my son Brad in November what he wanted for Christmas and he said, "I already got it: my Dad is home from the hospital" and that is my special memory this year because my family and friends love me and prayed for me.

So remember, "Keep the true Christmas spirit alive within your hearts and keep the name of Christ in Christmas."

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Doug Dalrymple
Huntsville

Nostalgia and love reign

My ghost of Christmas past visited me this week. She took me by the hand and we flew back across the years.

She showed me 1938, when I opened my stocking in a darkened room because of my double dose of measles and chicken pox. In those days doctors protected children's eyes from the

bright light.

In 1940, at eight years of age, I am reciting Dicken's Christmas Carol and speaking so quickly I'm mixing up the words. It's a school Christmas concert and I realize I've made a mistake when I hear the giggles... "and they had

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