

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing David Marsh

BY PAULA BOON

David Marsh's heart has never left his childhood home in the Arctic.

While some people might be content simply reminiscing, Marsh is a man of action. The retired principal, who lives in both Parry Sound and Huntsville, has spent most of his time and money for the past 10 years gathering much-needed clothing, footwear, tools, toys and other items to send to Inuit communities across the Arctic.

Marsh was raised in Arviat, 350 miles north of Churchill, on the west side of Hudson's Bay.

"The population was 350 in summer and 12 in winter, when the Paddleituit people were inland hunting caribou," he says.

Marsh's father, an Anglican priest, eventually became bishop of the Arctic diocese. His mother was an artist whose watercolour paintings were shown at the McMichael gallery and are now found in the Prince of Wales Gallery in Yellowknife.

Until age 8, Marsh lived and thrived in Arviat.

His mother taught him, along with anyone else who wanted to learn to read, write and count, in their home.

Then, he was sent to school in Lakefield, Ontario. Adjusting to life in the south wasn't easy.

"I looked white," he explains, "but I had never had shoes on my feet, only mukluks."

A year later, the rest of the family moved to Aklavik in the western Arctic, and Marsh joined them.

"I went to an Indian residential school," he says. "That was another interesting cultural change."

One of his favourite memories is of racing on skates down

the frozen Mackenzie River, pulled by one of the dogs from his dogsled team.

In 1949 his family moved to Toronto. "I started Grade 7 there. That was a horror show," he recalls. "I learned that money made a difference. Systems should be fair, but they're not."

As a student at several prestigious private schools, Marsh was left off sports teams in favour of weaker players with "important" parents.

Luckily, he had a better experience at McGill University, where he received a Masters in biology, played on the McGill football team, and found fairness.

During all this time, he maintained his connection to the north. He worked summers on the Hudson's Bay Company supply boat out of Montreal, then paddled the rivers around Lake Superior on lamprey control, and finally he worked in the Yukon for the Arctic unit of Fisheries Canada. "That put me close to home again," he says.

Marsh became a teacher and coach of many championship sports teams in Thunder Bay, Hanover and Brantford. Throughout the years he always had a special interest in disadvantaged students.

"The kids that didn't have anything got special consideration," he says.

It was in 1982 as principal of Parry Sound High School that Marsh first thought of sending a shipment north. The school band was getting new uniforms, and he sent the old ones to a man who had worked with his father in Arviat.

A few years later, he began sending skates. "I could fit 25 pairs into a tea box," he says, adding that he shoved little shoes

and boots inside the skates to take full advantage of the space.

When Marsh retired in the early '90s he worked part-time in a jam factory to make extra money to buy supplies and pay for shipping. The company also provided him with an unlimited number of barrels.

Since the late '90s, Marsh has devoted himself to finding and packing items for his Inuit friends. He estimates the original value of goods he has sent north to be about \$2 million.

"I branched out from skates to anything that I can get in a barrel," he says. "I shop for 30,000 people."

Among the items that have made their way to the Arctic are more than 100 sewing machines, several organs, and a "whale puller," which was originally used as an extraction line in the bush.

This winter he is arranging for a shipment of medical assistance devices like wheelchairs and walkers to be flown to Nunavut.

"It looks like Home Depot will donate a container and the armed forces will divert a Hercules aircraft to the Muskoka Airport to pick it up," he says.

Marsh says he would like to thank the people of Huntsville, who have been very generous. Unfortunately, his years of giving are coming to an end, hastened by bureaucratic problems and shipping issues.

But his focus on the north will go on. Next, Marsh is planning to edit five manuscripts about the Arctic written by his late father.

And, knowing Marsh, he will find other ways to keep in touch with his homeland and its people.

"I never know what's going to happen," he says. "Life's an adventure."

Is there someone you'd like to see profiled in this space? Please call Paula at 789-5541 or e-mail pboon@metroland-northmedia.com.



DAVID MARSH

New Year's stories from our readers

Sit-up resolution won't be broken

I was recently reminiscing about when I was in my late teens and early 20s I would do 50 pushups and 100 sit-ups every evening. Not the wimpy versions either: full military style pushups and twist-the-torso sit-ups.

In my last year of high school, I dared one of the strongest guys to punch me in the stomach. Just to add to the drama, this was in the shower room after a game of soccer. Mega testosterone. Everyone knew I had been working out with weights for a few years, much to the embarrassment of several "tough guys" that I whipped in arm wrestling. Both arms.

But, to look at me, I didn't have an obvious six-pack of abs developed. After much cajoling and assurances that if he did hurt me I wouldn't report it, he finally agreed. As the crowd gathered around,

he wound up and let go a wicked punch to my belly. I smiled, shouted "OW!" and shook his hand.

Over the past 20 years I have "played" at exercise. Rowing a few "laps around the living room" on a row master, while watching the CBC morning news. Pedalling a stationary bike "for a few miles" as I viewed a movie. I would notice, and feel, a positive difference even in a few days. Coworkers and lady friends sometimes even remarked that I looked slimmer. But slothfulness would, inevitably, return.

I am now committed to stick to it. I now do 20 sit-ups every morning. I know this doesn't sound like a lot. But, hey, you can only hit that snooze button so many times.

Will Perry
Huntsville

Celebrating new beginnings with friends and strangers

Bringing in New Year's 2001 with a celebration of a new beginning was my goal when I invited my long-time friend Kiem to join me at Deerhurst Resort. My divorce was in progress and I had moved to Huntsville a few months earlier, so a special new year was pending.

We arrived at Deerhurst on Dec. 30, went for a sleigh ride on a one-horse open sleigh and swam in the indoor pool. On Dec. 31 we dressed up to a 10 and entered the van which would take us to the special dinner and show. A minute later a couple squeezed in beside us for the short drive.

We kept seeing them in the crowd as we waited for our call to dinner. Moments after we sat down at our table the same couple was seated at the table next to us. We talked a bit.

"How do you like the view from your room's window?" I asked.

"We haven't looked out the window yet," the woman replied.

"Newlyweds?" I asked.

"We're getting married tomorrow," she replied.

Kiem and I finished our dinner and we were taken to the stage area and seated for the show. Sometime later, who should be seated at our table but the same couple.

"Well," he said, "We've been looking for two nice people to be witnesses for our wedding tomorrow, and I guess someone wants it to be you."

My friend and I exchanged glances and smiled. "We'd love to."

The next day, at 1 p.m. on the first day of the first month ("Surely I can remember this anniversary date," the man had said) the couple was married in the foyer, near a huge Christmas tree, the light of a new day shining on all of us.

Marilyn Laycock
Huntsville

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: E-mail: letters@huntsvilleforester.com

When sending letters to the editor be sure to include your name, address and phone number. Unsigned letters cannot be used.

Health unit's Positive Parenting Program offers practical suggestions and support for moms and dads

BY DR. SUSAN SURRY

The single most important job a parent has is the nurturing and raising of happy, healthy children. A big part of that parenting role is to help children learn to behave in a variety of situations as they grow and mature.

However, children don't come with a how-to manual, an expression often heard by parents, especially when a child develops a new and challenging behaviour. While preschoolers having tantrums when shopping and uncooperative teenagers can be upsetting, making some small changes can make a big difference in behaviour.

The Positive Parenting Program, also known as Triple P, aims to give parents the confidence

and problem-solving skills to promote positive behaviour in children and help prevent some problems from developing in the first place. The program is based on a core set of skills that emphasizes plenty of encouragement for behaving well, with the belief that catching kids being good is key to reinforcing desired behaviour.

Triple P offers support, practical suggestions and a plan of action for parents in the way that they need it, whether that's by talking to a trained person over the phone, in individual or group sessions or with additional help. The program was developed in Australia and is widely used there, as well as around the world. Triple P is available in Simcoe Muskoka from a variety of community

agencies, including the health unit.

An example of a Triple P approach to a preschooler who has tantrums in the grocery store would include a reminder to parents that they need to be realistic. The child may find shopping boring so planning some activities and getting them involved in collecting grocery items may be in order.

A Triple P plan of action for a rude and disrespectful teenager would include understanding why the young person is behaving that way, modeling and encouraging positive communication, staying calm and patient, setting rules at home and following through with consequences.

If you've ever wondered if you were doing the

right thing as a parent, if you've ever struggled with your child's behaviour or if you've ever wanted to improve your relationship with your child or teenager, you're not alone. Raising children and teaching them the positive attitudes, skills and behaviours to develop their full potential isn't always easy, but Triple P can help.

For more information about Triple P or other parenting programs in your area, call Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and speak with a public health nurse or check the website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

Dr. Surry is one of Simcoe Muskoka's associate medical officers of health and a pediatrician.



HEALTHCARE HEROES

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Your Happy, Healthy
New Year
is Our Wish

The Board of Directors, Staff and Volunteers of the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation wish a very Happy and Healthy New Year.

Thank you for your generous donations in 2007. We work every day to make your wishes come true for your healthcare facilities in North Muskoka and East Parry Sound.

Contact us if you have a special dream in mind.



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