

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Brian Smith

BY PAULA BOON

It was Brian Smith's music that brought him to Huntsville. Born in the city of Nassau in the Bahamas, Smith had planned to be special education teacher, but life had other things in store for him.

While volunteering in a special ed classroom before applying to a faculty of education, the classically trained pianist got a job playing with a violinist and guitarist in an Italian restaurant. He has made his living as a musician ever since.

In a second twist of fate, a producer of Deerhurst Resort's stage show was visiting the Bahamas in the '70s and saw Smith and his friends Howard and Hilda Melbourne playing together at the King and Knight Club. He told them to give him a call if they ever came to Canada.

Howard went to visit his sister in Guelph and came back raving about what he had seen during his trip. So, in the early '80s the three of them decided to emigrate.

First they did two tours, playing top-40 music at bars, hotels and clubs across the country. Then, they took the Deerhurst producer up on his offer.

"We auditioned for Bill Waterhouse and

ended up playing part-time in the Vegas shows and part-time in the lounge as a trio for almost four years," Smith says.

Music also brought him together with his wife, Lynn.

"In the late '80s, I was playing at Hidden Valley and met Lynn, who was attending university and working there in the summer," he says. "We dated for three years and then got married. This year we will celebrate our 17th anniversary."

The couple had intended to live in Toronto, but what was supposed to be a three-month stay in Huntsville, close to Lynn's family, turned out to be a more permanent arrangement.

It helped that he, Howard and Hilda became the house band at Grandview Resort's Owl's Nest for several years.

"They kept renewing the contract," he says.

Nowadays Smith does gigs at places like Windermere House, Casino Rama and Bigwin Island. Without steady work, it's not an easy business to be in. "Lots of places are cutting

back on entertainment," he says. "They're hiring more DJs."

That's one reason Smith would never push his children into pursuing music as a career.

"They play a little, but no one should do this unless they have a passion," he says.

His unusual work hours, however, meant that Smith was able to be a stay-at-home father to his children Mariah, now 11, and Justin, now 9, when they were little. He is still the one mainly responsible for cooking, cleaning and homework help. "I really enjoy cooking," he says.

Smith is also an active member of Trinity United Church. In fact, on April 20 at 10 a.m., he will be starring in a play *as part of the service* called *Skin Deep*. The performance is based on the story of Martin Luther King from the time of his famous *I Have a Dream* speech to his death.

"I haven't done a lot of plays," Smith says, "but it gets me out of my box. It's something I wouldn't normally do and I'm having fun with it."

Seven others will be joining him in

the performance.

"There are some great actors involved," he says. "It's great to work with them. I'm one of the rookies."

Smith says the play's director, John McTavish, is so intent on making the show the best it can be that he keeps tweaking lines during rehearsals. "Just when I think I've got it down, John changes it," he says with a laugh.

Looking out his living room window at the snow that's lingering after this long winter, Smith says he's not a huge fan of the cold weather, but he thinks Huntsville is a great place to raise children.

And when asked about his hopes for the future, he says his only wish is for his family to be healthy.

"It's been a rough few years," says Smith, explaining that Lynn recently completed chemotherapy and radiation treatments after a cancer diagnosis. "You look at life a little differently when things like that happen."

Thanks to John McTavish for suggesting that Brian Smith be profiled. If there is someone you'd like to see in this space, please call Paula at 789-5541 or e-mail pboon@metrolandnorthmedia.com.



LETTERS

Couple humbled and inspired by Huntsville's support through an extremely difficult time

My husband and I have learned that life has a way of humbling us. Just when we thought that we were figuring out this game called life, we were thrown a curve ball.

On May 19, 2007, six weeks after the birth of our daughter, my husband, Bob Pepler became ill from an unknown virus, which resulted in him needing a liver transplant.

In an act of love, on June 6 Bob's sister, Stacey Barden donated 70 per cent of her liver to her brother. Unfortunately, while Bob was recovering from his liver transplant, the virus was still in his body, this time attacking his bone marrow. After several months of tests and blood transfusions, Bob received his bone marrow transplant on Nov. 28. Once again, his sister Stacey was the donor.

Bob is still recovering and just recently returned home from the hospital, where he was being treated for Guillian-Barre Syndrome.

While it is difficult to find the silver lining in this situation, we are thankful for many things and touched by the love and support that we have

received. The sacrifices Stacey has made out of love for her brother are more than any sibling should have to make. While there is no way of ever repaying her for what she has done, the best we can offer is our thanks and our love.

We are grateful for our families, especially our moms, who have supported us in every possible way. Please know that everything you have done is truly appreciated. Thank you to our family and friends for your well wishes, prayers and offers of assistance. These simple gestures have given us hope when we really needed it most. We couldn't have gotten through this without all of you.

We would also like to thank the community of Huntsville for all of your words of comfort, prayers and support. The way so many of you have reached out to our family has been humbling and inspiring. Thank you to everyone who organized, and attended, Bob's benefit. Thank you to the members of the Huntsville Church of Christ; and Riverside Baptist Church; Pat and Diane Clarke, The Clothes Closet Staff; the busi-

nesses and staff of Huntsville Place Mall; Ron Henry Jewellers staff; Hydro One staff; and the TD Bank for your kindness.

Our gratitude also goes out to the staff and students (and their families) of Huntsville High School (HHS). The way the school has rallied around Stacey, and supported not only her but Bob, Sarah, and I, has been nothing less than inspirational. To be embraced by the HHS family with such open arms, after graduating 11 years ago, has been unexpected and extremely heart-warming.

While we've learned that life may have a way of humbling us, we have also learned that people have a way of lifting us up, giving us strength, and inspiring us to rise to the occasion.

While Bob still has a lot of recovering to do over the next year or so, please know that our hearts are warmed, and our spirits are high, thanks to all of you.

Sherry, Bob and Sarah Pepler
Ajax, Ontario

Worried about firefighters' response times

The Windermere fire department has been a huge part of our community and losing the service of so many has me greatly worried, and so it should.

I do not know all the ins and outs of the situation between the volunteer firemen and the township council, but would like to express my concern of the extreme danger our community is in with the reduced numbers of local firemen.

The response time of the firemen from areas such as Port Carling and Milford Bay is a minimum of 20 minutes.

We hope the council will take into account the real needs of the people and resolve this as quickly as possible.

Joan E. Emmons
Utterson

Don't fix what's not broken: Clement to Martin on Bill C-451

An open letter to Tony Martin, MP for Sault Ste. Marie

Mr. Martin,

I am writing to respectfully ask you to withdraw your Private Member's Bill C-451. The people of Parry Sound-Muskoka have made clear their strong opposition to the bill, which would take our riding out of Northern Ontario and cut off FedNor funding.

As you learned from the recent meeting you hosted in Bracebridge, residents of Parry Sound-Muskoka count on this funding for much-needed business development. We fundamentally disagree with your bill and its exclusion of our riding.

In my role as minister for FedNor, but more importantly as Member of Parliament for Parry Sound-

Muskoka, I will defend the residents and businesses of our riding. I will not apologize for protecting my constituents from your and the NDP's plan to deny us our rightful place in Northern Ontario.

As many of our community leaders told you on Monday, March 31, "if it's not broken don't fix it." I ask you to do your research. Stop to think about the fact that our region has the second-lowest family income in Northern Ontario. Stop to think about the recent manufacturing jobs that have been lost. It is easy to ignore the real impact FedNor funding has on the everyday lives of my constituents when you are not from our riding, but let me assure you that this funding is essential.

At the meeting you said that you were "willing to be found wrong" over your plans to take Parry Sound-Muskoka out of FedNor. Let me say respectfully that you are indeed wrong. I know it. Our community leaders know it. Our business owners know it. Even your local NDP candidate is forced to admit it.

I ask you to take this opportunity to do the right thing and withdraw your bill. Bill C-451 is wrong for Parry Sound-Muskoka and wrong for Northern Ontario. If you are not willing to withdraw your bill I will continue defending my constituents and challenge you every step of the way.

I look forward to your response.

MP for Parry Sound-Muskoka
Tony Clement

LETTERS

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Spring Gala

April 19th, 2008

The annual dinner/dance at Deerhurst Resort sponsored by Philips with proceeds to Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation.

Last year's volunteer of the year winners, Dino & Bessie Georges would like to see you at this year's Spring Gala. Enjoy the dinner provided by Deerhurst, the entertainment by Big Sweet Lou and Muskoka Touring Co. and a chance to win chocolate diamonds.

COCKTAILS 6:30 • DINNER 7:30 • TICKETS \$75.00

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