

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Ava Bijl

BY PAULA BOON

Ava Bijl knows what's important in life: family, friends... and stickers.

The three-year-old has a thing for stickers, and during our interview she pulls out several different sheets of them and selects the perfect ones to affix to a colouring book, a stuffed animal, and her earlobes.

"Aren't they pretty?" she asks after she checks to make sure they're not upside-down. She pushes her dark hair back so I can admire them properly. "I like the rainbow ones with all the colours. I have lots of stickers."

Ava, who is very excited to be turning four at the end of the month, lives on Harp Lake with her mom Melanie, dad Timo and baby sister, Makena.

After a long wait, she and her parents, a family doctor and a teacher, made the trip to South Africa to get the newest member of their family in March.

"Makena didn't have her family any more so we picked her up," Ava explains. "She was at a baby house."

The plane ride was very long, but Ava says it was worth it. "We saw a big giraffe in Africa. Not in a zoo, from a truck. That was cool. Plus, I got these new stickers."

Ava is a helpful big sister who enjoys looking after her sister. Sometimes she holds Makena's bottle while she's eating or gives her a toy if she's fussy. When Ava returns home after being away, she runs straight to Makena, puts her face up close to the baby and makes funny faces at her. Makena gurgles and smiles in response. "She likes playing with me," says Ava.

In her free time, Ava enjoys listening to music, reading books, dressing up, playing with her toys and doing crafts. "Mommy's good at crafts," she says. "I am too."

Ava also has an active life outside of her home. She attends preschool at the Muskoka Montessori School five mornings a week and takes swimming lessons and dance classes. With a dance recital in the near future, Ava can't wait to wear her costume and show off her moves. When asked what kinds of things she learns at dance class, Ava says, "Once the teacher showed us how to jump and clap."

She's more interested, though, in telling the swimming lesson saga of The Week the Small Pool Was Closed. "We were in the big pool the whole time," she says, giving a little shiver as she remembers. "It was cold! And I swam with my lifejacket off, too!"

Ava says she likes school very much. She has lots of friends and her teachers are "good." She says her favourite thing to do at school is to work with water, pouring from one container to another. "And I like washing tables," she says. "I also find stuff to put on a mat sometimes. That takes a long time."

Ava's grandparents, both sets of whom live nearby, play a very important role in her life. She spends time with all of them every



week.

"My favourite thing at Poa-poa and Geung-geung's house is playing with play dough," she says. Then her eyes widen. "Poa-poa even makes new play dough. Brand new!"

"When asked about what she likes doing with her other grandparents, Ava says, 'I like to have a sleepover at Oma and Opa's house. It's fun.'"

Then Ava turns her attention to some Lego vehicles in a cubby in her play area. "Daddy built these with me," she says. "We built all of them."

Later, she points out the toy hospital she got for Christmas. "That's like the hospital where Mommy works. Sometimes I pretend a doctor gets sick — but not all the doctors, because then there would be no one to look after them!"

I ask what her favourite toy is, and Ava has trouble deciding. "I like everything," she says, summing up her attitude to life with a sunny smile. "Want a sticker?"

Thanks to Nico Byl for suggesting that Ava Bijl 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.

Be on the lookout for dead birds, says local health unit

The public can begin reporting dead birds to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. Surveillance for the West Nile Virus (WNV) began Monday, May 12.

"Reporting dead birds to the health unit is an important part of our WNV surveillance program because dead birds can be an early indicator that the virus is active in our area," said Brenda Armstrong, supervisor of the health unit's WNV program. "West Nile virus

is well established across the province, but our annual surveillance is what helps to give us a local picture of the risk the virus may pose to our health each year."

WNV is spread to humans by mosquitoes that have become infected by biting birds with WNV. Although most people will not become sick if bitten by an infected mosquito, WNV can cause severe illness in some people.

The health unit's WNV plan for 2008 includes dead bird surveillance, testing of crows, blue jays and ravens, mosquito surveillance and human surveillance. Larval dipping and adult trapping help to determine the abundance of the type of mosquitoes that spread the virus.

In 2007 the health unit received more than 900 reports of dead birds. It submitted 40 dead birds for WNV testing and

two confirmed positive for the virus.

People can protect themselves from mosquitoes that may be carrying WNV by wearing insect repellent, covering up with long sleeves and pants and by avoiding areas where mosquitoes are active.

Because mosquitoes like to breed in stagnant water people should drain water regularly from old tires, plastic containers, wading pools, wheelbar-

rows and clogged rain gutters. They can also reduce mosquitoes in their backyards by changing the water in bird baths weekly and by putting screens on rain barrels to keep mosquitoes out.

People can report dead birds by calling Your Health Connection, at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7250, or by using the online reporting form on the health unit's website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

LETTERS

Clement's decision hurts most vulnerable members of society

I'm writing in reference to the article by Andre Picard in yesterday's Globe and Mail, "Scientists accuse Tories of 'despicable' interference."

The scientist's charges land squarely in the office of Muskoka-Parry Sound MP Tony Clement.

I must agree with Picard's assessment of the actions of Clement's ministry as regards the continued support for Insite (the safe injection site) in Vancouver. His position, to place a moratorium on research, is driven entirely by ideology.

The rigorous scientific research into the effectiveness of Insite in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS doesn't tell him what he wants to hear, so he ends the research. Then he offers funds for research, but only if the research results are released after Insite is closed.

Unfortunately for Clement and his neo-con colleagues, the research demonstrates that Insite has had a significant positive impact on both the spread of HIV/AIDS and in addict rehabilitation.

In other words, there is a reduction of harm to the entire community, and fewer people using needles as they are rehabilitated.

One would think a minister of health would

find this very positive. Instead, he does everything he can to shut Insite down, thereby ensuring that dirty needles will continue to be used, HIV/AIDS will continue to spread (and not just among drug users) and rehabilitation resources will be less available to addicts.

He must be very proud.

The only other group on the fringes of this issue supporting Clement's position are the police. Health-care workers support Insite. Social workers support Insite. Rigorous scientific research proves Insite's positive impact on the health of everybody in the community.

His response is to shut the scientists up?

But that would be like cutting funding for special education in Ontario schools, wouldn't it? Ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our society are placed in an even more precarious position?

Who would do that?

Oh, that's right. He was in the Harris government, wasn't he?

We all should have seen this coming.

Peter Giaschi
Picton

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

May 14

□ V.K. Greer Public School is holding its annual Fun Fair from 5 to 8 p.m. There will be games, prizes, a barbecue, cotton candy, a silent auction and an inflatable obstacle course.

May 15

□ The Table Soup Kitchen holds a free dinner at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church every Thursday from 5 to 6:30 p.m. as well as on Mondays at Community Living Huntsville. All are welcome. To volunteer or for more information, contact Heather Berg at 783-5827 or e-mail table-soup@gmail.com.

May 17

□ The Huntsville Horticultural Society's annual Spring Flower Show is taking place at the Huntsville Place Mall from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will feature spring perennials, floral designs as well as houseplants. Contact Harriet Hutchinson at 788-1173 for more information.

□ The Lake of Bays Fire and Water Rescue is holding a fundraiser at the Dwight Shopping Plaza from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Attendees can tour the fireboat, check out equipment and displays as well as meet the firefighters. On May 18, a fundraising brunch is being held, with sittings from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$23.95 for adults and \$12 for children and reservations are required by calling the lodge at 635-2505. Proceeds go toward on-board equipment for the fireboat.

May 18

□ The Bay Lake Property Owners Association is holding their annual pancake breakfast from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Clear Lake/Bay Lake Hall (at the intersection of

Hwy. 592 and Bay Lake Road. There will be a breakfast of pancakes, sausages and fresh maple syrup and fruit as well as a silent auction. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$4 for children under 12 years of age.

May 21

□ A spaghetti dinner fundraiser is being held in the centennial centre auditorium, with doors opening at 6 p.m. and dinner served at 6:30 p.m. Entertainment will be provided by the Trillium Jazz Quartet and there will also be a silent auction. The cost is \$10 for adults and \$6 for children 12 years old and under. Tickets must be purchased in advance at Treasures and Trophies (cash only). Proceeds to Chrystalis.

□ A spaghetti dinner fundraiser is being held at Pioneer Memorial Church at 5 p.m. The cost is \$10 per person.

□ Jocelyn Smith and Allie Chisholm Smith are holding an Ayurvedic cooking class at the Dorset Recreation Centre from 7 to 9 p.m. Cost is \$25 and pre-registration is required by calling 766-9968 or e-mail drc@algonquinhighlands.ca.

May 24

□ Trinity United Church is holding a garage sale from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Coffee, muffins sausages and hot dogs will be sold as well.

May 30

□ The Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network is holding its annual general meeting at Georgian College in Midland. To register or for more information call 326-7227 or 1-888-518-4788.

June 12

□ The Muskoka Literacy Council's annual general meeting is being held at 46B King William Street at 5:30 p.m.



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