

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing Connie Hays

BY PAULA BOON

When she was growing up in Port Carling, Connie Hays lived just a couple of doors down from her grandmother's place.

"I had one of those childhoods where if you're not at home you're with Grandma," she says. "I grew up with elderly people around me and developed a deep respect for them."

This early experience may have had something to do with Hays' eventual career choice. With an eye toward working with seniors, the Bracebridge Muskoka Lakes Secondary School graduate spent three years studying Activation for Gerontology at George Brown College in Toronto.

"Then I came back to Muskoka as quickly as I could," she says. Her now-husband Chris came with her.

In 1996, Hays was hired as an activationist with The Friends, an adult daily program for those who require care for a variety of reasons ranging from strokes to Alzheimer's disease.

"It gives people time out of their homes for social and recreational activities," she says, adding that caregivers who work need somewhere for their loved one to go during the day, and elderly spouses need time to do errands and look after their own needs.

The Friends' program is offered in Huntsville, Bracebridge and Gravenhurst, and people can attend up to five days a week. "It's ever-changing," says Hays. "You never have the same day twice."

Hays and an assistant keep participants stimulated in a variety of ways. For example, they lead discussions on current events, offer an exercise program, arrange outings to concerts, farmers'

markets and special presentations, lead sing-alongs and offer various games.

"I really love working with people, especially seniors," Hays says. "I learn something every day, whether it's a history lesson or a huge life lesson."

Getting to know the participants and their caregivers has another benefit as well, she says: "It gives me a sense of belonging to a community and being of service to the community."

There is one thing she finds frustrating, though. "In the last little while, the number of referrals has exceeded the number we can accommodate," she says. "I wish people would pressure their MPs to provide more funding for community services. I've yet to meet the person who says, 'I can't wait to live in a nursing home,' and supporting community services is actually cheaper in the long run."

In the past, Hays has sat on the board of the Alzheimers Society, and recently she trained to be a Living with Stroke facilitator.

"I took a course in Toronto to learn to deliver an eight-week program for people post-stroke and their caregivers to learn about what to do after rehab is over," she says.

Offered through the district stroke coordinator at the hospital, the program will be held several times a year.

Recently Hays has entered into another huge venture with her



husband Chris. After 10 years in the restaurant industry, Chris has opened his own Little Caesars franchise.

While the business is his baby, Hays supports him in any way she can. "Every evening I spend three, four, five, six hours there so Chris can get time away," she says. "It's sort of crazy. We joke that we have four full-time jobs and only one that pays."

When she's not working with seniors or helping at the pizza place, Hays enjoys hiking and camping with her two dogs, a golden retriever and a black lab.

"Neither of my dogs will canoe," she says. "They just sit there and shake. So we mostly go car camping in Algonquin. It may sound funny to camp in our backyard, but it's beautiful."

That beauty is something she also appreciates about Huntsville. In the future, she says, she hopes the town stays with its current overall look. "I like the old-town feel with small, low-rise buildings. Things have to develop, but I still like to see the trees and the rocks."

When asked about her own future, Hays, laughs. "I dream of a day off. Having two hours to go to my sister's wedding shower recently was heaven."

Thanks to Susan Reain for suggesting that Connie Hays be profiled.

## LETTERS

### Clement answers to everyone

It is with some concern and a bit of amusement that I write this letter containing both a criticism and a suggestion.

Our honourable member of parliament has borne the brunt of some verbal slings recently questioning his ability as both a private member of parliament and a federal minister over various issues, notably over the safe injection site in Vancouver and Bill C-51.

Last month, as reported in the Forester, Mr. Clement responded sadly to a court decision to keep the safe injection drug harm reduction site open. Why he did this, despite the opinions of all medical personnel in a half a dozen studies, was due to the opinion of us, his constituents.

While I am flattered by the attention of a man who sits alongside the prime minister caring so much about the feelings of his adopted region, I can't help but question the logic in this.

To the best of my knowledge no one has ever died in the streets of Huntsville with a heroin needle in their arm. Rural Muskoka is not urban Vancouver. I, for one, am very happy about this. I don't understand why my opinion on heroin addicts being shunted into the streets to overdose is terribly important.

I know nothing of this and the people who live in Vancouver proper unfortunately do, in spades.

Recently the Honourable Mr. Clement met up with a man from Calgary who wished to discuss

the controversial Bill C-51. As reported, the meeting was amiable until the person mentioned they were from Alberta and an advocacy group, at such time Mr. Clement is alleged to have said that his "time in his constituency is for his constituents."

Again I'm flattered, but not sure about the logic.

When one is a federal minister then one's constituents are all Canadians. During the years Mr. Clement spend as provincial minister under Mike Harris, he had to listen to the opinions of every Canadians in Ontario and not just those in his Brampton riding who could vote for him.

Likewise now that the Honourable Mr. Clement is a minister under Prime Minister Harper he has to listen to all Canadians, not just those from this riding.

In a nutshell, my suggestion is this: Mr. Clement, if you wish to serve all of Canada and not just us, please do so. If every statement and bit of government business is going to be checked against a public opinion poll in your riding, you would be best to resign your appointment as a federal minister and focus on getting re-elected in Muskoka.

I urge you to have the courage and political leadership to do both.

Tyler Austin  
Huntsville

### Cost of gas is ridiculous

What is wrong with this picture? On Thursday in Huntsville I purchased gasoline for my vehicle for \$1.27 plus per litre. Then on Friday I purchased gasoline at the same supplier for \$1.37 per litre. My supplier was obviously making a profit at the lower price and a huge profit at the higher price. This happens every weekend. Can this really be legal?

Apparently, the people of western Canada are paying as much for fuel as we are. It's beginning to make former prime minister, Pierre Trudeau's, natural energy program look very attractive.

Maybe now westerners won't say, "Let those eastern bastards freeze in the dark."

Canada, as I understand it, could be energy self-sufficient if we didn't sell our oil to the United States and they, in turn, sell it to their citizens cheaper than Canada can buy it. Then Canada buys offshore oil. Are we not masters of our own house? Is the Canadian government going to let the high cost of energy ruin our economy?

Rory Mulligan  
Kearney

### Story 'refreshing and uplifting'

I have just come upon the friendly faces of Shirley Spiers, Joan Gemmil and Debbie Cochran accompanying your article on their 20-year engagement of providing books for kids. One of the joys of being employed by the Muskoka Board of Education was to be associated with such devoted and skilled teachers, all of whom were active leaders and participants in a number of teaching/learning initiatives. It has

been quite a while since I last saw any of them. So it was quite refreshing and uplifting to find them in your paper online. Having a couple of pre-school grandsons certainly is a great way to be reminded about the magic of books for youngsters. Every visit means I must re-read *Yertle the Turtle* to Campbell, who is 2 1/2.

Wayne Weaver  
Goderich

### Please stop idling vehicles

On Friday afternoon I was parked outside a restaurant in Huntsville. I noticed a man getting out of his car. He had a big red bag. Obviously he was a delivery man for the restaurant.

He did not shut his engine off as he went into the restaurant for his next delivery. About six minutes later he came out and got into his car. I politely asked him why he left his car running. He told me he was on delivery, and that I should worry about my own car and he would worry about his.

He was unaware of the no-idling bylaw in Huntsville. I think we have to start thinking more about the big picture here. A lot of us have our heads buried in the sand about climate change. It

is happening all around us.

We need to act now, before it's too late. New car or old, there is no reason to leave your car running. Experts say if you are idling longer than 30 seconds, you are just wasting gas. If this delivery man shut his car off during his deliveries and pick-ups, he would save enough gas to do a complete second shift.

People, wake up! Turn your car off. If this was Toronto you wouldn't leave a new car unattended and running for fear it would be stolen, but here we don't fear that as much. Please turn your car off when going into a store for the sake of my children. We only have one world.

J. Church  
Huntsville

### Couple appreciates waitress's honesty

I wanted to write to not only thank the waitress at The Cottage Bar and Grill, for not only finding my wallet and having it returned to me with everything intact, but for her honesty in doing so.

My wife and I were in Huntsville and stopped for lunch. I did not even know that I had lost my wallet (with my life in it) until two days later. After much searching my wife called the Cottage and Lisa, the manager, said that one of her staff

had turned it in.

What a relief! Not only was Lisa proud, we were too. This young girl must have great parents to instill this kind of honesty in a young lady. We don't know her name yet, but many thanks and if your honesty is part of your character then you must have many, many more great qualities about you.

Wayne and Susan Beck  
Toronto

### What happened to 'Love thy neighbour'?

This is a letter that I never thought I would write living in the wonderful town of Huntsville. I have lived here most of my life and have seen people helping people. Unfortunately, this has become a relatively rare sight over the last 15 years.

I see people who go out of their way to call the town by-law after my husband was in a car accident because our grass grew too long for someone in the neighbourhood. It's too bad that they were able to call the town bylaw (officer) instead of knocking on my door and asking if there was a reason for the length of the grass or if they could do anything to help. It makes me wonder what has happened to chivalry and love thy neighbour as thyself.

I have been the recipient of kindness by strangers who went out of their way to help me, and I am trying to teach my children the same thing. Something as simple as bringing in the neighbour's garbage can when they aren't home just so they don't have to. And I am talking about my six year old, not an adult. We truly love our next door neighbour, her family and would do anything to help them.

Unfortunately, I can't say this for others on the

street. Pay it forward doesn't mean let the town deal with the issue but what can I do to assist someone and enrich their lives. I do not wish to cause an issue, but when there are far worse things in people's yards in town than long grass, I don't see anyone notifying them to cut or clean up and some of these houses have fields, not 10 days' worth of growth.

I wish to assure readers of this letter that I will not stop paying it forward, that I will continue to assist those who need it and to suffice those who complained, my grass will not grow longer than what the neighbourhood deems acceptable. I apologize that my husband was unable to cut the grass with five children at home, and was in a car accident while I work away 3-4 days a week. However, next time, please approach us and talk, ask and compromise. Don't call the town, talk about us but not to us and the issue can be dealt with in a civil manner without hard feelings. And to my neighbour who is fabulous, don't worry about your garbage can. It will always be brought up your driveway.

Tracy Whale  
Huntsville

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**SHORT DRIVE . . . LONG ON SAVINGS**