

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing Veronica Medon

BY PAULA BOON

One of Veronica Medon's favourite quotations is, "Build yourself a podium to stand on, not a safety net to fall back into."

The 17-year-old swimmer likes the saying so much, it's part of an inspirational collage on her bedroom door. "It reminds me to always strive forward and to try new things," she says. "Also to make decisions about things so that I am always moving in the right direction and not setting myself up with excuses if I fail."

If her recent showings at provincial and national events are any indication, Medon is indeed moving in the right direction. Last spring she won the provincial bronze medal in the 200-metre individual medley, and at the age group nationals, Medon placed 11th in the 50-metre and 200-metre backstroke for 16-to-18-year-old girls. She also made this year's Olympic trials in the 100-metre butterfly event.

While these results were gratifying, Medon says her main focus is improvement. "I want to achieve my goals, which are times, not ranks," she says. "Those are the only things I can control."

Born in Huntsville to Polish parents, Medon attended St. Mary's Catholic school.

She learned to swim by going to the beach with her father Adam. At age 8 she joined the Rocky Island Swim Club. "In my first year, I didn't like to race," she says. "I got nervous and thought I was going to be sick. I liked the fun and games, though."

Qualifying for the provincial championship at age 11 made her

"a bit more serious and confident," she says.

Medon's next big turning point came when she went to watch the 2004 Olympic trials. "When I saw the athletes' reaction to making the team, I wanted to be there," she says.

Now in Grade 12 at Huntsville High School, Medon swims eight times a week. She is beginning her third year as a member of the MUSAC swim club. "I was a bit scared and intimidated to meet (coach Mark Shivers) at first," she says. "He became a big motivator, though. When I joined, I got my drive and passion for the sport upped a few notches."

The athlete appreciates all the support she receives from her coach, family and friends.

The toughest thing, she says, isn't the physical or emotional aspect of being an elite athlete, but the financial burden it puts on her family.

"When you go to swim meets, you have to pay the coach's way," she explains. "At lower levels, the whole team shares the expense, but recently at some high-level events, I've had to pay on my own. That's difficult."

Medon says it means a lot to her that people in the town care about her success. Members of her church and others often cut out clippings and congratulate her mother Krystyna on



her accomplishments.

"But the financial part is still a major aspect of it," she says. "In bigger cities there are sponsors like airports or sometimes there are reduced fees for team buses. It's hard to keep going if your money runs out."

Last year, a neighbour contacted Steven Carr of Comfort Inn, who arranged for the Medon family to receive discounts at hotels when they travelled to swim meets. "I'm very grateful for that," Medon says.

Recently another friend approached a local service club about helping to cover Medon's expenses, and the family is hopeful that group will also lend their support.

Medon, who is preparing for post-secondary education next year, says it's too bad Canadian universities don't offer full athletic scholarships.

While she doesn't know what future holds, she is preparing to write the American SATs to keep her options open. "I'm thinking maybe of sport psychology or law," she says.

In the meantime, she continues to train. "I would love to go to the Olympics," Medon says. "That's what I'm working toward. Obviously as far as I get I'll be happy. I feel like I've accomplished a lot, and just getting better is good."

## LETTERS

### People should be worried about Stephen Harper's plans

There are many things that trouble me about the possibility of Stephen Harper heading up a majority Conservative government.

One is his disdain for Canadians. What else can you call it when a party leader travels cross-country campaigning in a political bubble as isolating as an iron lung? No handshakes or rallies or unfettered access for Mr. Harper. It's staging and hyper-security all the way. We shouldn't be surprised since control and secretiveness have been the hallmarks of this government.

His disdain for Canadians isn't new. Ten years ago when he was vice-president of the right-wing National Citizens' Coalition he addressed a con-

servative American think-tank. He openly called Canada "A northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term, and very proud of it."

His fawning admiration for the U.S. right wing continued: "Your country, and particularly your conservative movement, is a light and an inspiration to people in this country and across the world." Is it really? The light and inspiration that so thrills Mr. Harper now threatens to bring down the entire global economy.

Then there is the slashing of government funding of the arts by claiming that ordinary folks don't care about the arts. How does Stephen Harper have a clue what "ordinary Canadians"

want when he does everything he can to avoid coming into contact with us? He added insult to injury when he said "average Canadians have no sympathy for rich artists who gather at galas to whine about their grants." Most artists work at their craft for the love of it and most make a modest living at best.

Mr. Harper disdains us and he tries to mislead us by pandering to people's fears about violent crime. He promises that a re-elected Tory government will impose adult sentences on offenders as young as 14 years old. First, when it comes to this country's laws, the Supreme Court of Canada decides what is constitutional: Stephen Harper does not. Second, harsher sentences have not been shown to reduce juvenile crime in any jurisdiction in the world. This is a blatant attempt to play to people's fears about a crime rate that, aside from certain types of crime, has been dropping for 15 years. Then in a smarmy bid to soothe Quebec (where the Tories need to win seats to form a majority government) the law would apply only to those 16 and older in that province. He uses the excuse that in Quebec the justice system and public sentiment favour rehabilitation. So why doesn't the rest of Canada adopt Quebec's methods and forget about the draconian idea of jailing 14-year-olds for life?

I've often accused Mr. Harper of having a hidden agenda. I was wrong: the desire to mold us in the image of Ronald Reagan's anti-government, social conservatives is right out there in the open. He continues to tell us that we are becoming "more conservative" as a people. That is simply not true. The Tories are ahead in the polls but a strong majority of Canadians (about 65 per cent) support the centrist Liberals and the further to the left NDP, Greens and Bloc Québécois.

Small-l liberalism is alive and well in Canada, Mr. Harper.

Even people who aren't crazy about Mr. Harper may think that the Conservatives are a better bet to lead us on issues of the economy. I don't think so. The Conservatives have made two dangerous assumptions: one is that the U.S. will continue to act as the engine to Canada's economic train. To continue the railroading metaphor, evidence is mounting that a derailment is imminent. Thanks to neo-con practices, the U.S. may not be a good horse to which we should hitch our wagon. Next, the Conservatives are relying far too heavily on resources like petroleum, fish, and timber to drive the Canadian economy and that's old, tired thinking. It's an especially bad idea for Ontario, whose manufacturing sector needs a serious strategy that can lead us forward instead of taking us backward. We have a deteriorating economy going toward deficit. It's not unreasonable to lay that on Stephen Harper's Conservatives.

Read the Liberal platform. It's prudent and workable, if not sexy. Mr. Dion is bang-on when he talks about the necessity of balancing our economic prosperity with our environmental health. Yes, he's a little nerdy — get over it! The Green shift has been misunderstood as a tax increase when it actually represents one of the healthiest tax cuts in recent memory. If you are somewhat worried about Mr. Harper (and you should be) check out the Liberal message. There's a lot to like in it in terms of the Liberal party's commitments to child care, support for manufacturing, green job creation, public health care, student aid, basic infrastructure, and poverty amelioration.

Dale Peacock  
Huntsville

### A Dog's 10 Commandments provide some food for thought

I am a volunteer at the Huntsville Animal Shelter, and constantly see dogs and cats coming in who have been abandoned, surrendered, or found wandering around as strays. It's very disheartening to see the way some people treat their animal companions.

I know the following will not come as a surprise to those who have shared their lives with animals, but for those who are indifferent to their plight, perhaps it will give them cause to stop and think about how they treat any animal that may cross their path in the future.

This is an e-mail that I received and I think it is an important one to share.

A Dog's 10 Commandments...

1. My life is likely to last 10-15 years. Any separation from you is likely to be painful.
2. Give me time to understand what you want of me.
3. Place your trust in me. It is crucial for my wellbeing.
4. Don't be angry with me for long and don't lock me up as punishment. You have your work,

your friends, your entertainment, but I only have you.

5. Talk to me. Even if I don't understand your words, I do understand your voice.

6. Be aware that however you treat me, I will never forget it.

7. Before you hit me, remember that I could hurt you, and yet, I choose not to.

8. Before you scold me for being lazy or uncooperative, ask yourself if something might be bothering me. Perhaps I'm not getting the right food, I have been in the sun too long, or my heart might be getting old and weak.

9. Please take care of me when I grow old. You, too, will grow old.

10. On the ultimate difficult journey, go with me, please. Never say you can't bear to watch. Don't make me face it alone. Everything is easier for me if you are there, because I love you so.

Remember, they can't do a lot of things for themselves, and they depend on you to make their life a quality one.

Eryn Jagosky  
Huntsville

### Man on crutches appreciates youthful help with heavy doors

I am recovering from knee ligament surgery and am presently confined to crutches when walking. As I was recently attempting to enter the Huntsville Place Mall and somewhat struggling with the outer door, three youths were leaving the mall further over from me. On seeing me, one of the youths immediately yelled to his friends, "Get the door for him. Help him with the door," and while one of them helped me with the outer door the others opened wide the inner doors to help

me through. As I looked back to thank them, the original youth said to me, "I have been on them before. I know how it feels. It sucks, man," and laughingly went on his way.

We constantly hear the bad things about today's youth. I feel we need to know that there are a lot of (probably the majority) today's young people that deserve our respect. I, for one, was pleasantly impressed.

Bill Paterson  
Emsdale

### We must continue creating a national culture of compassion

*Re: We don't want a sink-or-swim society,* Huntsville Forester letter to the editor, Sept. 29.

I greatly appreciated the comments made by Elisabeth McIver. As we face a difficult economy and a rapidly changing social fabric, I am very concerned that we persist in creating a culture of compassion in Canada.

I think it is significant that this particular election has been called during Canadian Women's History Month, just days before the anniversary of Oct. 18, when in 1929 Canadian women were legally declared "persons" after five feisty women from Alberta created legal history in women's rights by contesting a ruling by judges of the Supreme Court of Canada which ruled that legal definitions of persons excluded females.

It is interesting that the famous five women

who led the way were from Steven Harper's province of Alberta and that the theme for the 2008 Women's History Month set by Harper's government is Women in the Lead. I encourage everyone to find out more about Canadian women's history by going to the status of women page on the federal government's website. Also, on Oct. 4 we are having our very own celebration at the Algonquin Theatre sponsored by the Muskoka Women's Advocacy Group. A one-woman theatrical presentation called In Our Right Minds speaks to many of the issues that continue to concern Canadian women, especially the need for more balance between right and left brain ways of making the decisions that affect us all.

Meg Jordan  
Huntsville



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