

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing Gunnar Christensen

BY PAULA BOON

Losing a finger changed Gunnar Christensen's life.

"It made me re-evaluate everything," says the Huntsville High School construction technology teacher.

Christensen was 27 at the time of the table saw accident that cost him the better part of one middle finger. He was living in Thornbury, Ontario, working in construction and teaching skiing at Blue Mountain in the winter.

While he had long thought about becoming a teacher, his marks from studying geology at the University of Waterloo weren't high enough to get into a faculty of education. He had volunteered in every grade at a local elementary school and found success working at a treatment centre for youth in his hometown, but his journey had stalled there.

A year after the accident, Christensen decided to start fresh by studying geography at the University of Ottawa. "It was wonderful," he says. "Everything was starting to come my way. I was meeting people who didn't know who I was, so I became who I wanted to be."

By chance, he heard about the Queen's University Outdoor Experiential Education (OEE) program, and he applied. "Out of 144 applicants, they took 26," he says. "Somehow, I got in."

It was the perfect place for him. Born in 1961 to a Danish immigrant family, Christensen had always been physically active as a kid: hiking, biking, fishing, camping and building forts. He was also a junior ranger in Powas-

san the summer he was 17, and his university summers were spent in Northern Quebec and the North West Territories doing surface exploration and underground mining. The OEE program allowed him to harness his many skills and use them to engage and teach young people.

During his year at Queen's, Christensen met Elaine, his wife-to-be. After graduation, they travelled together "two-thirds of the way around the world and back," spending time in Southeast Asia and South Africa. "When you travel with someone for six months, it's like four or five years of a regular relationship," he says.

Not long after returning to Canada, the Christensens applied for an English-teaching job in Japan. "A significant part of the agreement was to be engaged with our students at an extracurricular level," he says. "It made the job very rewarding."

They moved to Japan in 1995, soon after being married, and stayed until 1997. "At that point we were ready to go home and start a family," he says.

Christensen's first Canadian teaching job was in Kirkland Lake, but that was a bit too far from family, so he and Elaine moved to Huntsville in 1998. "We decided to choose the place rather than follow a job," he says.

After a year of commuting to work in Haliburton, he



transferred to Huntsville High School in 1999. Since then, Christensen has worked hard to make the school's construction technology program successful. "I asked myself why kids take it, what I had to teach, and how I could mold that into something that gives them satisfaction," he says.

Christensen arranges for his construction technology students to do a wide array of community projects. "It keeps the community positive about what the kids are doing with their time and teaches kids a sense of caring for their space, their environment, their town," he says.

One of Christensen's pastimes has been leading the Muskoka Aikido Dojo, which he co-founded 10 years ago. "Aikido is a wonderful thing, what it stands for and what it gives you," he says of the martial art he learned while

in Japan. The club currently practises at Dokan Karate. Christensen also loves to explore the beauty of the area with Elaine and their three kids, preferring quieter, more natural forms of recreation.

He says he is humbled by things like grey hairs and bifocals that remind him he's getting older. "If I could ask for anything, it would be don't take me until my kids are grown, because those high school years are tough years," he says. "Every day I grow more grateful to be living in this place – and on this planet."

## LETTERS

### Candidates 'got what they deserved'

So, Canadians stayed away from the polling booths in record numbers this general election. Who can blame them? If my own experience is any example, the blame lies not with the electorate but with the appallingly apathetic, negligent and inept candidates.

In the five weeks of the campaign, no candidate or surrogate came to my door to discuss the issues. The phone? Two calls from Cottager Clement's office, both merely asking for my vote. I laughed. No calls from anyone else. Mailings? One pamphlet from

the Conservatives and one from the Liberals, each self-aggrandising and utterly uninformative. And no communication whatsoever from the NDP or the Green Party.

But there is a kind of a justice here. The results showed the candidates in Parry Sound-Muskoka got what they deserved. It's a bit of a worry, though, that all it took to win was two brusque phone calls and one silly pamphlet. What were we voters thinking? I, for one, wasn't. I was just guessing.

John Scully  
Dwight

### Questions for Barry Lockhart

An open letter to Barry Lockhart, CEO, Muskoka Algonquin Health Care.

When I met you at the information meetings in the Huntsville library prior to the amalgamation of the two Muskoka hospitals, you seemed to be a level-headed and fair man.

I would like you to clear up a few questions that I have regarding our hospitals.

You told me the care of patients would not be affected or compromised. Now we are losing services and direct care staff. Why?

The administration was supposed to be where the cuts could be realized. Having one H.R. team, one payroll team, one records, etc. etc. Huntsville hospital used to have one woman do all of the payroll. Now, I understand, there are three people doing the job. Then Bracebridge hospital has their own payroll team. Why isn't it just one-three person team doing all of the payroll?

What about all the other administration teams? Are they still duplicates of each other?

I won't touch on the new position of public relations. That, in my opinion, should be part of your job for such a rural area as Muskoka. Also, a hospital isn't in the competitive market place, so PR is not necessary.

Was this only an amalgamation to cut one CEO and board? Is the board elected or are they appointed? Was the purpose of amalgamation really to have one hospital's debtload spread over the whole district health-care

system and our Huntsville hospital to be made less efficient, as most other small hospitals are?

I am told by the former comptroller of a large downtown Toronto hospital that your funding comes to you in a lump sum and you and the board choose how it is distributed. The province does not dictate how it is spent. Is this correct? How does the LHIN fit into the picture now?

A great number of the Huntsville staff have been on the job for 25 years or more. Do these people need managers with very large salaries? I would guess from observing them at work that they are self starters, and only need one of them to be classified as the supervisor. From the published list we are carrying quite a few people in that over-\$100,000 salary range. That would seem to be the reasonable area to cut costs. Maybe 10 per cent reduction across all of these salaries would be a good and appropriate start in these volatile financial times?

What about the proposed laboratory cuts when we are isolated during a winter storm, or the highway is closed due to an emergency and we no longer have the staff or equipment to diagnose quickly? I have been informed that this item is being dictated by the provincial government. Also, I hear that our hospitals are paid less for each test than the private sector labs. Is this correct, and why?

Venetia Woodruff  
Huntsville

### What about Echo Valley residents?

It seems Mark Galligan of Echo Valley Development was able to dazzle the Lake of Bays council with the promise of a free hiking-biking park and golf course in exchange for approval to sell estate lots.

There are already dozens of homeowners living in Echo Valley. What impact will this development have on their lives?

Anne Johnson  
Dwight

### Harper will need your prayers

*Re: Harper deserves the full support of Canadians*, letter to the editor, Huntsville Forester, Oct. 15.

Your letter of Oct. 15 suggests Canadians support Harper as our prime minister.

If only you gave us a reason why we should.

Politics is a messy business. Of course Harper will be attacked in debates. He sits as the prime minister of this country and the rest of the political leaders are trying to take him down.

Accusations, rudeness and vilification are the trademarks of Stephen Harper.

Accusations: Who was it that sued the Liberal Party for the Cadman affair (only to have that pretty much backfire)?

Rudeness: Who was it that refused to answer the media's questions prior to the election call?

Vilification: Who was it that called an election (contrary to his "Law" against snap elections, written so vaguely to be non-effectual) pretty much for the single reason of trying to destroy the Liberal Party? Who has been the bully in the House of Commons?

So for two and half years Harper has been competent and trustworthy? Faint praise indeed. On the other hand, Harper was the one who said, "I will not govern by polls," and then spent more money on polls than any sitting government in history. "I will not touch income trusts," he said, and then cancelled them.

In two and half years, Harper increased his votes by one per cent. Wow. Another 20 elections and he might get a majority. For this we had to spend \$300 million?

Having a strong military is not an extreme right wing viewpoint. No one thought it was.

But law and order, traditional marriage and protection of life surely are. You prove that point in your letter when you say, "are not extreme right wing: they are right."

Law and order? You mean throwing everyone in jail. Well, it doesn't work and you and I know it.

Traditional marriage? Ah, the old secret anti-gay rhetoric. Protection of life? Perhaps you can tell the women of your family they are not allowed to make decisions on their own with respect to their bodies.

So, these are the "right" things to do, according to you. That's fine and I respect that. But I, and many millions of others in this country, do not subscribe to any morals, codes, nor pontifications espoused by the Bible which you invoked.

Our founding fathers wanted to name this land the Kingdom of Canada. But since American sensibilities being what they were after the Civil war and the support for the Union by the British, it was decided not to use Kingdom. So yes, we used Dominion from the psalm. Lord Derby suggested it as appropriate, but we did not seek it for guidance. It happened to be there. We have not been a Dominion since the Second World War, for what it's worth.

Harper strengthened the Banking Act? The previous governments that refused banking amalgamations, put most of the current act into law, regulated the banks at every turn, they are not worthy of praise?

I was unaware that Harper saved Canada from a sub-prime meltdown. That's pretty impressive, if it were true.

In this election, Harper's opposition could not have been more lame. The expectations of Dion were so low we should have called him Palin. A snail would have had to duck under the bar it was set so low. Harper, in not realizing any gain in this wasteful exercise, has relegated himself to the scrapheap of politicians, right alongside Dion.

But you are right, Harper is deserving of your prayers, not mine, and he will surely need them.

Ian Douglas  
Toronto

### Ministry of Health made an error

*Re: No funding mechanism to keep lab work local*, Huntsville Forester article, Oct.15.

I'd like to correct a significant error of the health ministry spokesperson, that seems to be designed to confuse the public.

The funding comparison between pilot and provincial models in the RPO Consultants' report does include the total funding, including the collection work part. The reason for the qualification statements in the

report is that no detailed incremental cost analysis was done by the consultants before making their recommendations, hence they were unsure of the extent to which the overhead and capital reinvestment needs were covered by the pilot funding. It is a fair guess that these would be a relatively small component, given the need to preserve a lab capability for the in-hospital lab service.

John Brenciaglia  
Huntsville



## HEALTHCARE HEROES

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### Miles of Coins Volunteers & Donors

The Friends of Burk's Falls & District Health Centre held their annual Miles of Coins fundraising event in municipalities throughout East Parry Sound during the July holiday weekend.

New volunteer Ann Gaupholm held down her post in Emsdale despite some rather heavy rain. Ann is only one of dozens of volunteers who raised over \$10,000 for the digital upgrade of the x-ray department at the Burk's Falls Health Centre.

Since 2001, over \$285,000 of donated funds have purchased much needed equipment for the Health Centre. Thank you donors and volunteers.

### Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation continues to support:

- Huntsville District Memorial Hospital
- Fairvern Nursing Home
- Burk's Falls & District Health Centre



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