

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing Laurene Armstrong

BY PAULA BOON

Laurene Armstrong has been improving the lives of area seniors for almost 20 years.

Born in Blind River, the executive director of Muskoka Seniors moved to the area in 1983 to be near her parents, who are now retired. "I wanted to come home to my family," she says.

She raised her children, William and Amanda, in Port Sydney and worked at various retail jobs before becoming a receptionist in Dr. Anderson's chiropractic office.

Through her church, Faith Baptist, Armstrong got to know the founder of Muskoka Seniors, Peggy Graham, and she decided to volunteer in 1989. Then, around 1996, Armstrong started working for the organization two days a week scheduling transportation programs and home-making services.

For a number of years, Armstrong held down three part-time jobs, which was financially necessary to support her children. "But that's all right," she says. "It's what had to be done, and it all worked out for the best."

When Graham retired six years ago, Armstrong took over Muskoka Seniors' top position. "It was quite a shock," Armstrong says of the workload and responsibilities involved, which soon expanded to include fundraising.

Raising enough money to keep the organization going each year is Armstrong's biggest challenge. "The town is wonderful when it comes to helping, but every year we're faced with more groups competing for what's available," she says. Muskoka Seniors is subsidized in part by the

Ministry of Health, but without user fees and fundraising, it would not be able to keep up with the needs of people who live in this area.

"Our programs are growing," says Armstrong. "We serve over 700 people across all programs."

Armstrong and the two other employees of Muskoka Seniors oversee four different programs. There's Frozen Meals on Wheels, where clients can buy entrees, soups and desserts; Friendship Luncheons in Huntsville, Baysville and Dorset, where seniors receive a hot meal plus entertainment, education or other activity (transportation to the event is provided if needed); transportation to medical appointments; and a visiting program, by telephone and in person.

"A lot of visits start with a circle of concern, where a senior is happy to have someone check in to see if they're okay," Armstrong explains. "From that often social visiting begins and friendships grow. People meet at the dining program and it's a natural flow for visiting to begin."

Armstrong can't say enough about Muskoka Seniors volunteers. "They're awesome," she says. Some help out every week, some just once a month. "We can accommodate what works best for them."

The majority of the volunteers are seniors themselves, and with many people retiring to the area, Armstrong says she hopes to increase their ranks. "It's hard to say no to people who need our services because of a lack of volun-



teers," she adds.

The best thing about her job, according to Armstrong, is seeing and hearing about seniors benefiting from the programs her organization offers. She says it's particularly rewarding to see the friendships made amongst clients themselves. "They're really supportive of one another," she says.

When asked about her hopes for the future of Muskoka Seniors, Armstrong says the organization has grown so much that the immediate goal is to stabilize programming. "The last five or six years have brought overwhelming growth in services," she says. "It would be nice to stabilize and go from there. We just want to keep doing what we do and do it well."

In her free time, Armstrong enjoys sewing and knitting. "Those are two of my big relaxing things," she says. She also collects air miles to be able to holiday "anywhere warm."

Remarried one and a half years ago, Armstrong and her husband Jon are renovating their house at the moment and also spend as much time as they can with their grandchildren.

Armstrong says she looks forward to retirement, but in the meantime she loves her job. "When you're making a difference, that's the greatest joy," she says.

Thanks to Donna Nairn for suggesting that Laurene Armstrong be profiled.

## LETTERS

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### Single mother needs help to make her home safe for son

It takes a village to raise a child and I need to find the village!

I am the proud parent of a very cool 13-year-old. He is spontaneous, creative, kind, energetic and fun. He also suffers from severe mental-health issues due to horrific early trauma he experienced when he was an infant and young child.

We adopted each other six years ago when he was seven. It was a great day with lots of dreams and hopes for the future.

In the six years since that day we have had many moments of glory as he learned a new skill, learned to read and play and learned to love the family dog. He also learned things that he had never known; there would always be food when he was hungry; there would always be hugs and kisses available; there would be warm clothes in the winter and adult help when he started to get scared.

In that time there were also very difficult times when he had emotional explosions and rages as he remembered his trauma. He struggled regularly with his inability to trust adults who would not hurt him or go away again.

Recently his past memories and fears have gotten the better of him and he has had the equivalent of a nervous break down, wanting to end his life just to end the pain in his heart. It was a terribly sad day for our family that after so much love and work together he had to move into a therapy home for two months to give him the additional help to learn to be safe.

Now it is time for him to come home

again on Dec. 19 and I need to be sure that the right safety practices are in place. You see, as he works through his past trauma issues he can get so caught up in the pain that he strikes out at me, even though he loves me. So, I need others to help support us and keep us safe while he learns to master the new skills he's learning in therapy.

We need to have safe people in the house with us to allow him the support he needs to work through his memories and learn to love again. I am a single mother with no extended family and I know that if people knew how to help us there would be lots of people in Huntsville who would come and help. I just don't know how to find them.

If you are a child and youth worker, volunteer with crisis intervention training, a police, fire or paramedic worker who wants part-time hours or who could volunteer, if you have an interest in helping and are willing to get training, please contact me to see how you can help our family. We are looking for long and/or short shifts (day and night) or just a few hours here and there.

If this is you or you know the right person please do not just read this and get around to it later. We need your help now. Please e-mail me at familyinneedpleasehelp@yahoo.ca and tell me a little about yourself and I will send you out more information to help you know if you are the right person. Please, please help me bring my child home and have a great holiday season as well as a happy new year.

Name withheld

### Lucky to have health-care team

I am a cancer patient at Huntsville Hospital. My care and treatments have been ongoing since August. I just want to let everyone know how terrific my health-care team has been.

Bryn Milner is the hospital social worker. She has been a great help in dealing with various government departments and helping me get the financial aid I now need.

My family doctor is Megan Stephenson. An excellent doctor and wonderful person, she has been there for me from the beginning. Surgeon Dr. Jennifer MacMillan has done four procedures on me. Her energy and attitude are amazing. I always feel like I am her only patient and I know that's far from true. I can't say enough about her.

Dr. Sanjay Jindal and Dr. Allison Small look after me for chemotherapy. They are

both very good at their jobs and a great help when problems have cropped up during chemo.

Lastly and maybe most important are the nurses of the chemo clinic. Jodi, Beth, Yvonne and Joan are terrific nurses. Their caring, competent professionalism and cheerful, upbeat attitudes under sometimes trying circumstances never cease to amaze me. They always compliment me about my positive attitude, but they are partly responsible for that. They help keep me going and I am truly grateful for everything they do for me.

This is my health-care team. I thank them for everything. I, and Huntsville in general, am very lucky to have them working here.

Kevin Cockram  
Huntsville

### Some things are just not done

In 141 years, no "coalition" has ever attempted to overthrow the newly elected government of the day in Canada.

Like many technically legal or possible things, some things just are not done. Our system, since inception, has always worked on the "first past the post" ideal. In the case of minority (which is actually more often than not) the combined opposition always outnumbers the government, but it has never tried before to sneak in the back door by doing what this coalition is trying to do.

If the opposition are so sure that they are right for Canada, they should officially run in an election as a coalition or at least

advise the voting public that they will work as a coalition if elected as the opposition. I am a Conservative, obviously to many, but I would oppose such a move regardless of who was doing it.

This is not one party agreeing with another party just to defeat a government and then to go to the people. Just the opposite. This is an attempt to overturn the decisions of the Canadian voters to take the government without consent of the people. To the shameful leaders of the coalition I say, if you are so sure you are right for Canada, why not have the courage to ask us?

David Lowe  
Osgoode

### This Dec. 14, light a candle to honour children we have lost

As we all continue to mourn the loss of children within our own community, as well as nationwide, once again may we remind you of The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting, held annually on the second Sunday in December (this year, Dec. 14) at 7 p.m. Around the globe, families and friends light a candle for one hour to honour and remember children who have died, at any age, from any cause.

As candles are lit, hundreds of thousands of people are commemorating and honouring children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious and political boundaries.

It is believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, creating a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone, resulting in a quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

It can be a tremendous comfort to bereaved parents to know that candles are being lit all over the world in memory of children who are no longer with us.

We encourage you to light a candle for them as well, so that their light will always shine.

Jim and Nancy Mavity  
Port Sydney

### Federal coalition is legitimate

During the furor of the past week, we resurrected and re-read our political science textbook, *The Government of Canada* by Robert MacGregor Dawson and which, incidentally, won the Governor General's award.

To quote: "Coalition with another party will take place only as a last resort to create or to maintain a majority in the House or because some issue of transcendent importance obliterates, for the time being at least, the normal party lines."

This would therefore answer any question of legitimacy regarding the recent coalition between the Liberal party and the NDP, supported by the Bloc Quebecois on votes of confidence.

The Conservatives have been spinning a different "take" on the facts, seemingly forgetting they are a minority government and therefore need the Bloc to pass any legislation should the opposition and NDP vote otherwise.

Whether Stéphane Dion would have been a good leader or not we will never know since he was discredited and his integrity trashed by the Conservative attack ads before he had an opportunity to prove himself. He does have the satisfaction of knowing it cost thousands and thousands of dollars to accomplish this, but it's a shameful act of partisanship.

Bruce and Lenore Werry  
Huntsville

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