

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Marge Denis

BY PAULA BOON

Marge Denis has always coloured outside the lines.

For example, as a young teacher and then principal of a tiny school in Peace River, Alberta, in the 1950s, Denis used unconventional strategies to help at-risk students. She even eliminated grade levels so students could move from class to class depending on their ability in different subjects. "That got me in trouble with the superintendent," she says with a chuckle.

In the late 60s, after several years organizing religious education for the Catholic diocese in Winnipeg, Denis was asked to work among native people to find out how the Catholic church could really reach them. For seven years, she wandered from native community to native community in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Alberta and British Columbia. "After my first three weeks I came back and said, 'Guess what? Our mandate has changed. It's not about how we can reach native people, but how we can allow them to reach us,'" she says. "The experience changed my life."

Inspired by what she had learned, Denis enrolled in a master's program and then

earned a doctorate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto. Her PhD research involved the role of intuition in learning, a very new field at the time.

Denis interviewed many people who by reputation were intuitive, including Marshall McLuhan. "Nobody was talking about process then, only product, and McLuhan said, 'It's the process,'" she remembers.

Denis decided she couldn't write a thesis about intuition in straight lines on standard-sized pages. Instead, she wove a large tapestry. "It said everything I knew," she says. "Then I wrote a translation for illiterate professors who couldn't read tapestries. I didn't care if I got a doctorate, so I was free."

For the past 30 years, Denis has been a process facilitator, mainly in the non-profit sector. "I've worked with many groups of Catholic sisters around the world," she says. "It's wonderful to enable a group to discover what its inner process is."

Denis continued in her role as an educator as well. In the 1980s, she spent 10 years on the staff of both OISE and the Toronto School of Theology. As well, she helped hundreds of other people become facilitators, both internationally and at her own small retreat and conference centre called Still Point, which was located on Clark Lake, outside of Huntsville.

"I don't teach, I try to facilitate learning," she says, quoting Gerald Pine, who said, "Nobody can teach anybody anything of significance."

Since retiring about five years ago and moving into town, Denis has spent most of her time mentoring other women. "Throughout the process is a core of central values, of spirituality. That may or may not have anything to do with religion," she says. "Women are hungry for a spirituality they can say is theirs — their own process."

Denis says she realized long ago that the most ordinary things in life are at the same time the most spiritual: life itself, love and

learning. She adds, "I find that search in life to discover what those things are, that's what keeps me buzzing."

A board member of the North Simcoe Muskoka Local Health Integration Network, Denis is also active with Hospice Huntsville, most recently facilitating the organization's grief support group. She is a member at Curves as well and swims regularly at the centennial centre.

"I love Huntsville," says Denis. "It's close to nature and people care about each other." Denis is also struck by the way people here pull together to organize events. "They don't just leave these things to professionals," she says. "Like the group celebrating International Women's Day last year. It was just wonderful."

In fact, Denis is going to be on stage during this year's March 8 celebration at the Algonquin Theatre as facilitator, and she is honoured to be part of it. "Facilitators are like orchestra conductors, who are not music, but who enable the music," she says.

Thanks to Jenny Cressman and Meg Jordan for suggesting Marge Dennis be profiled.



LETTERS

Closing snowmobile trails isn't wise in these economic times

I don't know much about the tree-cutting bylaw other than I know it is costing the Muskoka area more than it's gaining. The snowmobile trail closures are driving our winter economy down the drain.

We own a small portion of trail in Hillside and in the past few weeks we have had several out-of-towners hoping to enjoy a good ride only to find out they have to run the roads, costing them considerably in repairs if they do. One group said they were going home because of lack of trail access instead of staying the week. Another said they

wouldn't be back again. The snowmobilers generate considerable winter revenue.

Instead of driving them off we should be putting our best foot forward, and as far as I've seen, closing the trails is not the best way to go, as shown in the Feb. 20 editorial cartoon of the snowmobiler driving away with his money and the business owner closing up shop. In these economic times none of us can afford missing out on any business.

Margaret Campbell
Hillside

Government puts corporation before average Canadian worker

Last Friday I joined more than 300 workers from Sudbury in a peaceful protest in front of Tony Clement's office in Huntsville. In spite of an agreement made between their employer, Xstrata, and the Canadian government protecting the workers' jobs until July 2009, Tony Clement, Canada's Industry Minister, has allowed Xstrata to back out of their agreement and begin layoffs now.

Ken Lewenza, president of CAW, Claude Gravelle, NDP MP from Nickle Belt, and Glen Thibeault, NDP MP from Sudbury, were also there supporting the workers.

According to Lewenza, Clement has cited the current economic downturn as reason for siding with Xstrata. It seems to me that this agreement was put in place precisely for times like these. A so-called airtight agreement that guaranteed jobs for three years came about to protect those jobs in case times got tough. Layoffs don't typically happen during good times.

Xstrata is a multi-billion dollar Swiss

company with interests around the globe. The CEO of Xstrata was recently awarded an incentive package worth more than \$180 million Canadian. This was on top of his regular salary. The seven weeks' pay that is due to Xstrata employees would barely show up on a balance sheet of a company this size, but for the workers and their families it means so much.

At the heart of this protest was a deep sense of frustration over the Harper government's agenda. The Conservatives were wrong to sell off our natural resources to a foreign corporation. And they are wrong to put the interests of this Swiss company before the livelihoods of Canadian workers and their families. Clement has sent a clear message that during these tough economic times the corporation, foreign or not, comes before the average Canadian. It's a shame.

Sara Hall
president
Parry Sound-Muskoka NDP Riding Association

Priorities need to be re-shuffled

Re: Huntsville to get state-of-art rec centre and Hospital budget troubles, Huntsville Forester, Feb. 11.

Isn't there something wrong here? How about \$13.7 million for an arena and \$3 million for the hospital?

Don't get me wrong. I know we need another ice surface, and have for years, but maybe they could cut corners somewhere to make the arena budget smaller.

While the hospital is trying to balance

its budget it is having to cut services we need, while still giving the excellent service we get. I know we are looking at hard economic times. I have a suggestion that might help.

How about anyone making \$100,000 a year take a 20 per cent cut? I'm sure they would still be able to manage. Ask any senior living on under \$15,000 a year.

Violet Earl
Huntsville

Laverne Reynolds set some high standards for caring, generosity and team spirit

One of the lasting values of sport is that it brings people together and, through the sharing of a common purpose and a common pool of experiences, forges bonds between those people that often last a lifetime.

The strength of such bonds was very much in evidence at the funeral celebrating the life of Laverne Reynolds on Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009. The room was filled with former teammates of Laverne's.

While Laverne didn't actually take part in the "on-ice" or "on-floor" competition, he was very much an important member of every team with which he was associated. He cared as much as any team member about the outcome of the game and about his teammates who were actually taking part in the game. And he gave as much of himself to the team as could be expected of any player on the ice or floor.

I remember him best as a team "chauffeur." He always seemed to be available to drive members of the team to their out-of-town games in his personal automobile. I was fortunate to almost always be assigned to ride with Laverne. And, a ride with Laverne was an experience to remember.

The phrase "twinkle in his eye" refers better to Laverne than to anyone else I've known. When I close my eyes and picture him, he always has at least a smile and is, more likely, laughing that boyish giggle that was so characteristic of him. He had a wealth of stories and songs — frequently off-colour — with which he regaled us during the trip.

Laverne was born without fingers on his one hand. He referred to that hand as his "stub." He would often accompany his songs on his harmonica and, since the harmonica required the use of his good hand, he used to steer and often to beat out the rhythm on the steering wheel with his stub.

He drove fast and it was not uncommon for us to be stopped by the police. I never saw him actually get a ticket. It seemed that every police officer that ever stopped us knew Laverne and sent him on his way with a resigned shake of the head and a warning, much to the delight of Laverne.

He would scout out the cornfields on the trip to the game so we could stop and raid them on the trip home.

Laverne was a character. He did some outrageous things, things you could never get away with today. And yet, he left us with a treasure trove of experiences that have enriched our lives. Almost all of us have Laverne stories that we share over and over with each other and we never tire of hearing them. As soon as someone starts a Laverne story — one I've heard hundreds of times — I can feel a smile starting to spread over my whole being.

Laverne Reynolds was a caring, generous man, one I am proud to call a teammate. We who have been fortunate enough to have known him can only hope to live up to the standard of caring, generosity and team spirit that he has set.

Don McCormick
Huntsville

John Tory only interested in himself

John Tory's cynical appropriation in pursuit of Ms. Scott's seat in the long-held Conservative property from Lindsay north to Haliburton presumes obedient voters will embrace the seatless, quick-talking leader as a done deal.

What's ironic (I mean beyond the fact the Conservative legacy under junior fascist Harris pretty much ruined Ontario's health-care system, not to mention Walkerton), is if John Tory were ever to govern Ontario, his policies would inevitably turn hard left as Harper's policies have done, thereby effectively emasculating Conservative

dreams and promises of less government and lower taxes. Harper is now a socialist.

Ontario is facing the second Great Depression, folks (thanks to the trickle-down by-product of Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush Jr. years stateside) and no Conservative or Liberal has a clue what to do. We are clearly screwed until we invest in a sustainable long-term infrastructure rebuild from health care to daycare; from libraries to affordable housing; from renewable energy to water quality. John Tory is only interested in John Tory.

Mendelson Joe
Emsdale

— LETTERS CONTINUED ON PAGE A17



HEALTHCARE HEROES

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