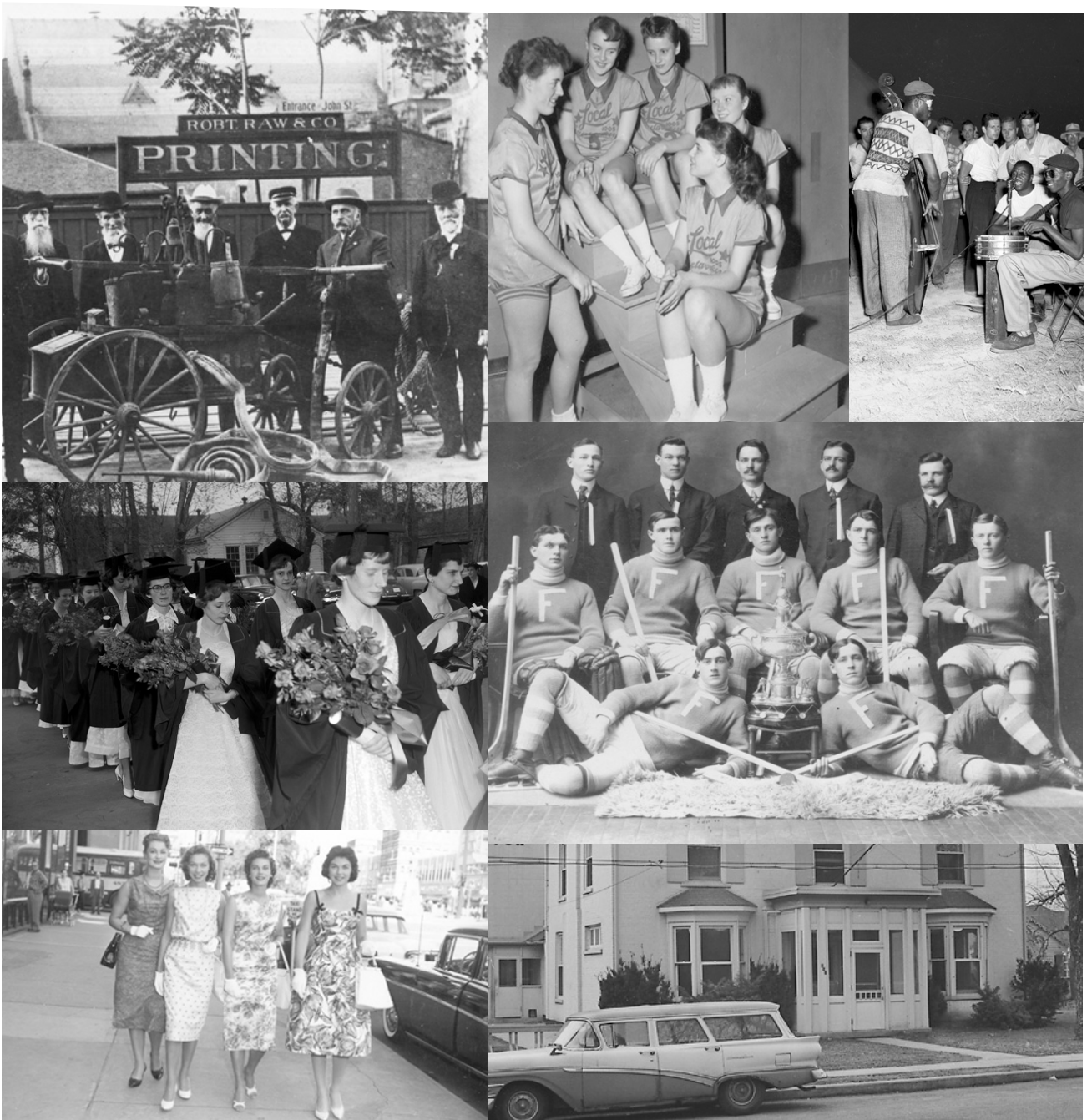


WRITING THROUGH TIME



Images courtesy of Hamilton Public Library, Local History & Archives

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FOREWORD

Writing Through Time: Older Adult Digital Storytelling is a project that embodies the spirit of community. This program, offered in partnership with the McMaster University Reading Lab, the Seniors' Computer Lab Project and Hamilton Public Library, brings together senior adults and undergraduate students in the Hamilton, Ontario community to share their stories while learning digital skills. Finding inspiration in historical photos archived on Hamilton Public Library's Local History and Archives website, participants of Writing Through Time worked together to put together a collection of fiction and non-fiction stories about our Hamilton community, some of which are featured here.

Throughout the eight week program, participants learned how to use video conferencing tools, navigate the Local History and Archives website, and record and submit writing through a digital platform, all while sharing their experiences with other storytellers and developing their creative writing skills. This program created a platform for intergenerational storytelling and sharing of wisdom and knowledge.

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all who participated in this program: Anita, Brian, Chris, Heather, Jackie, Janice, Kodi, Lois, Lynda, Mira, Pryz, Sarah, Spencer, Sue, Terry, and many more anonymous but equally talented writers. This photobook is a testament to the dedication of all the participants who took part.

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Sincerely,
Nadia Lana
Research Assistant, McMaster University

“Then all at once, my father’s arms lift me up and out of the smoke, the crowds, the noise. He carries me home.”



Hamilton Central Collegiate Institute fire, 1946-06-07

TORCH

by Paige Turner

What's going on? I smell something burning. My mother comes into my room without knocking. She looks at me sitting on my bed, then she does a sweep of the room. There. My dad's ashtray - the big one - on my bedside table. Mom walks over, picks it up, base resting on the palm of her hand. Hot.

Our eyes meet. *What's this?* she asks.

Nothing, I say.

She looks down at the ashes in the ashtray - remnants of the bits of newspaper I had lit, just to watch it burn. She looks again at my face, then turns and leaves.

I know she won't tell my dad. That would trigger a discussion, and she doesn't want to talk, not to me or to him, not about anyone or anything. *It's the grief*, Grandma says.

My brother is gone, but I'm still here, alone on my bed, in my room, upstairs at our house on East Avenue in Hamilton. And it's a long moment before I realize - my mom took the ashtray, but she left me with the matches.

Between that day and the big fire, I take Michael's old bike out of the backyard shed - it's still a bit big for me - I'm only nine - but I can ride it. With wheels under me and no one watching, my range gets wider - soon I'm all over lower Hamilton.

By the tracks near Corktown Park, I build a fort in the woods and try to light sticks and stuff, like a real campfire. Sometimes I bring a wiener from the fridge. I imagine I'm a Boy Scout, like my brother was before high school and the military and the war. Mostly my fires never take hold and I eat my food cold. But for a moment, right when the kindling catches, I have hope.

Then comes June 7, 1946. After dinner I hop on my bike and ride aimlessly across the streets of Stinson toward Corktown. On the way back to my house I circle the high school.

Central Collegiate Institute is a huge building that takes up a full city block. No one is around - it's Friday night - the place is dark inside. I stop at the corner near Hunter and Victoria, and notice the ground floor window has been left open, just a crack. I go to push it down, but instead I pull out a match, scrape it along the brick. My heart pounds - before I know it, I am dropping a lit match into the school, just to see what will happen. In a panic, I ride off down Victoria street as fast as I can.

It won't take, I think. It will be just a small fire at most. I am wrong.

I turn and ride back when I hear the sirens. It's getting dark by the time I get to the school - seems like the whole city came to see the school burn and burn and burn.

I watch the fire spreads and people come. Some cry. The pit in my stomach grows, my heart pounds in my ears, heat rises inside me in wave after wave. The building burns and hoses pour and firemen yell and people watch from the lawn. I crumble to the ground, where all I smell is grass and dirt and my own guilt. Then all at once, my father's arms lift me up and out of the smoke, the crowds, the noise. He carries me home.

The newspaper says the fire was deliberately set, and they even know where the match dropped. The school is destroyed - only the big gym at the back still stands. No one ever finds out it was me - at least I don't think so. But from that day on, my mother asks where I am going and tells me when to be home. Sometimes I find a snack set out for me when I come home from school, and she'll sit with me while I eat. My dad gets some paint and together we make Michael's bike bright and shiny. But I don't ride as much, or as far. My fort in the woods is out of bounds now.

After, I bury deep the fact that I did such an awful thing. I avoid that city block, and that dark part of myself, for the rest of my years living on East Avenue. I never play at the recreation centre they build a couple of years later from the school's gymnasium. Only as a grownup do I go back. When they put in the pool in 1963, I take my own kids for a swim.

As I float, I wonder how different I would be if I hadn't dropped that match. I think about all the kids who went to other high schools because Central had burned to the ground. I wonder how life would change for so many people in so many ways if the school still stood. And I wonder, to this day, how many others carry a secret, deep down inside, just like me.

“By the tracks near Corktown Park, I build a fort in the woods and try to light sticks and stuff, like a real campfire. Sometimes I bring a wiener from the fridge. I imagine I’m a Boy Scout, like my brother was before high school and the military and the war. Mostly my fires never take hold and I eat my food cold. But for a moment, right when the kindling catches, I have hope.”

COOTE'S PARADISE

by Old Muser

Coote's Paradise - what an odd name for a marsh. There is a reason. In the late 1700s, troops of the British military were stationed at Fort George near what is now Niagara-on-the-Lake. The reputation of the marsh as a major stopover for migrating waterfowl was well known. A couple of times a year, Captain Coote and a party of soldiers would tramp all the way to the Burlington Heights, the sand and gravel between the marsh and the western end of Hamilton Bay. As waterfowl would usually stick to a certain height when flying over water, when they passed over the Heights, the hunters would be very close to them. It was a hunter's paradise and as captain, he would be honoured with the name, Coote's Paradise.



Henry W. Smith, 52

**“It was a hunter’s paradise and as captain,
he would be honoured with the name,
Coote’s Paradise.”**

PLAIN JANE

by Jackie Birch

“Jane remembered the trouble she had trying to find a prom gown that flattered her own figure. Her mother tried to comfort her, saying when a thin girl falls ill, she withers away, but Jane, on the other hand, would always have something to draw on.”

She hated that her name was Jane. When she was in school, she remembered that the kids called her Plain Jane. There was nothing she could think of that was worse than being plain. She wasn't as pretty as Lottie James or Hannah Burke. Jane's mother told her looks aren't everything, but they were something. Jane noticed that Lottie and Hannah got the most valentines every year, and the boys always seemed to have excuses to pass their desks in class. Sometimes it was on the way their to the pencil sharpener. Other times, they were looking for a pair of scissors. Tommy Taylor or Jimmy Shea would deliberately bump into one of the girl's desks and then Lottie would smile, showing her oversized white teeth that reminded Jane of a horse. Hannah would laugh so loudly, Jane wanted to put a muzzle on her like old Mrs. Flannery did on her German shepherd after it bit her paperboy.

Besides not being pretty, Jane knew she also wasn't tiny like Maryanne Dunbar who had the height and shape of a child, but with a big bosom, and Jane had noticed, a head so large it looked like to didn't belong to her body. Jane remembered the trouble she had trying to find a prom gown that flattered her own figure. Her mother tried to comfort her, saying when a thin girl falls ill, she withers away, but Jane, on the other hand, would always have something to draw on.

Now that Jane was in her twenties, she felt even more pressure to find a boy, so she could get married like the other girls her age and even younger. Lottie James ended up marrying Jimmy Shea right after graduation, and they had twin girls a year later. Hannah Burke went off to McMaster University. She didn't finish any degree, but she did get her Mrs. when she married a business student from Niagara Falls named John Harper. Jane wanted her own Jimmy or Johnny. Her mother had tried, unsuccessfully, to fix her up, but most of the time, good old Plain Jane felt like she was wasting her life, working in a local drug store and living in her childhood home with her parents and younger sister Patsy.

She was working one day when Martin Zeller came into the store to buy aspirin for his father who owned Zeller's Hardware. Jane remembered Martin from school being smart, but unpopular because he was quiet and awkward. She watched him up walking up and down the aisles. His hairline was already receding, and he had a little pot belly that hung over his black belt like a jellyroll. When he reached her at the cash register, she saw that his eyes beneath his horn-rimmed glasses were dull and muddy brown. He turned them

towards her.

“Hi Jane. I don’t know if you heard, but there’s a dance this weekend at the Brant Inn. I was wondering if you’d like to go with me?” His voice was just audible.

Jane was so thrilled at the prospect of a date, she looked past his crooked smile. “Why, sure, Martin, I’d love to.”

Martin unconsciously straightened his posture and thrust his shoulders back. “That’s great. I’ll pick you up on Friday night at 7.”

On Friday, Martin arrived at her house in his father’s Oldsmobile. He came inside, and Jane made sure to introduce him to her parents just in case. He was polite and shook her father’s hand. On the way to the dance, Martin talked about how he wanted to take over his father’s business one day and maybe even turn Zeller’s into a chain store. He certainly wasn’t handsome, but Jane noticed that his suit was new, and his shoes were shiny. They danced and drank Coke out of bottles. Jane laughed when Martin attempted to be funny and took his arm as they walked together towards the car after the dance.

“I was thinking,” Martin said, “that we could go down to the beach before heading home. Would you like to, Jane?” He was tentative, even after spending the night together.

“Yes, that would be fun.” She knew she didn’t have to be home right away. It was the night her parents played cards, and they would be home late.

They strolled on the beach holding hands like lovers do, and then sat by some logs beside the lake. No one else was around.

“Jane, I think you’re beautiful. I really like you. I was wondering if I could...If you’d like to...” Martin was too shy to admit what he wanted and looked guilty for even thinking about it.

But Jane knew what he meant and only repeated herself. “Yes, that would be fun.”

Jane walked slowly through the china shop with her mother and Patsy, shopping for the perfect set to complement her decor. When she spotted a floral and leaf pattern in golden brown and green, she knew that was the one. She could imagine it on display in the dining room cabinet of the new three-bedroom house her husband-to-be had just purchased for them. What a momentous occasion. She knew her mother had a camera in her handbag, so Jane asked her to take a picture. Jane posed, tilting a teacup, and looking at the camera with a sly smile as if to say, look at me now.

On the way home, Patsy, one of Jane's bridesmaids, asked her sister about her wedding. Patsy was curious about the all the details, the dresses, cake, and hors oeuvres.

"Do you love him, Jane?" Jane knew that her sister read Harlequin romances, but she was still taken aback by the question or maybe it was by her sister's boldness in asking it.

Jane laughed nervously and responded too quickly, "Of course I do." She instinctively looked down at her diamond ring that was small but real. She knew in her heart that Martin was a gentleman, but she was lying about love and about the baby she had told Martin was coming before he proposed. There would be time to deal with that. For now, she was excited about her new life. Plain Jane was going to become Mrs. Martin Zeller!

McCall China Shop, Vittoria, 1961-01-21



BRIGHT STAR

by Lois Corey

10 year old Yuka sat nestled in the warmth of his mother's lap. His brother, father and uncle has just returned to their summer camp from a successful day of fishing. There would be a delicious dinner of fish tonight. True to the meaning of his name, "Bright Star", he brought light, joy and hope into his parents life and that of his entire extended family. A big smile lit up his face as his father entered the camp, and as he cried out in welcome, a short cough belied the disease that lurked inside his little body.

Their camp was situated on the edge of the water near Igluktuk (what the white man called "Coppermine") northwest of what is now called Hudsons' Bay. Yuka felt like the luckiest boy in the world, living in his beautiful land of ice and snow. He followed closely behind his family members, copying their actions to learn what he needed to know to survive in this icy world. He was also free to roam and learn about the world around him. Following the Inuit way, his parents never scolded or used any kind of harsh punishment, but instead modelled by example. Thus he was learning his own way in the world. During the winter they lived on the ice and hunted the seals and the walrus. During the summer, they moved up the inlet to a summer camp to take advantage of the bounties of food that summer offered such as caribou and fish. On this particular day, they had just gathered round to view the fish harvest when his uncle exclaimed he saw a boat approaching. In keeping with their tradition of hospitality, his mother rushed into the tent to grab the pot and start boiling some tea for the visitors.

As the boat neared, they could see it was a white man's boat. Although many Inuit were losing their traditional skills, living in small communities with white man houses, Yuka's family still lived mostly off the land, occasionally visiting the town



“Inuit” 1955

and trading animal pelts for the odd modern luxury. At those times they were asked to visit a building where a woman in a white dress would take their pulse and ask them to step into a room where a special picture was taken of their body. They said it was necessary to protect their people from a sickness. The lady used the words “endangered species,” but of course they couldn’t understand her and saw no harm in agreeing to the pictures.

The boat pulled into shore and a white man stepped off. He said, “Hello, my name is George Robinson. I am looking for a boy named Yuka.” Beside the man was an Inuit woman named Aqakuktuq (or fish catcher) who was able to repeat the words of the man in the Inuit language so that they could understand what was said to them. Yuka’s mother was startled that they knew her boy’s name. In Inuit she said, “What is this about?”. Aqakuktuq answered, “Yuka has a very bad disease called tuberculosis which can spread to everyone around him. We can save his life and protect others, but in order to do this, he must be taken away to hospital in a place called Hamilton. I am so sorry, but there is no choice.”

Yuka’s mother and father became very upset. His father, who never raised his voice, began to shout, “No! No! We were not consulted! He belongs with us.” His mother

clung to his father's arm, trying to present a united front to the intruders. When the man called Mr. Robinson moved towards their son as if to take him by the arm, Yuka's father brandished his spear and said, "You will not touch him!" His mother cried out, "Please, why are you doing this?! Please stop!" but the man had several large uniformed men with him who physically restrained his father, mother and uncle and created a barrier so that Mr. Robinson could lift Yuka up in his arms and whisk him onto the boat. Yuka's mother cried with anguish, "Please do not take my little bright star or at least take me too with you so that he is not alone! I beg you!" The Inuit translator woman cast her eyes down, said so very sorry but it is for the best, we will not harm him and he will be returned when he is cured. Yuka's mother responded with "You are indeed a fish catcher! You have captured my little fish." The woman turned away as the white men hurriedly boarded the boat with Yuka and pushed off, leaving the bewildered family prostrate in anguish on the shore.

Yuka screamed as loud as he could, "Mama, Papa, please don't let them take me. Help!" over and over. He saw his parents jump into their boat and paddle towards them but they could not keep pace with the motor boat, and as their figures slowly receded into the distance Yuka sobbed bitterly. This must be a bad dream, he thought, I will wake up soon. But he did not.

Once far enough out from shore that his parents' boat was a pinpoint on the horizon, the boat pulled up to a much larger ship with the words, "C. D. Howe" printed in big black letters on the side. He was carried up a ladder to the big ship where he discovered there were many others like him. His sealskin anorak and kamiit were stripped from him and replaced with western trousers, jacket and shoes and a card with a number tied to the buttons of his jacket. His hair was shaved and he was showered and "de-loused". His name was not to be spoken again, he was to be indendified by a number only, later to be given an English name in hospital.

It was a very long way to Hamilton from his home, with many stops, the last being a bus ride from the ship to a place called the "Hamilton Sanatorium". He was terrified with this new world and its people, so unlike his own. A man on the bus spoke to him. He also was wearing a funny suit like the man on the boat. Yuka could not figure out which animal skin it was made of, it was like no animal he had ever seen. There was no snow, no ice, no seals, no walrus. How would he learn to hunt seals in this new place? There were many large structures made of materials that he had never seen before – concrete, metal, glass and more. In spite of it being so warm here, people seemed to stay inside

these big buildings most of the time. It was baffling how they could stand it. How he longed and dreamed of home – especially the summer trips to gather berries and hunt fish with his father, brother and uncle and sitting in the warmth of his mother’s lap. The pain of missing home was unbearable.

To make matters worse, these people it seemed were never taught how to behave. On the day they took his clothes, that his mother had so lovingly made, away from him, he tried to pull them back. Did they not understand how many hours it had taken his mother to make these?! The man yelled at and hit him. Inuit parents never did this. They led by example in teaching their children good behaviour such as patience and humility. He felt like he was surrounded by devils.

At least in the hospital there were many other Inuit, of all ages and he was eventually able to make some friends. The white people gave them soapstone and tools to try to keep themselves busy while they rested and tried to recover. Yuka quickly showed skill and passed many hours creating sculptures that reminded him of home – walrus with tusks, smooth shiny seals dancing through the water. The carving into which he poured the agonies of his soul and painstaking hours of careful work was a replica of his mother holding him in her lap. This one he was most proud of.

After four years they returned him to his home and his family. How ecstatic he was to see his family again as they rushed towards each other! “My little star is in my sky again!” exclaimed his mother. How much older and care worn though his father and mother looked. He learned his uncle too had been taken away on the big boat, but unlike Yuka, he so far has never been heard from again. One night, while sitting beside his mother (now too big to fit in her lap) Yuka said, “I don’t feel like I belong anymore. If I had been here, Papa would have taught me to hunt seal, but now I feel like I don’t know anything.” A big tear rolled down his cheek. His mother said, “Never mind, you will slowly learn, you will always belong to us, you will always be our bright star.” Yuka now knew he was truly home. He said, “Wait here Mama, I have something I have been keeping for you.” He got up and searched through his bag and pulled out a carefully wrapped carving. “This is for you, Mama.” They both cried.

ALBION FALLS

by Terry Martens

The City of Hamilton has long been known as “The Steel City” - not the most flattering of labels, but it was one that I never gave much consideration to. I have always lived here and found so many places to visit and enjoy.

During the years when my children were young, we often visited several waterfalls in the city, but our favourite was always Albion Falls. The flow of water depended greatly on the weather. During the hot days when we were experiencing a drought, the flow would be slow and minimal over the rocks. After heavy rain, the water would flow rapidly, a loud thunderous splash against the rocky bottom. We loved carefully climbing down the path and rocks to reach the pond at the bottom. You would always need to be cautious as the depth would vary depending on the volume that had been flowing.

The kids enjoyed standing on the ledge behind the waterfall. The water streamed down in front like a curtain dividing them off from the rest of the world. They would reach out their hands to interrupt the flow and feel the water crashing against their hands, spraying their clothes and faces. After being on the ledge for a while they would venture along the rocks at the bottom, finding various places to sit. There were two large rocks side by side that both seem to slope towards each other. The kids always referred to them as the book rocks as they appeared to be like the open pages of a book. This was one of their favourite places to sit in the sun and dry off after playing in the pond.

As the city became known as the “City of Waterfalls,” its popularity skyrocketed. Now the falls were busy with tourists and people. It is now not the way to spend a relaxing afternoon with family. As the numbers grew, so would the risks that many people would take. In some cases, we would see people jumping from the top of the falls to the pond below. They would also try to scale about the walls of the falls without thought of the risk involved. Unfortunately, this would lead to many injuries and accidents at the waterfalls in the area.

On many occasions, firefighters would be required to attend waterfalls and perform

rope rescues to assist injured people. This would lead to injuries, and in some cases, death. The city then blocked access to both the top and the bottom of the falls. You could now only see the falls from the viewing platform from a distance, no longer up close or touching the water.

It is so sad that we are unable to enjoy the beauty of the falls as we did before. Now you can either see them from a distance or by paying to access what we once enjoyed for free.



Fiction

THE ANNIVERSARY

by Jackie Birch



Mr. and Mrs. J. Stacy Burwash, Jarvis, 1961-02-04

This couple refuses to cooperate with me. I don't think they're trying to be difficult. Instead, they seem completely unaware that they're being difficult. I've tried everything I know as a photographer to get these two to smile, or at the very least, look happy. Even the tricks I learned with children don't work on them. Their mouths remain turned downward. I consider the irony of them sitting on a loveseat together, since my camera can't pick up any discernible love between them. Their arms are touching, it is true, but only because the loveseat is small, forcing the woman to sit just in front of her husband. He looks like he's broad in the shoulders, but I think his suit is creating an illusion; his jacket is oversized, too big and padded for his frail body.

I'm here because my boss at the paper sent me. "It's an anniversary piece," he said. "There's a couple just outside of the city who are the oldest residents in the village."

"How old?" I was worried about what I might encounter here. And as it turns out, I was right to worry, but not for the reason I expected.

"Not sure. Burwash is the last name. James and Minnie. One of their neighbours told me they got married in 1900."

I look at their hands for their wedding rings, wondering if I can feature them in a photo. Only James wears a band. Minnie wears no jewellery except for a brooch pinned on her dark dress that gives her an unmistakable air of grandmotherly sternness. I see then that their hands aren't even close to meeting. They rest on their laps as if a teacher in my place has instructed them to let her see their hands.

As I hold the camera in their small, tidy living room, I try to get them to turn towards me, but Minnie tips her head ever so slightly to the right, and James to the left. Their bodies stiffly face forward, and only their eyes seek me out. Through the lens, they look awkward, like they happened to be testing the cushion on the loveseat when they think they hear a knock at the door. I move around the room. I give them direction. I offer encouragement. But getting them to relax would be akin to performing a miracle. It's not going to happen. This is one of my worst photos. I can only hope I can redeem myself with the accompanying story.

I ask them what I figure I need to know for the paper. They tell me they have been married for seventy years now, that Minnie is 88 and James is 91. James retired when he had heart trouble at the age of 75. Until then, he owned and operated an old grocery store in the village that his father opened in the 1860s. I have my angle: long-time village resident and businessman celebrates a milestone wedding anniversary. Then I wonder if there's anything else.

"Will you be celebrating with your children and grandchildren then?"

James and Minnie look at each other. It's Minnie who answers. "No, we never had any children."

James adds, "I had to sell the store. I couldn't pass it on like my father did to me."

"What happened to it? Is it still open?" I wonder if I could get some better pictures there.

“Oh no,” James answers. “The fella from Toronto who took it over ended up selling it. It was torn down after a while. There’s a parking lot there now.” He looks off into the distance wistfully, and I notice his mouth has fallen open as if he’s about to say more, but he doesn’t.

It’s Minnie who breaks the silence. “You know, we both wanted a family, but it never worked out. I was expecting eleven times. And eleven times I lost the baby.” Minnie then clutches her broach and suddenly her eyes well up with tears. Soon they’re streaming down her wrinkled cheeks and get stuck in shallow pools in her downturned mouth.

I’m uncomfortable, struggling to figure out what to do next and ending up doing nothing except imagining how it must have been to lose a child eleven times. But I’m at a loss. My wife and I had four children over five years easily and often complained about it.

James shifts in his seat. I’m not sure what he’s doing at first. But, as if in slow motion, he raises his right arm. It’s not an easy feat for him. I see a grimace of pain flash across his hollow face. Then he takes his arm hoisted crookedly in the air and places it around the shoulders of his wife. “It’s all right, Min. We tried. It wasn’t your fault. We did just fine.”

And just like that, Minnie stops crying. I hear her say ever so quietly, “Thank you, Jamie. You always know what to say.”

I can’t believe my good fortune. Right in front of my eyes I have the perfect picture of a long-lasting union. How often do you see an elderly couple in a genuine embrace on their 70th wedding anniversary? I quickly raise my camera to capture the image I know is fleeting. Then I lower it again. I can’t do it. I can’t invade the privacy of this intimate moment for a better picture in the paper. I’d rather stick with the inferior shots I’ve already taken.

“What would you say is the secret to a long marriage?” I toss out this final question as an afterthought as I’m packing up to go.

At almost the same time, they say the same thing. It’s a single word. “Love.” And then they smile.

“It’s not an easy feat for him. I see a grimace of pain flash across his hollow face. Then he takes his arm hoisted crookedly in the air and places it around the shoulders of his wife. ‘It’s all right, Min. We tried. It wasn’t your fault. We did just fine.’”

AN EXCLUSIVE ROOMING HOUSE: 19 BOLD STREET

by Spencer

The words “exclusive” and “rooming house” don’t seem to belong in the same sentence. A rooming house is a building with multiple (usually furnished) rooms rented out individually, with shared bathrooms and kitchens. So it’s quite surprising to see a rooming house described in these glowing terms in a Hamilton newspaper from one century ago, with the grand name “The Royal Alexandra”. It reads: 19 Bold Street / FOR SALE / Owner retiring from business. One of the most central and exclusive rooming-houses in Hamilton. Fully furnished; paying splending (sic) revenue. Ten bedrooms, five three-roomed suites; one five-roomed suite; three bathrooms, one with pedestal basin, laundry tubs; excellent furnace, hot water heater; large lawn, electric range; hardwood floors; four electric grates with overmantels. Apply Owner, on premises.” The advertisement in the archives is dated as “192?”.



The Royal Alexandra rooming house, Hamilton, 192-?

Today, the building at 19 Bold Street in the Durand district is home to businesses and at least one apartment. It’s part of a terrace of 4 units. At first glance, numbers 13, 15, 19 and 21 Bold may look like they were built at the same time. However, a closer look reveals the first two are stone and the second two are brick. The stone-faced numbers 13 and 15 were built in 1855 according to the book, *Footsteps in Time* by Bill Manson.

According to the city directories, #19 and 21 were built between 1888 and 1891. In the 1887/88 directory, #19 and #21 don’t exist. The directory for 1889-90 is missing. And in the 1891-92 directory, #19 and 21 appear. So 1888-1891 is as accurate as we can get for now.

Who lived in the building back then? The 1891-92 city directory lists George W. Perry as sole occupant of #19 Bold. It seems like a big house for just one person, though. The Canadian census of 1891 reveals some more information. Mr. Perry is described there as a contractor or mason. Living with him at the time are his wife, his two sons and six lodgers. The lodgers include two school principals, a bookkeeper, a salesperson, a student and a dressmaker. So right from the start, this building is being used both as a family home and as a rooming house. Ten years later, in the 1901 Canadian census, Mr. Perry is living there with his family, one male servant, and 8 lodgers. The house is getting more crowded!

Mr. Perry is still there in 1910, almost two decades later.

However, in 1911, a new resident shows up in the unit 1 of the building: Mrs. John E Martin. In the 1911 census, she has a 7-year-old son, Jack E., with her and several lodgers. In 1920, in the directory, the building takes on a new name: The Royal Alexandra Apts (although it's still a rooming house according to the census). In the 1921 census, she is listed as Mable Martin, widow, head. She is 49 years old and her occupation is listed as "income" – which is probably from the property. She has five roomers: a 70-year-old man with "income", a tailor, a reporter, a stenographer, and a waitress.

Then, in 1926, there is another name in unit 1: Mable E. McLean. It's odd that both the first name and the initial of the person are the same. Could this be the same woman and she's just using a different last name? Perhaps a maiden name? There are 11 units in the building, with 3 vacant. The tenants include a civil engineer and a cashier at a restaurant—another interesting range of occupations.

The Durand district of a century ago is often described as a neighbourhood of middle and upper-class single-family homes; then in the 1960s and 1970s, the story goes, many of these houses were demolished and replaced with apartment buildings, which drastically changed the community. While this is partly true, the history of 19 Bold suggests a more layered reality. In the city directories of the period, #19 is not the only rooming house or apartment building in Durand. It looks like many single people, or couples, of that era rented rooms or apartments in the neighbourhood. It appears that Durand was home to a mix of social classes, as well ... just as it is today.



19 Bold Street, Hamilton, ON, 2023

THE CLOSET

by Paige Turner

“It was on the day the electrician came - right after I moved in - that I realized it was true. There was someone in the closet.”



Elmwood Estate Bedroom, 194-?

I was excited to find this photo of our bedroom in the archives - turns out my house was built in 1869! Our bed sits in the same place as the one in the photo, but the fireplace is gone - chimney closed, hearth removed, wall smoothed. And there it is, tucked in the corner... my small closet. The closet.

It was on the day the electrician came - right after I moved in - that I realized it was true. There was someone in the closet. After checking out the attic for some new wiring, he had a disturbed look on his face. I asked if everything was alright. "Yes - the wiring will be fine," he said. "But there's something strange about your closet. Have you noticed?"

Indeed, I had. But I wanted a second opinion. "What do you mean?"

"There's an energy. Someone is there. Not scary... just there."

He was not wrong. I had felt it the first time I opened the door and peered in to the empty space. I wondered why there were no clothes in the closet, but figured the sellers had just cleaned up for the showing. The air in there was... thinner somehow. Cooler. I thought it was because of the trap door leading to the attic, but that didn't explain the unusual vibe. Turns out it wasn't my imagination - it's the same, now that I've moved in... except now the vibe is even stronger. I haven't hung my clothes in there... it just feels wrong somehow.

A friend who is sensitive to these sorts of things checks it out. She says it's a female spirit - not doing any harm, just hanging out. "You can ask her to leave, you know. Just have a conversation with her - tell her it's time to go."

And so I do. The next night, I open the door, sit on the bed and start to talk.

"Hey there. I'm new here... and I need to put my clothes away. I know you here and probably comfortable in the closet, but could you please move on? Find another place? I know moving is hard... but maybe it's all for the best. I'll leave you to think about it. Thank you."

After a couple of days, I open the door.. and... nothing. No lady spirit energy at all. And the air is the same in there as it is in the rest of the house. I breathe a sigh of relief and put my things away.

I haven't really thought about it since, but when I look at this photo - I have to wonder - was she a person who lived in this house and slept in that bed? Or maybe even the person who took the photo? Or was she already the spirit in the closet?

HAND IN HAND

by Anita

What do you see when you look at this photograph? I see a man and a little girl walking, hand in hand, down a city sidewalk. You can imagine all kinds of things when looking at old images but let me tell you what I do know about this picture. The sidewalk is on East 38th on the Hamilton Mountain not far from Concession Street. The photo was taken in the summer of 1964 by the little girl's mother. It was a Sunday afternoon and it would have been after they had attended church, as was their custom. The little girl adored her father. He used to parade her around the house, perched on his shoulders, making sure to duck when going through doorways. She used to insist that when she grew up; she was going to marry her Daddy. She didn't, of course.

Let me tell you a little bit about the man. Klaas was the ninth child of eleven from a farming community in the Netherlands. He immigrated to Ontario, Canada in 1952. He added Charles as his first name but everyone called him Chuck. While living in Sault Ste. Marie, he met a woman named Carol. They fell in love and were married in Huntsville in 1959 and came to Hamilton where the little girl was born. They would go on to have three more children. Chuck had an awesome sense of humour and was known for telling stories and tall tales. His tallest tale recounted his war-time adventure in the 'Submarine Airforce' which starred grey underwater paint and a gravity-defying enemy submarine. How he enjoyed telling that story. He was active in his community: his church, civic committees, and political parties. If he could, he would tell you that he is most proud of his family: his wife and children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The man in the picture, so proudly walking his little girl down the street, now uses a wheelchair in a Long Term Care facility. He is over 90 years old and dementia is slowly clawing away at his memories. Sometimes he does remember that the little girl, who once held his hand, is now the lady who drops in to visit him. Sometimes he doesn't remember who she is. Those visits are hard. But when that lady visits her Dad, they still hold hands. And when he doesn't remember, I try to love enough for both of us. I love you, Dad.



THE WOMAN ON THE WALK

by Jackie Birch

Mary called over her husband, Danny, and pointed at the newspaper.

“Danny, you’re not going to believe this, but I saw this woman on Sunday in the conservation area by the old flour mill. I was pulling Andrew in his sled, and we passed this woman. She was on a walk by herself.”

“What woman?” Danny was confused.

“Her.” Mary pointed at the paper. “Donna Hastings was her name. Here is her picture. She was found dead in a field in the conservation area yesterday afternoon. Some local boys found her on their way to the skating pond.”

“How do you know that was the same woman you saw?”

“I know because she stopped and smiled at Andrew and said what a beautiful boy he is, that he reminded her of her own son when he was little.”

“That’s unbelievable, Mary. What did they say was the cause of death? Was she murdered? That would be scary to know you and our son were in the conversation area with a murderer.”

“No, they said that there were no signs of foul play, but her body was frozen. She was curled up like she was asleep.”

“Maybe she had a heart attack.”

“I don’t know. All it says here is that police spoke to the woman’s husband who’s in the hospital. Apparently, his wife left him a note the same day she went for a walk. The police are still investigating.”

“I wonder what that note said.”

“I’d be curious to read it, too. Maybe it had something to do with him being sick.”

“Maybe, but we’ll never know.”

Alex,

I am glad you are getting better after your fall putting up the Christmas lights. I was so worried that your injuries were more serious. Not that bone fractures aren't serious. But the doctor says you will recover from your shoulder and hip fractures with time and some physiotherapy. I'm so relieved. Truly, I am.

I am writing this to you because I want to let you know I had a terrible shock today. It was after you took one of your pain pills. You know how they knock you out. While you were sleeping, and I was reading my book in the chair beside your bed, there was a delivery to your room. It was a floral arrangement of red chrysanthemums. At first, I thought your boss and co-workers must have sent the flowers from the office, and how nice of them to do that, knowing you're going to be off work for a while. But it wasn't from them. I didn't think you'd mind if I read the card. I wish I hadn't. On that little card I saw words no wife should ever read. It said, "My Dearest Alex. I am thinking of you and can't wait until you're back in my arms again. I love you, darling. Get well soon. Your Lillian."

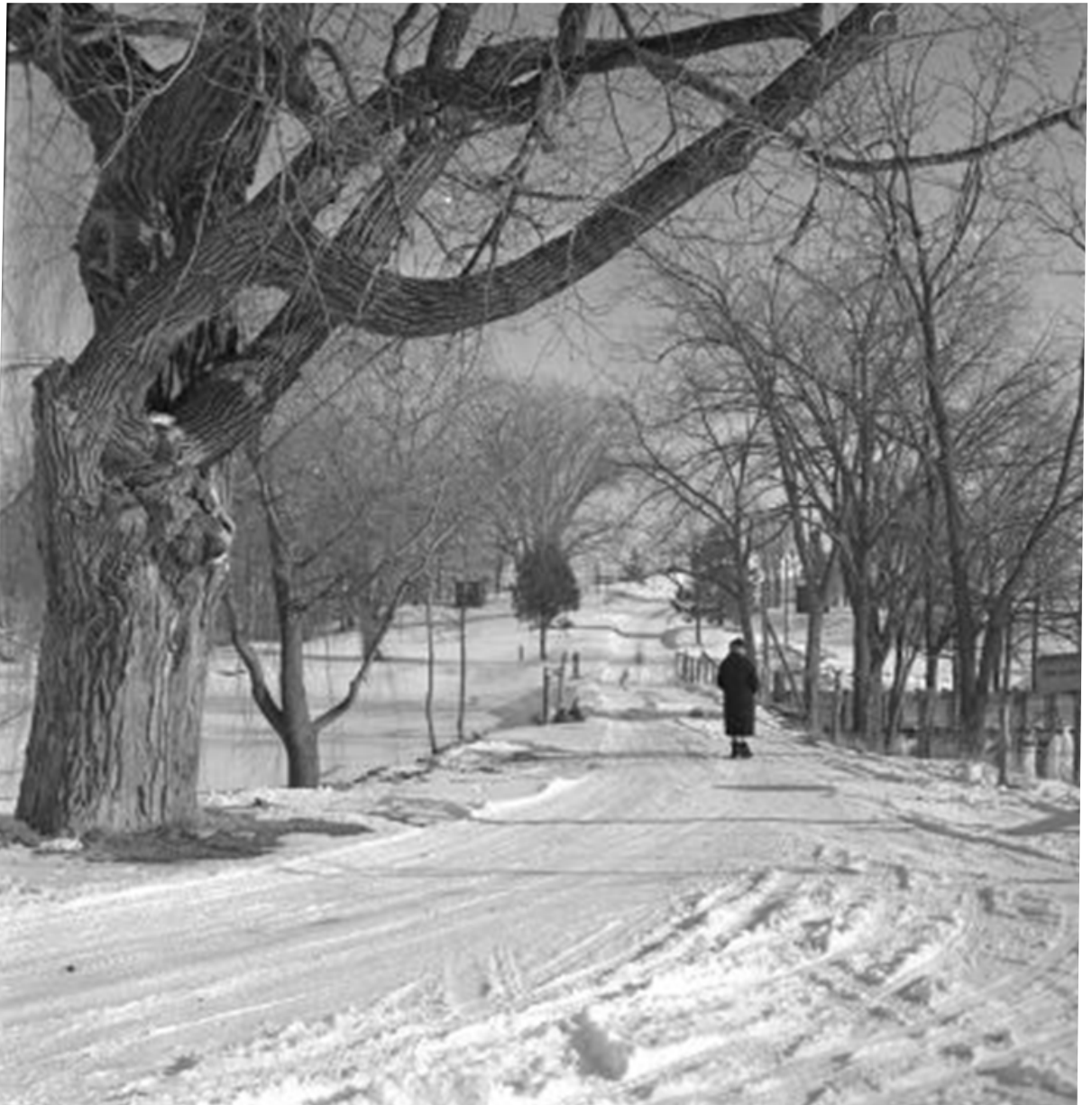
Don't bother trying to find the flowers or card. They're gone. I was so overcome with emotion, I ripped up the card into tiny pieces and plucked those flowers from their stems one by one. But they still looked beautiful, so I grabbed the petals and pulled them out by the handful. Then I stuffed your gift, vase and all, into a trash can down the hall from your room, which was no easy feat. For some reason, the red petals kept sticking to my hands, and wrists like so many perfect drops of blood.

I don't know Lillian, but I do know who she must be to you. I feel like I have fallen into a hole, one I have been avoiding for years and didn't want to go down again. It's too painful down here and so dark. I remember another woman named Anne. How could I forget? John was just a baby, and you left us to move in with Anne. And then when it didn't work out with her, you came back to me. You begged me to forgive you, to take you back, and I did, even though my mother warned me that you were just trying to wear me down with your promises. Do you remember what you promised me, Alex? Let me remind you. You said that you made a mistake with Anne, that you loved me, that you were sorry, and you would make it up to me. And then you said you would never cheat on me again. I forgave you, Alex. But most of all, I believed you. I believed you with everything in me. Now that there is a Lillian, and she is yours, I feel like such a fool.

I don't know what is wrong with me or with you, but there must be something between the two of us to explain why this keeps happening. Alex, I can't do it. I can't carry on like betrayal is normal. I gave my trust to you. I gave my love to you. I gave my life to you. But now I'm taking it back. I keep thinking of a character I read about in a novel who went to sleep in a field of snow under the light of a full moon. I'm so tired. I need to sleep, and sleeping in the snow among the trees seems so peaceful. I think it would take the ache away and be lovely somehow with all that bright white instead of the black hole I can't crawl out of. If you notice one of your pain pills missing, you can blame me. I noticed you left one on your bedside tray, and I stole it in case I needed it. The hospital has plenty more for you. There's always more for Alex, it seems.

Please tell John that I love him and that this has nothing to do with him. Tell our son the truth, Alex. Tell him his mother died of a broken heart.

Good night.
Donna



Roadway in Big Creek Conservation Authority, Port Rowan, 1961-02-11

“I keep thinking of a character I read about in a novel who went to sleep in a field of snow under the light of a full moon. I’m so tired. I need to sleep, and sleeping in the snow among the trees seems so peaceful.”

THE SHELL

by Lois Corey

I had always been a good student. My parents had taught me the value of hard work and discipline, so I excelled in my studies and pursued a career in engineering. After graduation I landed a job at Bertram, Henry and Sons Co. Ltd. In Dundas, my home town. Life was good – I had my family, my friends and girlfriends that came and went. The boys at work were a great bunch. I had friends amongst the fellows on the front line as well as the “higher-ups”. The guys on the floor seemed to respect me because I treated them as equals and listened to what they had to say.

I derived great satisfaction from designing the heavy machinery that the mill produced in particular the heavy hydraulic lifts. Then came World War I. I felt a strong desire to do my part and attempted to enlist with the Royal Flying Corps, but they turned me down, informing me that my skills as an engineer were needed at home in the manufacture of armaments.

Though disappointed, I delved into this new line of work with focused determination and managed to invent an advanced shell design which possessed a new level of lethal force. That’s me at the centre of the photo, demonstrating a process to workers. The design was patented with my initials: “J.R.” for John Richardson, affixed to the bottom of every shell, a source of great pride to me. My work felt like art to me – it was a mental and creative challenge to produce something original that had such a powerful outcome. There was a kind of giddy elation each time I successfully completed a design.



Bertram, Henry & Sons Inc. Dundas shell manufacturing, early 1900's

I worked away sometimes late into the night, drafting drawings and making improvements. The war dragged on and our mill continued to turn out weaponry. Years passed until at last peace was finally declared. I felt satisfaction that I had contributed to our country's success in finally winning the war.

It wasn't until several years after armistice that my perspective on my work was drastically altered. I was sent on a business trip to Nice, France to assist with installation of heavy hoist machinery in a new factory. I had always longed to see Europe, so managed to carve out some time to visit some local sites.

One day, after wandering the streets I stopped in at a sidewalk café. A young woman in a wheelchair approached to enter the gate at the same time as I did, so I held it open to allow her to enter first. She wheeled up to the only empty table left. Searching in vain for a place to sit, I asked if she would mind if I joined her and she said no, she wouldn't mind. We both ordered coffee and entered into conversation.

She had a warm sincere manner about her and a lovely pale face with gentle eyes, which drew me in and made me feel immediately at ease. I noticed she spoke with a German accent. Before I knew it, we were sharing life stories, in spite of coming from countries that had once been at war with one another. She was born in a small town in Germany, she told me. She had won a scholarship for competitive running through her University and was training for the World Championships when war broke out.

Observing her current confinement I perhaps overstepped the bounds to ask her what happened, how she had ended up in a wheelchair? How tragic that she could not continue to pursue her dreams. She could have told me it was none of my business but instead she shared her story.

The town where she lived also housed a military barracks. As such, it became a target for shelling from the Allied forces. One day as she walked from the local grocers to her home with her mother, a shell hit the barracks. Instantly the building and many of the soldiers within were obliterated. Her mother, caught in the head by fragments from the explosion was killed on the spot. The girl also was hit and a piece of shrapnel lodged in her spine. She was rushed to the hospital where emergency surgery was performed. They saved her life, but sadly informed her she would never walk again, her running days were over.

After the surgery they gave her the piece of shrapnel to keep as a kind of morbid souvenir if she wished. She is not sure why but she kept it and saved it to this day. She pulled it out of her purse to show me the piece of metal. It was not until she turned it over that I saw the initials stamped on the bottom: "J.R."

BALLINAHINCH HOUSE

by Lynda DiPietro



Ballinahinch House, Hamilton, ON, 1975

Mrs. Amelia Gardner, matriarch and hostess was presiding over an annual event sponsored by her husband's family. It was the fifth annual. Young writers, painters, musicians, artists of every genre were invited to the gala to meet each other, exchange ideas and celebrate the artistic culture of their city.

Mr. Frederick Gardner had been a very successful businessman, dead now for three years. He was the consummate businessman who was happy to have his wife manage his philanthropic ventures. He believed that sponsoring events such as this furthered his business interests. He really had no taste for the arts - which was a huge disappointment to Mrs. Gardner. For years, she had kept herself busy with such projects attending to events such as this one tonight while he built his empire.

Standing next to her niece Amanda, she surveyed the room when her gaze fixed upon a young man. When she saw him she quietly gasped. Amanda had not heard nor noticed. She turned to her niece and asked.

“Amanda, do you know who that young man is standing over there?”

“Which young man?” she replied.

“The one wearing the blue suit over by the window.”

Amanda turned in that direction and spoke. “Oh, that’s Matt Lightstone. He’s a writer for the local newspaper. He’s quite accomplished. His column is carried in many newspapers. And he’s recently published his first book. Would you like to meet him?” she said as she turned back to her aunt.

Amelia thought for a moment and then said, “Yes, I think that I would.”

Amanda turned to catch Matt’s attention. She gestured and spoke in exaggerated speech almost whispering directly to him. “Matt, could you come over here please?”

Matt responded with a wave and made his way to where they were both standing. Amelia was holding onto her cane to steady herself.

“Matt, I’d like you to meet my aunt, Mrs. Amelia Gardner, our hostess for tonight’s event.”

Matt held out his hand to Mrs. Gardner. She was looking at him as if she knew him.

“How do you do, Mrs. Gardner?” he said as they shook hands amiably.

“I’m happy to meet you young man. Thank you for coming today.”

“I’m pleased to have been invited. It’s a wonderful reception. I think that everyone is really enjoying themselves.”

She responded, “I’m glad that you could attend. You know you look very much like someone that I used to know. In fact, I was quite taken aback when I first saw you.”

“Oh, and who would that be?” he said.

Without hesitation, she said “Ben Lightstone”.

Matt smiled and replied “Ben Lightstone is my grandfather.”

She looked cheerfully surprised. “Is he? Well, it’s no wonder. You’re the image of him as a young man. It’s extraordinary.”

“I’ve heard that from a number of people actually. Do you know him?”

She shifted her posture as she replied. “I knew him many, many years ago but I’ve not seen him since that time.”

He said, "Well then, I must tell him that I met you when I next visit him at the home."
"The home?" she asked puzzlingly.

He looked down as he said "Yes, unfortunately he's been unwell for a little while now. I'm sorry to say that I expect he'll soon be moving into palliative care."

"I'm very sorry to hear that" she replied quietly.

"I'm sorry too. I'm very close to my grandfather and I will miss him desperately. But on the bright side, he's had a wonderful life."

"Well that's something then, isn't it?" she said, smiling.

Matt shifted his stance and said, "Very nice to meet you, Mrs. Gardner. I'll mention that I met you to my grandfather. Thanks again." Then he turned and moved to the centre of the room.

Amanda looking at her aunt asked, "You knew Matt's grandfather?"

"I did dear, for a little while, but it was a very long time ago." Her voice trembled ever so slightly.

Amanda then said, "You know I think I remember reading an essay or article that Matt had written about his grandfather a while ago. I'll have to see if I can find it. I'll send you a link if I do."

"Thank you dear. Well, we'd best get on with greeting the rest of our guests." They returned to circulating amongst the people present.

Four days after the artist night event, Mrs. Gardner received an email from Amanda with a link to the article written by Matt. Mrs. Gardner was alone in her den when it arrived. She clicked on the link and began to read.

"My grandfather, Ben, is an extraordinary man," it began. Mrs. Gardner noticed that the article had been written two years ago.

"I could talk about his honour, his integrity, his work-ethic, his humour, his intelligence, all the extraordinary things about him. But the one thing that stands out most in my memory is the grand love affair that he and my grandmother, Ellen, shared.

They've been married for 45 years. I'm not that old but for as long as I can remember, I've never witnessed a couple so devoted to each other. When in their presence, you can almost feel the love that there is between them after all these years together.

My favourite remembrance is of them dancing together at my cousin's wedding. I was about 18 or 19 years old. My parents, my grandparents, my date, myself and other family members were seated at a round table together.

The band had at long last begun to play a slow number. I remember my grandfather looking over at my grandmother and smiling. They seemed to have a secret language between them whenever they looked at each other.

He stood up next to her, took her hand and walked her to the dance floor. They looked so much as if they belonged together. They never took their eyes off each other. He took her in his arms and they began to dance. The way they fit together was remarkable.

The music played as they danced, some of the time in deep conversation, some of the time leaning into each other, some of the time laughing at something funny that they shared. Almost everyone who was watching them could not turn away. There was something captivating about this wonderful older couple dancing together. They looked like young lovers as they made their way around the dance floor. They were magical together. When the music stopped, they held hands as they walked back to the table together. She took her seat beside him. He lifted her hand and kissed it.

I couldn't take my eyes off of them. I was awestruck watching them together. My young self always sensed that they loved each other. But this was the first time that I had paid such close attention to the connection between them. Part of me was captivated, part of me was joyful, part of me was incredibly jealous of them and part of me was melancholy as I wondered if I'd ever be with a woman who loved me and who I loved as much as they loved each other. I will never forget that day in their company.

It was one more thing for me to admire about my beloved grandfather. There are many wonderful things about this man's life that I could tell you about, but mostly it's that he showed me how to be a good man by the example of the life that he has lived. He showed me how to be a provider, father, grandfather, husband, friend and neighbour. All of the roles that he played were an illustration of how to live a good life."

By the time that Mrs. Gardner finished reading the article, she was in tears. She sat silently for a moment or two. Then she picked up the phone to place a call as she dabbed her eyes.

The next day she had her driver take her to Rainbow Garden Rest Home. At the desk she asked to visit with Ben Lightstone. She was given his room number and made her way along the corridor.

She walked in cautiously in anticipation. He was sitting in a wheelchair close to an open window. He was reading a book. She approached him slowly. He lifted his head from his book and looked her way. She stopped dead in her tracks.

"Hello Ben" she said. "It's me, Amelia Sanderson" she paused and then added, "Gardner". She was struck by how handsome he still was.

He looked puzzled for a moment and then smiled. "Amelia. My goodness. It's been such a long time. Whatever are you doing here?"

"I met Matt a few days ago and discovered that he was your grandson."

"Ah yes." he remembered. "He came by a few days ago and mentioned that he had met you."

"You remember me, then?"

"Of course, I do. How are you?" he said matter-of-factly.

"I'm good, thank you. How are you?" she replied, smiling at him.

“Well, I’ve been better, but I’m fine, thank you.”

Amelia hesitated and then said “Ben, after meeting Matt, I had to come by to see you. I need to say something to you.”

“Oh? Whatever is it that you need to say?”

She continued, “I need to apologize to you.”

“Apologize? For what?” he queried.

“For my horrible behaviour and my cowardice all those years ago.”

“Oh Amelia, that was so long ago. It’s all forgotten,” he countered.

“I’ve not forgotten. I can’t begin to tell you how very sorry I am. I’m sorry for the way that I treated you. I’m sorry that I wasn’t braver and I’m sorry that I hurt you.”

“Well, thank you, Amelia. But it’s really not necessary.”

She went on hesitating occasionally as she spoke, “Ben, I didn’t have the courage to go against my parents. I was terrified of taking a chance being with you. I didn’t love you enough to trust that we’d be good together. I’m ashamed of the way that I behaved.”

He responded quickly. “Amelia, we were both very young. I forgave you a long time ago. Besides which, if things had worked out for us, I would never have met my lovely Ellen.” He paused and then continued. “I have forty-six wonderful years of memories with her.”

She smiled at him as he spoke looking off into the outdoors.

He went on. “It’s better that she went before me. I don’t like to think about how it would have been for her if I had died first,” he said sadly.

She looked directly at his still handsome face. Her heart felt heavy with regret.

“Ben, I’m so very sorry for your loss. I had to come by to apologize. I’m sorry that you’ve lost your Ellen.” Then she added, “But it’s wonderful that you had so many happy years together.” She realized that she truly meant what she was saying but it was mingled with regret.

He didn’t move as he said, “She gave me a wonderful family too. Yes, I was, I mean, I am a lucky man.”

It was a moment or two before she stood up and gently kissed his forehead. He was still looking outside, lost in his thoughts.

On the way home in the back of the limousine, her eyes welled with tears. Her eyes were still full of tears as the car made its way up to her driveway.

“By the time that Mrs. Gardner finished reading the article, she was in tears. She sat silently for a moment or two. Then she picked up the phone to place a call as she dabbed her eyes.”

CHIEF ALEX AITCHISON

by Old Muser

Hamilton Fire Department, 189-?



He was a big man, a big man in size, in bravery and in many other things. Alex Aitchison was Hamilton's Fire Chief but her was also one of the best-known, most respected fire fighters in the world. Ever innovative, Chief Aitchison came up with many new ways to organize the fire department, the most famous being the 'quick hitch' The fire wagons and the horses were placed in a row in the station. The harnesses, already attached to the wagons, were hung in front of the horses. When an alarm was received, the doors of the station would automatically rise up, and the harnesses would drop. The horses would charge directly into the harnesses. The firemen would slide down the pole from their quarters and jump on the wagons at the very instant the horses were ready to go.

It was the 8 second hitch. When visiting dignitaries came to Hamilton, a highlight of their visit was always a demonstration of the hitch. Chief Aitchison always felt that he should be first at the scene of a blaze so he could assess the situation and make a plan as to how it should be fought. The Chief always insisted that he should have the fastest horse. Even before the famous hitch reached the 8 second count, the burly but agile chief and his driver were on their way. Pedestrians and drivers of wagons on John and King streets near the station, on hearing a fire alarm, would know to keep out of the way. The Chief always raced at full speed when responding to alarms. I was there on the day when this photo was taken. That is the chief and his driver in the foreground. It was a bright spring day, April 5 1905, about 10:30 a.m, when an alarm was received for a grass fire on West avenue. One of Chief Aitchison's innovations was to have two doors which opened from the Central station, one led to Hughson Street and one to John Street. On that morning. the combination wagon left the Hughson Street door, only slightly before the Chief's buggy left via the John street door. The combination wagon, heavier and slower than the chief's buggy turned left on King street. The chief's fast horse unfortunately reached the intersection of John and King streets at the same time as the chemical wagon, leading to a collision between the two vehicles. The chief was thrown six feet in the air, and he fell to the pavement right in front of the Sir John A. Macdonald statue. I, along with dozens of people in the vicinity, watched in horror as the wrecked vehicles were strewn over the street. The chief was on the pavement not moving. Firemen, a doctor and several ordinary citizens were soon with the Chief. He was alive but it did not look good. Blood was spurting from his mouth and ears. An ambulance was quickly summoned and the chief was rushed to the hospital. His skull was fractured. Despite the best efforts of the medical staff, Chief Aitchison was dead within an hour. I, with a huge crowd, followed the funeral procession along York street to the cemetery. All along the route, the sidewalks were filled with grieving citizens. Tears flowed freely. It is so sad to think that the photo which I had seen being taken just a few months earlier would show the chief in the very area where he would meet his demise. There he was, our fire chief as we all wanted to remember him.

MRS. BRAITHWAITE'S SEWING GROUP

by Paige Turner

Claire was ten years old when she joined Mrs. Braithwaite's Sewing Group. There she is, the one on the far left, in behind the girl with the bow, but she's really someplace else entirely. You see, Claire had absolutely no desire to sew, or cook or do anything around the house, no matter what her mother said. Nevertheless, every Saturday at 10 a.m. Claire was deposited on the Mrs. Braithwaite's front stoop by her father, who was instructed to be sure she made it inside with her bag of threads and needles and fabrics.

But Claire also had a book in that bag. She was a reader - everyone knew that - and also a writer - which no one knew quite yet, not even Claire herself. All she knew is that she loved the smell of the fresh ink on newsprint when she fetched her father's paper every morning and the rustling of the pages as she read. And the words - all the words - that's what she loved the most. They had the power to take her away from everyone and everything around her.

So on one particularly dreary Saturday, Claire was once again off in her own world while all the other girls concentrated hard on perfecting their handiwork. As she watched Claire's halfhearted attempts at making even stitches, Mrs. Braithwaite's assistant Anne - she's the tall one on the right in the photo - decided she would let Claire see what she did with needle and thread - book binding. Sewing was not just for fabric - sewing paper together made books! After class, Anne showed Claire how to fold and stitch her first handmade notebook.

After that, Mrs. Braithwaite had a word with Claire's parents. She was secretly relieved to pass Claire on to Anne's group, so she assured them that yes, Claire's sewing skills would actually improve. With that, Claire became the very first girl to join Anne's Bookbinding Group. Little did they know that this new class would launch her into her life as a writer and publisher. But there's no photo of that, of course. After all, in 1904 it was on the edge of scandal to teach young girls anything but the domestic arts.



Mrs. Braithwaite's Sewing Group, 1904

THE 5TH ANNUAL PLUMBING HEAD AWARDS

by Lynda DiPietro

A fictional story about a group of professionals and what might take place if they were to give out awards to their members based on the dramatic annual Academy Awards ceremony. Just imagine if every group of professionals were to host awards similarly. This is a story about just one award.

Mr. Douse Flood is hosting the awards. He begins, “Tonight, we come together to honour the artistry of those amongst us. I’m so pleased to be hosting and to see the best of the best assembled here this evening to acknowledge the true creative spirit of our profession. The 5th Annual ‘Head’ Awards is taking place here tonight in the Powder Arena in downtown Flushing Meadows.

We are craftsmen and it is fitting indeed that once a year, we take the time and attention to acknowledge brilliance and skill in our creative vocation.

To start off our awards night, our first presenter is a man who has worked in every genre in our field. He has 25+ years’ experience in the profession and has won numerous awards for his efforts.

He’s here tonight to present our initial award – ‘Laying pipe in difficult buildings’. Ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, here he is Mr. Jack ‘PVCs best friend’ Soaker.”

The crowd applauds him furiously upon seeing him. They rise up in unison, shouting ‘bravo’ smiling knowingly at each other, some patting each other’s back. The man is a star. Someone yells out to him “Jack, so good to see you tonight.” He feigns humbleness and bows modestly.

“Canada’s Tomorrow Conference,” Hamilton, 1953-11-14



He makes his way to the podium and meekly raises a hand to hush the crowd.’

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for that thunderous welcome. I’m so honoured to be here tonight to present this, the first of our evening’s Head awards, ‘Laying pipe in difficult circumstances’.

Our nominees tonight run the gamut of skill in our profession. Some of the buildings worked in were further along in their construction than they should have been, some were barely ready to accept piping. Some had wall construction erected that hindered good plumbing and some had obstacles that were unforeseen until the piping process began.

But nothing hindered any one of our nominees because they are all true craftsmen and have the knowledge, skill and talent to overcome difficult circumstances.

The crowd bursts into applause.

He continues, “Our five nominees this evening are:

First:

Head Plumber Wally Latrine from Flush Is Us. Wally’s team was responsible for laying the pipe in the partially constructed Deluge House. Unfortunately, a myriad of mistakes had been made in the construction so managing to lay the pipe in that building was something of a miracle.

Second:

Head Plumber Neil Smeller from Stink No More. Neil’s team had to deal with a building contractor who went ahead and finished up some construction at Hoser House without the pipe being laid. They had to work around an almost finished edifice without causing too much destruction or incurring substantial costs and did so brilliantly.

Third:

Head Plumber Andrew Privy from Getting Laid. Andrew’s team was required to lay the piping in Swamp Guttering, an apartment complex that ran into some serious financial difficulties. But Getting Laid’s team managed to raise the funds from outside investors, complete the construction at the same time as they laid the piping in the interior.

Fourth:

Head Plumber, Tom Waterman from Saturation Flow, a relatively new company whose specialty is removing old and rotting piping and replacing it with new quality materials. Their work was exemplary in illustrating how to remove and replace in older buildings while keeping the integrity of the building itself.

And last but not least.

Head Plumber, Dan Washington from The Perfect Flow, whose team laid the pipe and connections at three adjoining properties as well as the swimming pool, sauna and aquatic pool. It’s a wonder to behold.

The room was silent as Douse fiddled with the envelope containing the winner’s name. He reached in and pulled out the card and spoke.

“And the Head Award goes to: Tom Waterman from Saturation Flow.”

The crowd goes wild. Remarks can be heard coming from the audience. “No one can lay it like Tom can,” someone says.

Tom rises and makes his way to the podium. He stops to shake hands with all of the nominees, who are smiling and congratulating him as he moves amongst the tables.

He takes the stairs and is handed the award presented to him by his friend Douse Flood and stands before the microphone.

When the crowd quiets down, he begins.

“I am overwhelmed. I can hardly believe that I am receiving this incredible honour made all the more meaningful because it’s awarded to me and my team by my peers.

Of course, you all know the difficulties that we’ve experienced in the past few years with delays in product delivery and increased costs. We’ve all had to overcome countless obstacles in our pursuit of perfection.

I cannot express enough my gratitude to my generous and thoughtful team who always have my back and who conduct themselves as consummate professionals. Together we make a team of true artists who create a masterpiece in every job that we do.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my wife, Ruth ‘Tappy’ Spoils. Without her love and support I would not be able to do my job and would not have won this most prestigious award. And most of all I want to thank my parents, who encouraged and supported me throughout all the years as I studied, apprenticed and gained experience to become the master pipe-layer that I am today.

Thank you all. I will never forget this honour.”

“And most of all I want to thank my parents, who encouraged and supported me throughout all the years as I studied, apprenticed and gained experience to become the master pipe-layer that I am today.”

WILD FAWN

by Lois Corey

It was a dreary October day in Grey County. I had just buried my husband, Ezra, two days before, after a long debilitating illness. I knew I should be feeling sad, but he was not an easy man, and had a violent temper. I had tended to his care, of course, those many years as the ever-dutiful wife. I had always done my duty, despite his cantankerous and controlling ways.

The hub-bub around the funeral had subsided, church members returned to their homes, my two children had flown back to their own families. For the first time in many years, I found myself alone. Earlier in the day, I had done something I had not done in decades, something very uncharacteristic for me: made a spontaneous decision. I had decided to just go for a drive. Where? - why, nowhere in particular. What a luxury of time I now found I suddenly had on my hands! Time was always something that was adhered to, scheduled, monitored and I had been so good at that. Some girls were described as pretty, some as vivacious. I was always described as “reliable” or “dependable” and my life ran according to a precise routine of mundane activities: meal preparation, cleaning, laundry, and supper on the table every day on the dot of 5pm (or Ezra would throw one of his tantrums). My whole life had been spent caring for others and attending to a myriad of household chores. In retrospect, it seemed like a very dull and forgettable life.

For the first time in my life, I was alone in the house. No one would notice if I was home on time or not. No husband to get cranky if his dinner was late. I felt guilty as I should feel mournful, but the last few years had been so very hard. Aghast at my own thoughts, I felt a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I hated to think it, and certainly wouldn't say it out loud, but I now felt free. I felt liberated.

I was born in the house my parents inherited from their parents, on the homestead near the Garafaxa Road. As a very small child I recall my mother speaking about a young woman (who was nonetheless quite a bit older than I at the time) who lived on a nearby farm with her family. She was known and gossiped about in the county for her unconventional and tomboyish ways. She certainly did not conform to the servile docile feminine mould we other girls were all taught to aspire to, and was therefore the subject of whispered comments of an unflattering kind. The girl's name was Nellie McClung. Whenever my friends were gossiping about Nellie, I could never admit out loud that I

secretly admired her, too much of a coward to defy the group opinion. Somehow the girl seemed gloriously free, unrestrained. Nellie's parents obviously loved her dearly, and, unlike other parents in the area, encouraged her to be free of the constraints demanded of most proper young ladies – Nellie could often be found roaming free through the local fields and forests, in a way that reminded me of a young wild fawn.

How I desperately underneath wished to be free like that! But it was not to be. Conforming to my parents' wishes, I married Ezra, the boy from two farms over and embarked on a life of drudgery and routine. I did everything that was expected of me, attended church every Sunday, even taught in the Sunday school, and was happy enough at times. However, despite giving so much to my family, it seemed I was not allowed to myself expect anything in return. In my secret dreams, I wandered the world, seeking adventure, but alas, it was just an illusion. I always wondered if I had been stronger and more courageous if I could have broken free of the chains that bound me to other people's expectations. Oh well, it was all water under the bridge now.

I stood and stared at the words on the monument, dedicated to the memory of Nellie McClung, the young girl who grew up into such an incredible woman, whose courage so vastly improved the lives of all of us women. Where were all those gossiping townswomen now? What did their lives amount to in comparison to Nellie's? So harsh on her then, I wondered what they thought now, those that were still alive? Did they, like me, secretly wish they could have been more like Nellie? Were they only criticizing her so as not to be judged by their men as "strident feminists," so that they could remain the well behaved housekeepers that they were, so they could present to the outside world the image of the perfect wife and mother while desperately yearning inside for more freedom? What did their lives of sacrifice mean, in comparison to the accomplishments of Nellie, who paved the way for them to vote, while they silently abided by whatever the laws of the land and society told them to do? They enjoyed the fruits of her labour, those that never had the courage to speak up themselves, myself amongst them.

I stood for a long time in front of the monument, thinking about my own life. Slowly I turned and walked back to my car. Well, at least I had learned to drive and gained a little independence which I could now enjoy unfettered by caregiving.

How could I know in that moment, that a new life had been opened up to me, as old as I was? I had always enjoyed walking. Now I could walk as much as I wanted so I did, each time a little farther. The walks turned into hikes. I had heard about a new trail which had just opened and passed through my county called the “Bruce Trail”. It ran all the way from Niagara Falls to Tobermory. I began exploring, driving to different spots to hike long distances. I actually bought a tent and started camping by my car and would hike for several days, a little further each time. Eventually I discarded my prim old lady clothes for hiking pants and knapsack. The peace that I felt surrounded by the beauty of nature was far beyond any experience I had ever had, and now that I had finally tasted it, nothing could make me give it up. I became obsessed.

My children were aghast and admonished me against walking in the wilderness on my own, but they were far away, busy with their own lives, and didn’t have to know. Hadn’t I done everything they and Ezra had wanted for so many years? Hadn’t I set them on a path to success? Now it was my time, my turn to do what I wanted. So I did.

I kept hiking and became the first woman to hike the entire 700 plus kilometres of the Bruce Trail. When I arrived at the final stone terminus in Tobermory, overcome with emotion, my thoughts returned to the monument on Garafrax Road and the young tomboy who grew into a woman that blazed a trail of freedom for those of us who came after her. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I touched the final trail marker and thanked Nellie McClung for inspiring me on that dreary October day long ago. Run free, wild fawn, run free!



Memorial to Nellie McClung , Garafaxa Road , 1961-06-10

“Eventually I discarded my prim old lady clothes for hiking pants and knapsack. The peace that I felt surrounded by the beauty of nature was far beyond any experience I had ever had, and now that I had finally tasted it, nothing could make me give it up. I became obsessed.”

Non-fiction

MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR

by Terry Martens



Hamilton Public Library, 192-?

The City of Hamilton has a variety of architecture within the city limits. There are many historic buildings standing today like the Hamilton Custom House which was built in 1858-1860. Another historic building was built at the corner of Main Street West and McNab Street. The cornerstone of the vast building was laid on August 1, 1911. The large stone building took almost two years to build and was officially opened on May 5, 1913. It remains standing in all its beauty to this date. Many people walk by this majestic building and enjoy the architecture and construction without considering the impact that it has had on the city.

On June 9, 1913, the doors officially opened to the public as the first open-shelf public library system. This was the first location that allowed patrons to browse the many shelves and review and select books on their own. Previously people would have to submit a request for a book that they would like to borrow. This was the first library where they were able to select materials on their own. This location was the third library in Ontario and the first one with a building that was built specifically for this purpose.

As you approach the building, there are large stone steps leading up to a set of heavy double doors. As you open the doors you step into the large marble foyer within. The four sides of the building all have large windows that allow vast amounts of natural light which provide warmth and brightness throughout.

The majestic two-story building has a large marble staircase leading to the second floor. Once on this level, you observe many stones and marble-carved ornamental designs along the edges of the ceilings. There is also an open area in the middle of the second floor that allows you to look down on the lobby below. The beauty of this is breathtaking to this date. I can only imagine how enchanting this building would have been as a library.

In 1980, the library left this building and relocated to 55 York Street, a new modern facility that houses the Main Branch of the HPL to this date.

To this date, the building at 55 Main Street West is still an important fixture in the City of Hamilton. After the library moved to the new location on York Street, the building became the Superior Court of Justice, Family Court.

The presence of historic buildings such as this brings pride and appreciation for the history of our city.

THE APPLE TREE

by Jackie Birch

I hear them talking about me. I hear Harry telling another man I've never seen before that I'm old, but he doesn't know how old I am. I do. I knew Harry as a boy, and his father William, and his father Emmett, and his father Abe, and his father Samuel. I have known all the members of the Evans family. I remember when Samuel and his wife Lottie first cleared the land around me to turn it into a farm. Before that it was empty fields of high grass. There were a few evergreens I used to be able to see in the distance, but Samuel and his brother Benjamin cut those down a very long time ago.

Oh, the racket those trees made with each chop. I've never heard anything cry so loud, not even all the babies who were parked below my leaves on hot summer days over the years.

I am 106 years old in tree years, which are the same as people years. If you cut me open, you'd see ring after ring after ring inside of me. I must have more rings than branches by now. I hold on to the number 106 and repeat it over and over. 106. 106. 106. But Harry doesn't hear me. I can hear him, though.

"This here may be the oldest apple tree in Ontario. There's no telling. It's been on our family farm for as long as I can remember. My father is 90, and it's been here his whole life. In fact, we think it's been here for 5 generations."

The other man is writing in a little notebook and starts asking questions about dates. When did the family start farming here? When was the house on the hill built? When was



The Old Apple Tree, Nanticoke (Ont.), 1952-05-31

Harry born? He is awfully nosy for someone I've never seen around here before. But Harry answers without seeming annoyed.

I could have told the writing man all those numbers. But it's no use trying, even with Harry who is my friend. He pats my trunk sometimes when he passes me, but he can't hear me. There is no way the strange writing man in the shirt and tie will be able to. Then the writing man takes out a black box with a circle sticking out and points it at me and Harry who's standing beside me. I hear a clicking sound and a see a flash of light.

"Let me take a few pictures of you with the old girl. Put your hand on one of them there knobs and look at the tree."

Well, that was rude. I know my trunk is wide and gnarly now, but to draw attention to my bark is just embarrassing. I'm old. What's he going to do next, make a joke about me not producing apples for the last 50 years? Oh, those apples. I remember when there were so many on me, my limbs would bend under the weight of them. The Evans children would pick them when they were red and plump and put them in bushel baskets. They said they were for pies, but I only saw pieces of apple pie if someone in the family had a picnic under my branches.

Harry does as the writing man asks. I wonder what the writing man sees through his black box that I can't see. After he's done with the box, the writing man shakes Harry's hand.

"Thank you, Harry. I think this will make for an interesting story in the paper. I better get going. Looks like a storm is coming."

"My pleasure, Sid. This old tree is special. It'll probably outlive me."

I'm tired after so much activity. After all the Evans children grew up and left the farm, it grew quiet. I'm accustomed to that now.

The writing man was right. Soon after it gets dark, it starts to rain, and I fall asleep to its sound. But then the wind picks up, and the sky is bright with flashes of light that wake me up. I'm groggy and think at first the writing man is back with his black box but realize it's only lightning. Forks of it stretch across the sky and seem to get closer and closer until I hear a crack and a high-pitched squeal. What in the world?

I look down to see pieces of splintered wood scattered on the grass. There is that squealing sound again. But there is something else too. It's pain. My pain. I hurt like I've never hurt before in 106 years. The sky lights up again, and I see that the wood on the ground is my trunk. And that squealing sound, it's coming from me. I think I've been...



Images courtesy of Hamilton Public Library, Local History & Archives

