

COMMENT

Place a Bookmark in Hamilton pages

Many local sites are worthy of inclusion on literary trail



HUGHENA MATHESON

Hamilton is full of hidden treasures, but many people, including Hamiltonians, are unaware of them. One is at Sam Lawrence Park on the Mountain Brow, where, close to the edge of the escarpment, is a plaque inscribed with the poem *Giants* by Hamilton poet John Terpstra. The inscription reads:

*“There used to be giants,
and they loved it here. They’d sit
their giant binds in a row along the top edge
of the escarpment, and pick at the loose rock
with their hands or their feet, then throw or skip
the smoothest stones across the bay to see who could
land one
on the sandstrip three miles away.”*

You can read Terpstra’s entire poem while standing in the exact location the poet envisioned when he was writing it. It’s a magical feeling to imagine yourself one of the giants, sitting on the edge of the escarpment a few thousand years ago. The glaciers were receding and the giants were excited “about not having to wear their coats all the time, and what the ice and water had done, shaping and carving the gentle, wild landscape.”

At the top of the plaque, which is part of a Canadian literary trail, there is a raised green “B.” the logo of Project Bookmark Canada, a registered charity that places text from stories and poems in the exact, physical location where literary scenes are set. The *Giants* plaque or Bookmark is part of the project’s vision of a “network of hundreds of Bookmarks around the country, so that Canadians and visitors can read their way around Canada.” Not many people know that Project Bookmark is based in Hamilton.

Founder and executive director Miranda Hill is a well-known writer who now calls Hamilton home. Miranda, an avid reader, came up with the idea for a literary trail as she walked in the very places that authors of the books she was reading wrote about. In 2009, her charity installed its first Bookmark at the Bloor Street Viaduct in Toronto. The excerpt is from *In the Skin of a Lion*, by Michael Ondaatje.

Other Bookmarks followed, including the Terpstra Bookmark in 2011. Now there are 13 around the country. The latest one was installed in Winnipeg for Carol Shields’ *The Republic of Love*. Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* has a unique Bookmark in Vancouver’s Chinatown — two plaques, one with the excerpt written in English and another with it written in Mandarin. So far, Newfoundland is the only Atlantic province with a Bookmark. Located at Woody Point in Gros Morne National Park, this Bookmark is inscribed with the poem *The Sea Breeze Lounge* by Al Pittman.

To build this literary trail across the country, Bookmark relies on corporate, government and private donations. Each Bookmark costs about \$10,000. The cost includes preparing the site, making, shipping and installing the plaque, and maintenance costs. The writer receives an honorarium.

Bookmark is always looking for suggestions for excerpts to add to its database. The excerpt from fiction “may be up to 500 words” and be “set in an actual and identified location.” The excerpt must be effective, making the reader “wonder what came before and what comes next, encouraging readers of the Bookmark to become readers of the book.”

Hamiltonians need go no further than their own wonderful libraries to find excerpts from poems and novels by their own writers, who often mention Hamilton and area in their works. Summer reading lists could include Hamilton literature. The list could have some murder mysteries set in the city. Indeed, Hamilton has all the ingredients for this genre: old, abandoned buildings, secluded narrow lanes, a big harbour, and the Mob. Some suspenseful scenes might make great Bookmarks at Barton and James, in Gore Park, on Van Wagner’s Beach, at the Wentworth stairs and near the harbour or “The Grave” as one writer calls it.

Along with the books, readers might want to have some sticky notes to mark sections that would make good Bookmarks.

The website www.projectbookmarkcanada.com gives more details about this unique project and information on how to submit excerpts. Hamilton readers could be part of extending Canada’s literary trail right here in their city and adding to the Hammer’s treasures.

Hughena Matheson is a retired high school teacher. She lives in Burlington.

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It’s just brought everyone, everything back. It’s just... ripped our guts again.

GREG BURROWS.

Burrows’ sister, Kaylene Mann, lost a brother in the disappearance of a Malaysia Airlines flight in March and her stepdaughter was killed in the Malaysia Airlines flight shot down over Ukraine this week.

Anchors aweigh ... or, in this case, away

Unexpected purchases took the ‘free’ out of my ‘freeloading’



PAUL BENEDETTI

July is a time when many Canadians pack their cars, put the dogs in the back seat, kennel the kids and head off to the cottage.

(There’s something wrong with that sentence, but I can’t quite figure it out. Oh yes, you’re supposed to put dogs in a travel crate. Sorry.)

The most important thing about your summer vacation is not that you are going to a nice cottage, but only that you are going to someone ELSE’S cottage. What many people call their Summer Vacation, I like to call Summer Freeloading.

This is where you casually ask friends and relatives what they are doing for the summer. Once you find out, you fake surprise that you are “off at exactly the same time!” and could easily “drop in” for a visit. Then you phone work and book those weeks off.

In fact, I just returned from almost two weeks of Summer Freeloading that I think went quite well, all things considered, and by all things considered, I mean several fairly large problems that involved the police and a rather sizeable insurance claim. But no matter. The key is that you have a lovely holiday in Canada’s north — free of charge!

Our vacation was at my brother-in-law John’s cottage on the St. Lawrence River in the Thousand Islands. The “cottage” is actually a century-old farm house complete with red barn and a bucolic pasture — whatever that is.

As you might imagine, a 100-plus-year-old farm house needs a lot of upkeep and repair. I say “imagine” because that’s what I did, referring to leave the actual work to John, who seemed to be fixing something or other from morning to night. I could see him working hard from my chair on the porch

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and every now and then I would pass him as I went to get a fresh beer.

Me: Wow, I didn’t know you could actually get your whole head inside a toilet.

John: Yeah, well someone clogged the line with hair gel, dental floss and about 40 pounds of toilet paper this morning.

Me: Well, I have no idea. (Quickly putting a baseball cap over my glistening hair). Good luck with that.

The key thing to remember when you are cottage freeloading is to avoid drawing attention to yourself. I have known people who, using this technique, have stayed at a cottage the entire summer eventually being called “Uncle Freddy” by the kids and joining the local Rotary Club. Unfortunately, this did not work for me.

On day one, I offered to make coffee in the morning. I measured out the coffee, filled the percolator with water, and plugged it into the stove’s outlet. I also grabbed a frying pan and turned on a burner to start the eggs. After a few minutes, someone said, “I think I smell plastic burning.” (I wish I was making this up.) To shorten this story, I’m providing the following equation:

Cold frying pan + wrong burner + smoke = Melted percolator.

To redeem myself, I decided to go fishing and try to catch that evening’s dinner. (I also wish I was making this up.) I took my brother-in-law’s boat to a good spot in a nearby channel. I carefully tied off the anchor line on a boat cleat and tossed the anchor over. In hindsight, it might have been a good idea to check the knot on the other end of the line. Because essentially what I did was expertly heave a perfectly good anchor into the depths of the St. Lawrence River, never to be seen again.

This story can be summarized as follows: Lack of knot + I’m an idiot = \$59.99 for New Anchor.

As you might imagine, any decent, thoughtful person would offer to repay my hosts and replace everything that was lost or destroyed. I blamed everything on the kids. But my wife forced me to go to town where I bought a new coffee maker, a new anchor, four toilet plungers, a week’s worth of groceries and several cases of good wine. This basically took the “free” out of my Summer Freeloading. The upside is, John invited me back next year.

As long as I brought \$1,000 with me and stayed in my room.

Paul Benedetti lives in Hamilton. He teaches journalism at Western University.

Let yourself be open to life’s surprises

People making plans ... God finds that concept quite amusing



THOMAS FROESE

It was in the whirlpool at the Les Chater Y when I was congratulated for My Bride’s recent naming into the Order of Canada. The woman had read the news in this publication.

“Let’s face it,” she said. “You’ve had a role to play in this all. Any woman who wins something like this has to be married to a certain sort of man. If Madame Curie hadn’t been married to Pierre, she’d have been forced to be home barefoot, baking bread.” I wanted to bow, but the water, you know?

And while Pierre may have had a supporting role in Marie Curie’s contribution to civilization — winner of the Nobel Prize in science, twice — if his experience was anything like mine, he didn’t have much choice in matters, anyway.

Yes, even before the Governor General’s office called our Hamilton home — I answered — to recognize Jean for her tireless battle against the dragon of maternal and child death in East Africa, plenty of honour and attention and lights and clunky cameras had been in our living room with regularity.

I once felt like sliding, just gently, into the picture to say, “Hey, I have a story too, raised in the forest by white wolves before the military came in on orders from some pretty big people to give me a new life using my unique skills in international operations.”

But that’s classified. And those producers always do seem more interested in my wife than in me.

Jean knew in grade school she’d be a doctor to the poor overseas. I, on the other hand, got into our back-and-forth overseas life — first living in Yemen and, since 2005, Uganda — more like Bilbo Baggins.

Yes, Bilbo, content in his little hobbit home, gets

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wrestled into things only after those party guests show up, uninvited, to eat his favourite food and make vulgar noises as if they own the place.

“You’ve been sitting quietly far too long,” old Gandalf finally says. “Tell me, when did doilies and your mother’s dishes become so important to you?”

Bilbo pleads, “I can’t just go running off into the blue! I’m a Baggins of Bag End!”

But somehow, his heart is captured. And when the hobbit then runs down the path singing and yelling about the unknown adventure in front of him — the dragon awaits — we’re reminded we, too, have our own adventures to find. And even if we sort of just fall into them, that’s fine too.

It’s unfortunate that this form of decision-making isn’t encouraged more these days. Instead, we’re told to draw up that five-year-plan. Make it 10. Be as rigid and unimaginative, I mean as clear and specific, as possible. “Ha ha, no, Mr. Froese, dragons certainly don’t exist, so no use considering that direction. And, if they do, well, better to be safe.”

God knows better. No, really. Do you know what makes God laugh? People making plans. This, an old Yiddish joke. And, for the blessed, a lesson in how to live. A new way. The way.

During these back-and-forth years to the developing world — I call it getting two lives for the price of one — this is the truism I’ve found: that it’s good not to over-script our lives, fragile and brief and beautiful as they are, but rather to open them to possible currents outside our own devices, knowing a surprise or two will surely come along.

Like this sort of honour in the family.

Like other recipients, Jean stands on the shoulders of others. She easily acknowledges this: her Save the Mothers team, generous donors, McMaster and St. Joseph’s hospital colleagues, her parents.

Jean’s mom notes when they brought newborn Jean home, they never imagined any future Order of Canada, just the rats at their Shedden farmhouse getting her. I wonder if any other Summer of ’14 Order recipients ever had such challenges.

In either case, they’re all worthy and can bow to be congratulated again.

As for me, I’ll just keep on swimming.

Thomas Froese is an author and journalist. Dr. Jean Chamberlain Froese is founding director of Save the Mothers. Learn more at www.savethemothers.org. Read Froese at www.thomasfroese.com and www.dailydad.net



BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

Pigs? What about deaths of civilians?

I was hoping someone would respond to my original letter about the pig protest. Unfortunately it wasn’t one of the protesters. As a young person growing up in eastern Canada I witnessed and participated in the raising and slaughter of these poor helpless animals, not using the humane methods of today. I still love pork, beef, chicken, etc. What is inhumane is the senseless killing going on every day, worldwide, of innocent civilians. When did the life of any animal used to feed people become so important? Small changes are often only a distraction to drag people away from important issues. Sometimes it is better and more just to try to change bigger humanitarian problems and fail than it is to save a few yummy pigs! CLARENCE PRINCE, HAMILTON

Why show aborted fetus to children?

Why would a group of people set up a huge sign of an aborted, dismembered baby right outside a McDonald’s Playland at Upper James and Ry-mal Road at supper hour on Wed. July 16? Families take their children to McDonald’s to enjoy a meal and to play and have fun. Families with children do not seem likely to be the most abortion-minded people. So what is the reason for setting up this huge display where any child looking out the window of the McDonald’s Playland could see it? DEBBIE THORKILDSEN, HAMILTON

Disgusted, tired of abortion posters

I understand that people are entitled to feel strongly about their opinions, but I am seriously disgusted and tired of seeing their big abortion posters. If someone decides to get an abortion, it doesn’t affect my life, so how does it affect the protesters? I drove by a big poster along Concession and Upper Wellington. I don’t need or want to see it and neither do my children. DANIELLE BABOTH, HAMILTON