



Collective MEMORIES



A Life-Changing Experience: Memories of City of St. John's Volunteers

Edited by Sarah Hannon

Collective Memories Series #01

A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE:

MEMORIES of CITY OF ST. JOHN'S VOLUNTEERS

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Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador
Intangible Cultural Heritage Office
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Introduction

BY SARAH HANNON

Over the summer, I worked with Terra Barrett and Dale Jarvis at the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador through the Conservation Corps Newfoundland and Labrador ECHO Summer Placement Program. As a Cultural Conservation intern, I worked to produce this booklet about local seniors' volunteer experiences. As a part of the Collective Memories Project, our goal is to celebrate our living heritage while promoting seniors' engagement in the community.

As editor, I conducted interviews with seniors and recorded, transcribed, and compiled their memories into this collection of short narratives.

I have learned many things over the past few weeks, but there are a few lessons that stand out. The first of these is that helping others is an integral part of our cultural heritage. So many of our volunteers said the same thing: they learned to volunteer from their family and friends - especially their mothers.

When I asked seniors "When did you start volunteering?" I expected them to tell us that they had begun after retirement. But this was not the case. Most of the women we interviewed had been volunteering their entire lives. They told us stories about growing up helping out at church dinners and dances, caring for neighbourhood children communally, and

participating in programs like Canadian Girls in Training and Girl Guides. These women told us repeatedly how their mothers' active roles in the community influenced them. They continued to help out in their communities while working and raising families of their own, only to return to volunteering more actively after retirement.

Senior volunteers are a community of people with shared values: helping others, staying active, showing respect, and demonstrating initiative are just a few things the women we interviewed had in common. And for them, volunteering is fun. It's a way to meet new people and be a friend. They host dinners and dances, play music and games, and take day trips to see shows.

I am sincerely proud to have participated in this project, and grateful for the opportunity to have spoken with the City of St. John's volunteers and shared in their stories.

— *St. John's, August 2016*

A MESSAGE FROM THE CITY OF

ST. JOHN'S

The City of St. John's, Recreation Division provides a variety of services to as many older adults as possible within the city, through the provision of recreation programs and events that can enrich and enhance their lives. The City's volunteer program welcomes all residents to get involved. Volunteers are an integral part of our programs and services, and create positive lifetime experiences.





ABOVE: City of St. John's Volunteers and Heritage Foundation of NL staff after the first planning session about the Collective Memories Project. Photo courtesy Crystal Barron/City of St. John's.

BELOW: Dale Jarvis talks with City of St. John's volunteers about the Collective Memories Project. Photo courtesy Crystal Barron/City of St. John's.



Kat DE METZ

Kat volunteering with one of the horses. Photo courtesy Kat de Metz.



Originally from Newfoundland, Kat de Metz grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where her father was stationed with the RCAF. Having spent most of her life surrounded by animals at home, she finally decided to complete her training as a veterinary nurse at the Animal Critical Care Group in Vancouver, B.C. in her forties. That's when she started volunteering. Over the years, she's worked with the Wildlife Critter Care Society in Langley, B.C., the Abbotsford SPCA, and the Circle F Horse Rescue Society. She talks about her childhood and the family who inspired her love of animals:

"I think I was born into it. My grandmother Metz and Uncle Ed homesteaded in Alberta, where she was in charge of the two big draft horses. I look like her and I'm petite and strong also. I've never had a fear of animals, only respect. I guess that's just the way it was. My great Nanny Squires who's from Tessier Place here in St. John's raised Manx cats, which are the cats with the half-tails that come from the Isle of Mann. I was always involved with animals, either rescuing or taking care of them or having pets. I was the child that brought home the snakes and the horned toads and the little birdies, some of which survived...I got away from taking care of animals for a long time. Then in my forties I thought 'I'm going back to university and I'm going to be a veterinary nurse' - and so I did."

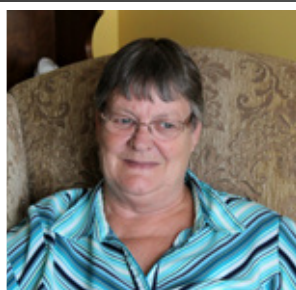
Listening to Kat talk about her life is kind of like reading a James Herriot novel - at times funny, often touching, and always real. She recounts for us her experience working with raccoons for the first time:

"I'd never dealt with raccoons in a closed habitat before. They've got little, almost human-like hands with little opposable thumbs, and they are quite grabby! So I was in there with the raccoons and I just had on a pair of loose pants and a little top, and I had my hair just pinned back once. There was a long rafter overhead and they were hanging down and getting at my hair, so after that I had to double tie it down, and they were pulling down my pants! Hahaha. So after that I always wore suspenders and a belt so they could hang off of me if they wanted to. They're very intelligent, and we had double locked entrances, because if they saw how you got in they would know how to get in and get out - they're very smart! They would remember it and go 'Ah, I can do that!' Little hands, you know..."

"For horses, my best memory is Missy. She came in half-starved. We had to ship her in from a farm where she had just been abandoned in a field. We nursed her back to health and she was adopted out to a loving family. That is the best thing about volunteering, because it's not about the volunteer, it's about who you are serving, and to me it is a blessing to serve and protect the animals, and work on restoring their health."

Kat is presently working on a related novel, *The Dragon of Tessier Place*.

Linda FUREY



ABOVE: Linda in her living room. Photo by Terra Barrett.



LEFT: Linda and Ron Ellsworth cut the City of St. John's volunteer ceremony cake. Photo courtesy of Linda Furey.

Linda Furey was born to Harold and Florence Clemence in Torbay. She has nine siblings, and attributes her interest in community work to her family. According to Linda, her mother was always involved in the neighbourhood and local churches:

"I guess it's bred in me from my mother, because mom always had a houseful of children. The women would all get together on the weekends and the children had to look after the guests. And our parties were parties! So we all had to do our share of whatever had to be done. It started from there, and I used to help out with the churches when they'd have a dinner on. I was about 18 when we started."

Helping out really does seem to run in Linda's family. Her volunteer initiative has been an inspiration for her grandson, who, like her, has learned the importance of showing respect through service to others.

"It teaches you how to respect people. Especially the elderly, I help them whenever I can. My grandson is after picking up on it, and he will help anybody. He helped out when they had the parade on Armistice Day - there was a man trying to get into the church, and because that man couldn't get up over the steps he went over and said 'Use me as a walker.' And so he stepped, and the man stepped. So it's rubbing off on him now. And he will go over and open the door, or hold open the door if someone needs help. He's 15 now, and he comes and spends the weekend with me."

"Volunteering helps the community get along. It's a big encouragement. If kids see adults doing it, they're going to do it. It makes a big change in their lives."

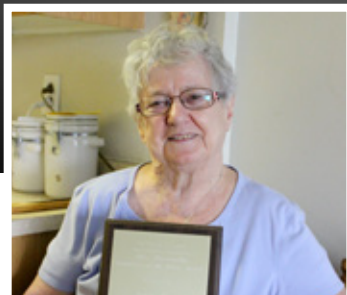
Like some of our other volunteers, Linda also sees the value of seniors helping each other:

"It's good for senior to help each other out. I think they would be more comfortable with somebody their own age. Because I find when they go into a home, they settle right in because they're with people their own age. They like where they are, and it's good company for them. With people your own age I find, they'll sit down and talk to them more so than they would the younger ones."

"I've been pretty active since I moved in here. I haven't stopped! I like the mingling with people. I like company. I'd have a houseful if I could! I like the fun and the enjoyment of it all. Especially the dinners and that, I'm amazed how they all jump up to dance as soon as the music starts! We were over at that dinner at St. Theresa's and there was a lady there 100 year old - and she was up dancing. Now if that doesn't inspire people! She didn't look her age, but she was enjoying herself, she was up dancing away. She was pretty healthy for her age."

Ruby HANN

Ruby Hann holding a plaque for the Alice Noseworthy Volunteer of the Year Award from the City of St. John's.
Photo by Terra Barrett.



Ruby Hann was born and raised one of nine children in St. John's. She attended school at IJ Sampson - St. Michael's at the time - and married shortly thereafter. Today she is a mother of three and a proud grandmother of many.

Ruby began volunteering at the Miller Center at the Senior's Resource Center when she retired about thirty years ago. She has always had a great deal of respect for seniors: "I loved older people, and I was always so interested in what they were saying." She helps out at the seniors' dinners and dances, where she has a great time meeting new people and keeping herself and others moving.

One woman in particular has been an inspiration for Ruby: Ivy, another senior volunteer, who had a massive stroke which left her paralyzed on one side and unable to speak. According to Ruby, Ivy came back to the Senior's Resource Center dances and began learning to speak again:

"We'd get her out on the dance floor in her wheelchair, she got to the point after where she could stand up on her own, and we used to sing the songs to her as we were dancing and she started singing right back at us. She was like that. The last time she was down to our party she stood up and we would hold her hands - one of the volunteers or somebody would just hold on to her hands and we would dance with her there by her chair."

When Ruby is at home, her door is always open.

"They know here if my door is closed I'm either gone out, or I'm having a shower, or I'm having a nap." She is well-known at Kenny's Park Apartments, where she has sometimes been mistaken for the building superintendent because of her helpful nature and involvement with the community. She moved in when she was 57, which put her among the younger residents at the time. According to Ruby, she just got used to helping out. "If I was walking the hall and one of the women said 'Oh my! My light just blew out in my kitchen' - No problem, my darling! I'll come fix it. Because I was the young one here."

As for aging, Ruby embraces her life as an older person:

"I'm a very happy senior, and I'm very proud that I'm a senior, actually. People say 'how old are you?' and I say 'I'm eighty!' Ah! 'You're not eighty!' Yes I am, unless they made a mistake on my birth certificate! But that's me."

Ruby's experiences have helped her to empathize with people her age who need help:

"I feel for other people - differently. You know, I have always sympathized with people but now I can see. Me being a senior, I can see. Because I worked with seniors - like home care and that - and I saw, and I believe it too now, that once you become a senior, it's like the old saying: you're put on a shelf and forgotten. People don't have the same attitude, they don't have the same patience that they would if you were younger. And meanwhile, there are seniors who could work circles around the young kids going today. I've learned to appreciate that more. And I think it makes my life worthwhile - that I can do one little thing for a person. Makes my life really worthwhile."

Lossie TRASK

Lossie in front of her family photos.
Photo by Terra Barrett.

Lossie Trask was born and raised in Port Blandford. When we asked about her favourite community memory, she said:



"Ah...everything! I was a little bit of a tomboy so I liked the outdoors, period. I loved the outdoors, still do. We'd play games - you know, school games. Hop scotch, tiddly. Ever hear of that one? And we lived off the land. We always had moose and caribou, rabbits and fish. That was our meals."

Lossie moved to Grand Falls at age 15, where she met her husband and started a family. Eventually they moved to St. John's for work, where they lived together until her husband passed away. Shortly thereafter, Lossie began to receive brochures in the mail to volunteer for Senior's Outreach. At first, she wasn't sure.

"I said 'I don't want to do that!' But my daughter kept pushing me, and she said 'Come on, let's go!' So she got me out and before I knew it I was in it. And I never stopped."

Lossie explained to us how good it feels to help others.

“You get in and you start with 120 or 140 people in a building, and you’re there carrying plates and then you’re bringing back plates and you’re cleaning up and all that - it’s rewarding to you. It’s very, very rewarding. It makes you feel like you’re extending yourself to people...I’ve gotten more confidence in myself, because, you know, my husband died and I said ‘Where do I go from here?’ It’s getting out with the seniors, around people. That’s where you have to step up and try to help them.”

“It’ll maybe make your life a bit longer by being out around people. When you go out around seniors, even when you go out for an afternoon, you come back and you almost have a lighter step. You feel good, you go into your house that you spend many days in, and you feel better about coming in and looking at your surroundings. I do, I know I did, because there was a time when I came in and said ‘I don’t want to be here.’”

Lossie’s apartment is bright and comfortable, and she offered us cups of tea which we accepted without hesitation. She is an upbeat, open person; it is hard to imagine her any other way. It is clear that Lossie is the type of person to make the most of every day, and that she believes in the power of volunteering.

“It gets you out in society. As people get older and their children leave, they’re alone. They need that spark of life. I notice that volunteers are more outward, and more friendly, more happy. Life becomes more interesting by volunteering. That’s about what I can tell you.”

Marie RYALL

Marie in front of her volunteering awards and certificates. Photo by Terra Barrett.



Marie Ryall grew up in the West end of St. John's, where she attended St. Patrick's Convent school. Her daughter, Rhonda, lives in Nova Scotia with her husband. They have three children, and Marie is now the proud great grandma of four.

Marie considers her life in two stages: before and after her accident. In 1990, she was in a head-on collision while driving to Nova Scotia to visit her daughter for Christmas. Her injuries were severe: the seat belt broke her shoulder and clavicle, her arm, wrist, six ribs, and, most seriously, severed her bowel and punctured her lung. After spending some time in the ICU at St. Clare's Hospital wondering if she would survive, she was finally released to return home, where she began to recover with many months of therapy.

"It was a life-changing experience. After the accident my marriage broke up, and that's when I started to live for myself."

For Marie, living for herself meant a chance to help others:

"Because I was so lucky that I had lived, I wanted to get into volunteering with those who are less fortunate than me and who experienced likewise - became maimed, or through dementia, or Alzheimer's. That's when I went to St. Clare's, where I had previously worked. I went to Sister

Dianne in the Pastoral Care Department and asked if she could fit me in there somewhere. I wanted to volunteer and help other people. So with training I started meeting with patients, I became a eucharistic minister then."

"I just want to be part of a team that's out there helping others. You know, and it gives me a sense of purpose. As I said, it's a two way street. You help someone, you'll get it back millions of times over."

During Marie's working years, she collected for the Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation and was team captain of the Arthritis Society in her area. After she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia she helped to launch a support group for sufferers of the disease. She continues to volunteer at the Miller Center Veteran's Pavilion, has been volunteering at the Agnes Pratt Nursing Home since 2001, and is an active member of the City of St. John's Senior's Outreach Program. She spent many years working one-on-one with a special needs child, and she helps out with the Children's Wish Foundation once a year.

"After the accident I felt so grateful that I survived, and I guess I just felt so sorry for those in nursing homes and in the hospitals, like the Miller Center, especially the Veterans' Pavilion, because when I look at them I say to myself: 'There but for the grace of God go I.' I could have been like that, but I didn't...I don't know how I came to be as fit as I am after all the injuries that I had. I still have my flare-ups, you know, I still have the aftermath of it, but that's only temporary. And I'm just so grateful that I'm alive and well enough to be able to do all these things for others that cannot."

"I'm happy now. Volunteering has made me happy, haha. And I hope I'm after making some of them happy. And I think



Photo courtesy Marie Ryall.

we are. And not just me, but all of us, who volunteer. I think we are doing something to bring a bit of brightness in their lives. That's why I like volunteering with the seniors and the elderly. Because sometimes I think they're forgotten."

"When I look back over the years and realize how many new friends I've made through volunteering, and the events

that I've experienced getting involved with them and their families, it gives me such a very, very gratifying feeling. My motto is that by helping others you help yourself."



Photo courtesy Marie Ryall.

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Advice from Seniors TO FUTURE VOLUNTEERS

"Go for it! It's the nicest and most rewarding thing that you could do. There's times when you might feel like saying 'whatever,' but don't. Enjoy it to the fullest - because you will. If you have a mind to do it, and your heart and soul is in it, there's no better thing you could do. There's no more rewarding thing. It's not money. Money's got nothing to do with it. Money's good but - hey, you know, you can't buy what we get from volunteering." —RUBY HANN

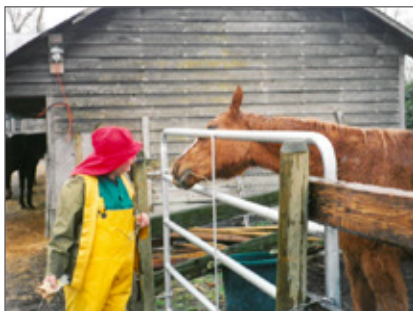
"If they'd like to be a volunteer, I'd encourage them to do it more than anything. There are a lot of seniors that can't help themselves and it'd be nice for a volunteer to come and help them. I think it'd be an awful mess if we didn't have any volunteers, because I don't think we'd know what to do without them." —LINDA FUREY



Photo courtesy Marie Ryall.



Marie's Volunteer of the Year Award. Photo courtesy Marie Ryall.



Kat volunteering with one of the horses.
Photo courtesy Kat de Metz.



School picture of Kat. Photo
courtesy Kat de Metz

“If you’re going to be working with animals, start very young. See if you can go and apprentice with a veterinarian. It’s going to be scrubbing out the cages, it’s not just sitting around petting kitty cats! You have to be willing to go in there and do the dirty jobs. I would recommend that - or working for SPCA.” —KAT DE METZ

“Go for it! Get out there and ask. Be there, and have a little bit of confidence in yourself.” —LOSSIE TRASK

“When you get in there and start, you’ll find it so rewarding that you’re helping someone else. It helps you. You have to get in there and find out. If there’s a particular area you think you’d like to get into, well try for that. If you get in there and you think ‘this is not for me,’ then try for something else!” —MARIE RYALL



About the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador

The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador is a nonprofit organization which was established in 1984 to stimulate an understanding of and an appreciation for the architectural heritage of the province. The Foundation, an invaluable source of information for historic restoration, supports and contributes to the preservation and restoration of buildings of architectural or historical significance. The Heritage Foundation also has an educational role and undertakes or sponsors events, publications and other projects designed to promote the value of our built heritage. The Heritage Foundation is also involved in work designed to safeguard and sustain the intangible cultural heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador for present and future generations everywhere, as a vital part of the identities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and as a valuable collection of unique knowledge and customs. This is achieved through policies that celebrate, record, disseminate, and promote our living heritage.



The **Collective Memories Project** is an initiative of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, with funding provided by the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

COLLECTIVE MEMORIES PROJECT

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