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Balance and understanding are evident throughout Sylvia DuVernet's many published works. DuVernet spent the later time of her life, after receiving a doctor's prognosis that she had only months to live, capturing the stories she witnessed in her youth when she visited Muskoka.

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Author Aaron Kreuter's recent novel *Lake Burntshore* explores complex themes and relationships against the backdrop of a fictional summer camp in Muskoka. Drawing from his own experiences as a camp counsellor and as a visitor to the area, Kreuter beautifully brings characters and their stories to life.

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Article by Bronwyn Boyer
Photography by Kelly Holinshead
Every other year, the Charity Paddle Art Auction supports various organizations, most notably the Huntsville Festival of the Arts (HFA) and the Huntsville Art Society. The event is an opportunity for artists, of all skill levels, from all over the region to design and create a masterpiece that supports the local arts community.

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Married musical duo Robyn Henke and Todd Blair, who perform as Todd & Robyn, have a story filled with love and music. Their performances have grown from intimate open mics to larger showcases, including their recent participation in the Mariposa Folk Festival's showcase.



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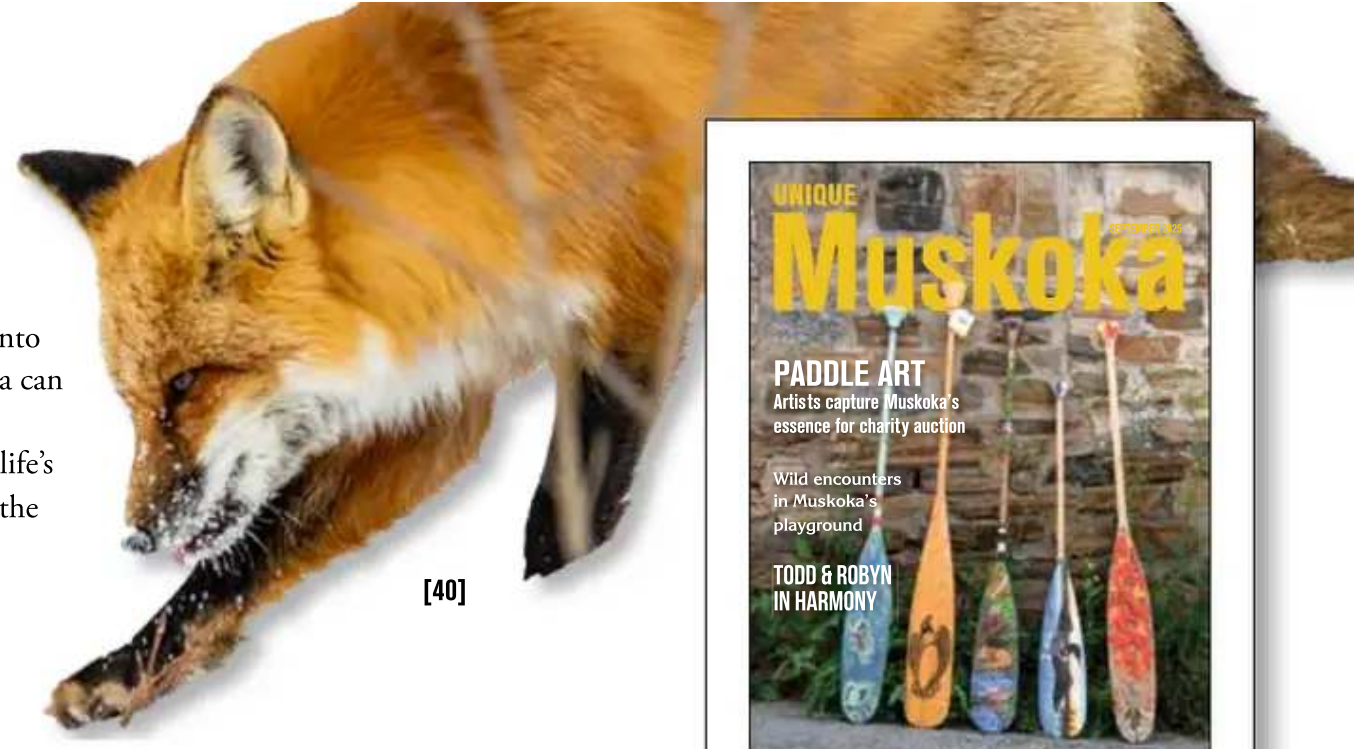


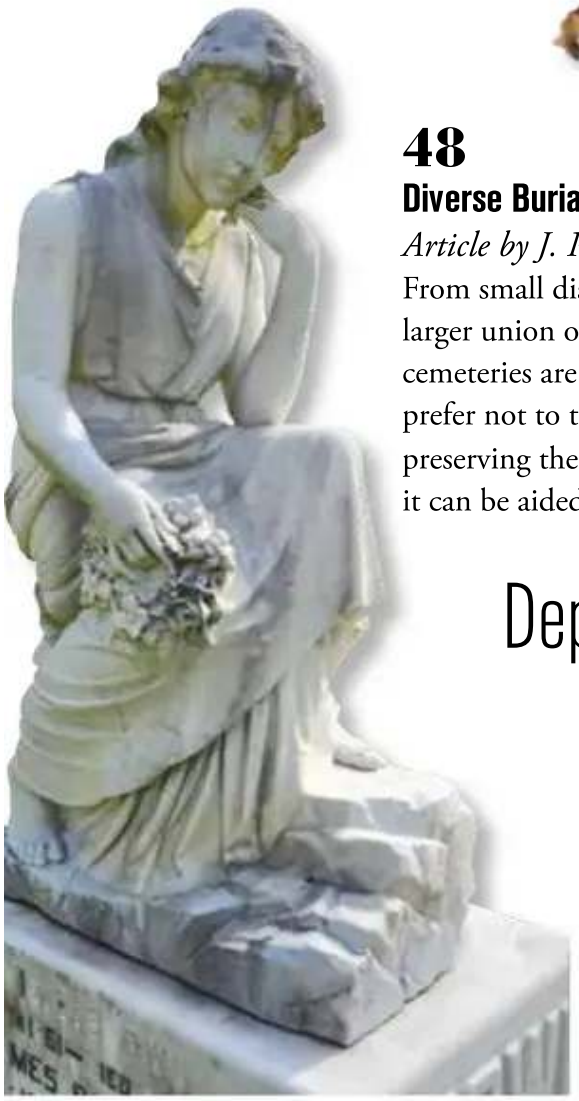
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Preparing for Animal Encounters
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Whether you plan to or not, venturing into the diverse natural landscape of Muskoka can result in encounters with wildlife. Remembering we are visitors to the wildlife's habitat is a critical element of exploring the playground that is Muskoka.


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Diverse Burial Grounds of Muskoka
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From small district village cemeteries to family graveyards to larger union or denominational burial grounds, over 200 cemeteries are scattered throughout Muskoka. The living often prefer not to think of the dead, but understanding and preserving the history of the region and the people who built it can be aided by visting a grave.

Our Cover
Photograph by Kelly Holinshead
Every two years local artists submit paddles to the Charity Paddle Art Auction to raise funds for local organizations, such as the Huntsville Festival of the Arts and the Huntsville Art Society.

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Fall fairs and festivals are back in communities across the region and *Wanda III* returns to sailing the lakes of Muskoka. Premier Ford welcomes Prime Minister Carney and premiers to Muskoka and South Muskoka Hospital Foundation receives a $1 million donation. Former Huntsville resident honoured with King Charles III Coronation Medal, *Muskoka Doppler* celebrates 10 years and Nursery Nights concert series returns to Sandhill Nursery.

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Article by K.M. Wehrstein
Photography by Brittany Clark
Sandwiches may be considered a humble meal, but local chefs are here to share otherwise. Spectacular sandwiches are within reach thanks to Deerhurst Resort executive chef Gusztav Gulmar, Deli Lama chef Sheila O'Rourke and Well Fed Eatery chef Phillip Jakel sharing their expertise and flavour combinations.


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Muskoka Insights

As we step into September, we are often hoping for an extension of summer – continued sunny days and warm temperatures, even as the days shorten and the leaves begin to turn colour. We all want to hold onto the idyllic summer and the promise of another perfect day in Muskoka.



Photograph: MacKenzie Taylor

This summer, however, has been filled with extremes – extreme heat, extreme storms and extremely dry conditions. This year's weather has been filled with extremes too. It's like Mother Nature has adopted an all-or-nothing mentality. Humans are also fickle. One day is too hot, the next too cold. We are Goldilocks on the hunt for a perfect scenario or outcome.

I'm reminded of when I was a child and, when forced to choose between two options I was equally unenthused about, I would say, often quite loudly, to my parents and my older brothers: "either!" Now, I am fully aware the word I should have been using was "neither" but in my young mind "either" made sense too – I didn't want either option. I wanted something else. Or, in some cases, I wanted to do it all, which was usually not an option.

Sometimes, I still want to do it all. But as I've grown up, I've realized that sometimes not getting it all is for the best. Sometimes, sticking to the middle of the road is a good thing. Sometimes, softer is a good thing. Sometimes, gentler is a good thing. Sometimes, bringing people, ideas or plans together, combining them into something new, is the best thing.

We can do more together. We can go further together, by looking after one another. We can impact more significant change by working together. As the popular African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

Working together, in harmony, seems to be a common thread throughout this issue of *Unique Muskoka*.

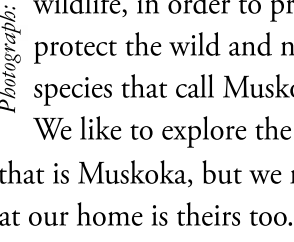
Regular contributor Patrick Boyer beautifully showcases the legacy of words left by author and poet Sylvia DuVernet. Her many books, covering subjects from Muskoka Chautauqua to Norman Bethune to the Wahta Mohawks as well as collections of poetry, were the result of her diligent study of these subjects and the people involved in them. In all of her work she aimed to "open doors to understanding." DuVernet's work, decades later, continues to provide a window into the matters she researched.

Also in this issue, contributor Andy Zeltkalns shares the importance of maintaining a respectful distance from wildlife, in order to preserve and protect the wild and natural species that call Muskoka home. We like to explore the playground that is Muskoka, but we must also recognize that our home is theirs too. Understanding the animals in our neighbourhood is critical for keeping everyone safe.

Regular contributor Bronwyn Boyer shows us the power of harmony in her feature about married musical duo Todd & Robyn. What started as humble beginnings for Robyn Henke and Todd Blair has grown through shared dreams and challenges. The couple didn't plan to be musicians, but their love and trust in each other has built their relationship and musical partnership. From songwriting to live performances, the duo is a team, supporting each other's strengths and weaknesses. They continue to work in harmony for their shared goals.

As the tail end of summer slips into the first signs of fall, let yourself enjoy the days and nights that still feel like summer is just beginning. Let yourself grab coffee with a friend, or dinner with a family member. Let yourself try something new or, give yourself permission to take it easy. It doesn't have to be all-or-nothing. Sometimes, let yourself choose "either."

Happy reading!







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Where to Next?

Article by Lori Knowles

Do you remember in-flight magazines? Those glossy, full colour tomes tucked into the pocket of the seat ahead of you, 27B, on your flight home. I had a French-speaking colleague once, a fellow travel writer, who'd snatch the magazine from its pocket the second she sat down, flip to the back, and study with zeal the double-page map of the world, the one with lines from Toronto's YYZ to destinations east and west, north and south.

"Whatcha doing?" I'd ask.

Her answer, always the same: "Plotting, of course, where next I am going."

Those magazines don't often appear in the pocket of seat 27B anymore. And while I don't miss the improbable images of Turkish towels in five-star Hong Kong hotels I can never afford, I do miss that map. Probably I won't have the means to jet-set to Japan or flit off to Florence, but one can dream. As a writer with a huge imagination, I can dream, anyway.

As summer ends here in Muskoka, as tinges of yellow appear in the birches and the smell of woodsmoke drifts from my neighbour's chimney, I feel the itch to consult a map. Do I want to endure another winter here? Is there a place to flee for artists and writers like me – a place as inspiring as Muskoka – that one can afford, but that doesn't sink to 30-below and get buried deeply in snow drifts?

So, I reach out to a handful of fellow artists. "Where do you go," I ask, "to paint or sculpt or write or craft in winter?"

The first artist I encounter is Josianne Masseau of The Bohemy Co. After a long 2024 farmer's market and music festival season, Masseau shuttered her RV and jetted off to Nicaragua. In between beach visits and surf lessons, she made buckets of brass fringe earrings and circle string bracelets which, at red-hot Ontario music festivals in summer, sell as well as ice-cold bottles of water.

"Hmmm," I think. "Let's add that to the in-flight map: Nicaragua."

Next comes Margaret Richards, a landscape artist whose paintings of moose and trees and Muskoka landmarks in oils and watercolours have a ghostly appeal. Richards flees each fall to a place whose name makes it sound like an artist's jackpot: Eureka, Florida.



Photograph: Lori Knowles

Jessica Hicks of Ember Collective spends time each winter in Laos, volunteering to teach jewelry-making skills to "women rising from vulnerable situations."

"I've never minded missing the snow," she explains, "And living in sunnier climes has been a true bonus. These past several years of wintering in Florida have been a gift." Richards calls aspects "treasures."

"Hmmm," I think again. "Add to the map: Eureka, Florida."

A brief chat with my friend Angela Jackson, novelist and self-help author reveals that every winter she closes her Port Sydney home, packs up her dog, cat and partner, and moves to Mazatlán, Mexico.

"Because we live down a very long road and both snow plowing and hydro are super expensive, we find Mexico more economical," she explains. In Mazatlán, "the lull of the ocean waves, the softly scented breezes, the beautiful sunsets and the warm weather all combine to make writing a pleasurable pursuit instead of another to-do in the dreary winter grind."



Photograph: Andy Zeltkalns

"Okay," I'm thinking, "maybe I'll go to Mazatlán."

But then I meet Jessica Hicks, a young designer from Humphrey, near Rosseau. Working briefly in Toronto's fashion industry left her empty. "I would go to sleep every night feeling like crying, feeling like I needed to be doing something good with my life, helping people." Hicks quit the industry six years ago and created Ember Collective, which sells ethically handmade jewelry. Each winter she moves to Laos in Southeast Asia, where she volunteers to teach jewelry-making skills to "women rising from vulnerable situations."

"Most of these girls have come from small villages and end up in bad places," Hicks explains, "because they're looking for any kind of work to provide for their families." The unnamed organization Hicks volunteers for provides safe shelter and what she calls "healing through art."

"Well!" I am now thinking. "Maybe Laos is where next I am going."

But no. In the end, I know I don't have Hicks' stamina, nor her goodliness. For me, Laos is a lofty ambition – as is Nicaragua, Mazatlán, or even that sunny jackpot, Eureka, Florida. As the leaves along the roadsides tinge darker and the woodsmoke curls nearer, I resign myself to staying home this winter, under blankets of snow, dreaming and writing in Muskoka.

Lori Knowles is a journalist and author of Summers with Miss Elizabeth, a Muskoka novel. In this column Lori explores what it's like to live and work as an artist in Muskoka. www.loriknowles.com @loriknowles_author







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Sylvia DuVernet

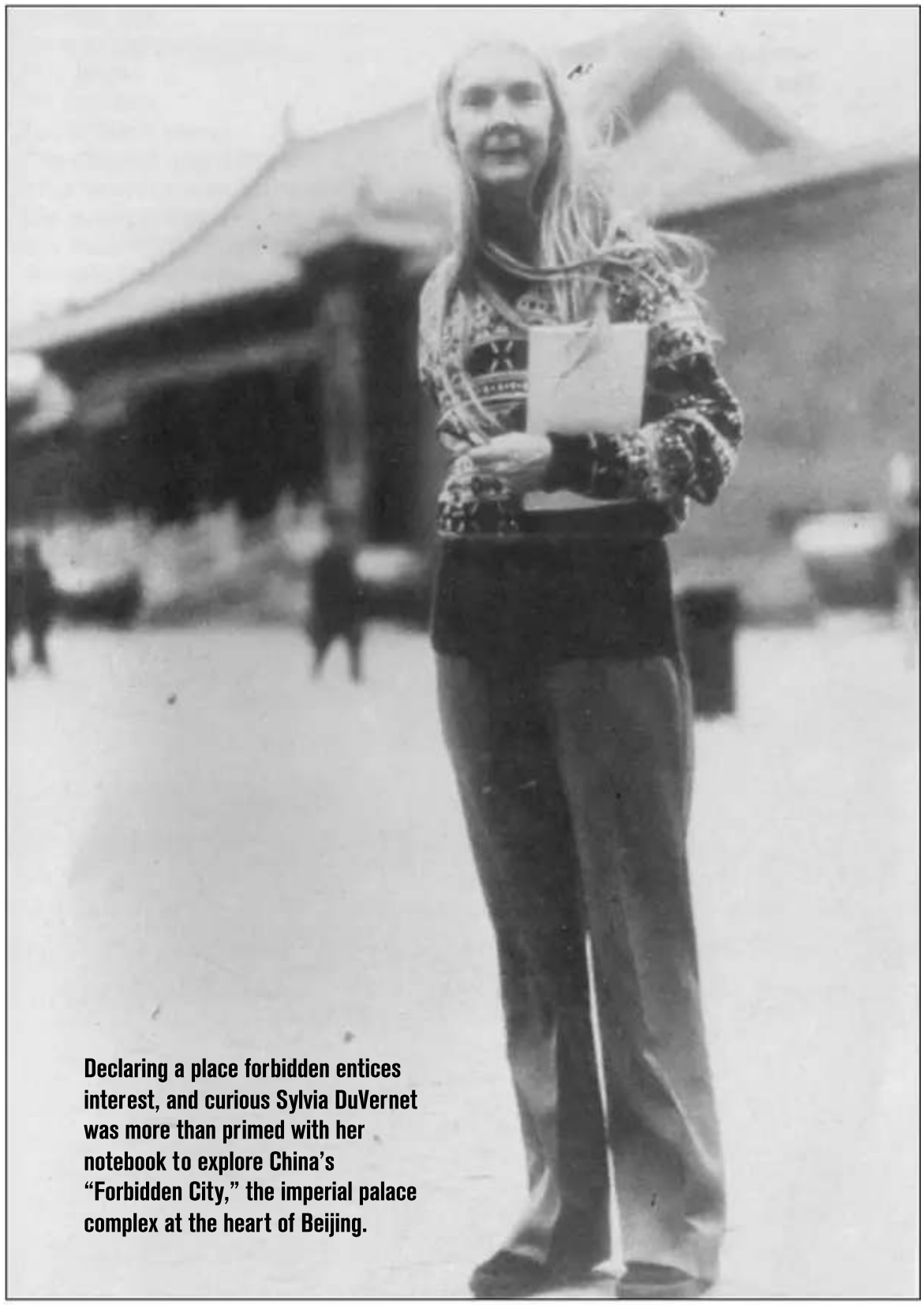
Article by J. Patrick Boyer

When Sylvia DuVernet's doctor said she had only months to live it sparked her vow to make the most of the time by writing what she cared about deeply – global spiritual forces and Muskoka.

At age three, she'd discovered Muskoka summering with grandparents at Gull Lake. As a girl, more Muskoka experiences unfolded at her parents' Lake Rosseau cottage. As a teen at Hamilton Central High, Sylvia Neimier was assigned a seat in front of energetic and endlessly curious Ernie DuVernet "to be a steadying influence on him" but instead embraced him as a partner to her own irrepressible curiosity. Born at the First Nation community of Kitwanga on the banks of British Columbia's Skeena River – no doctor, no school, no roads, no running water – Ernie absorbed Indigenous skills and traditions and was at home in the embrace of nature.

Sylvia and Ernie summered in Muskoka, married, and cottaged where they could rise early to savour Lake Rosseau sunrises from their canoe and later see the day out with sunsets aboard their Seabird. They introduced their three successive sons – Peter-Paul, Christopher and Timothy – to cottage life at Sandy Bay near Port Carling. For summer jobs, the latter two worked for the *Muskoka Sun* newspaper. Tim became a full-time Muskokan and skilled photographer.

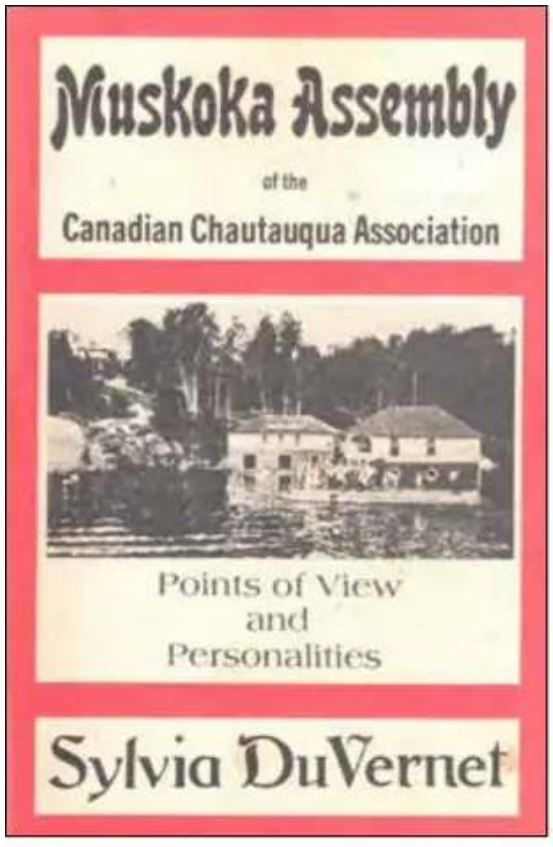
In the south, the inseparable couple developed high qualifications and fulfilling careers – Ernie a skillful lawyer, Sylvia with graduate qualifications in education, literature and religious studies teaching at McMaster and University of Toronto's department of continuing studies. Her approach to Canadian literature and culture was interdisciplinary and discerning. In philosophy and religious outlook, as an observant and reflective globalist, she ranged even more broadly – always asking the next question, continuously educating herself, broadening not only the content but the very structure of her understanding.

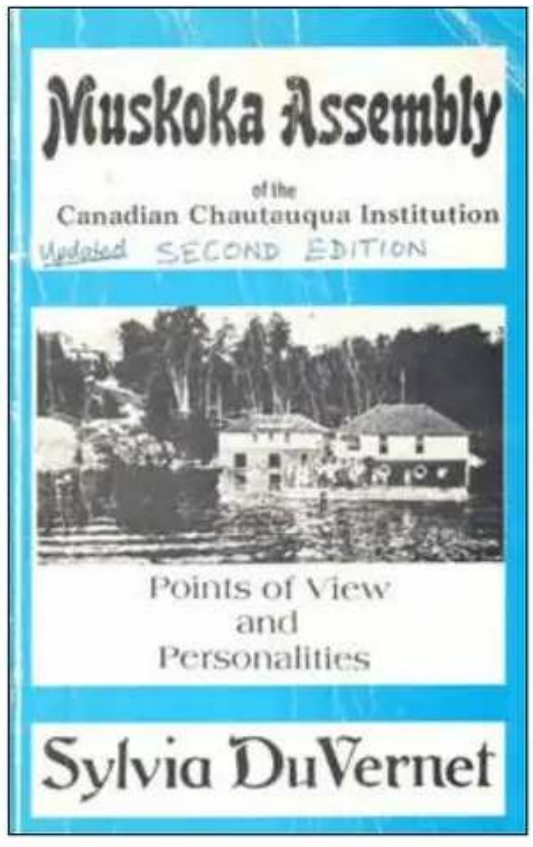


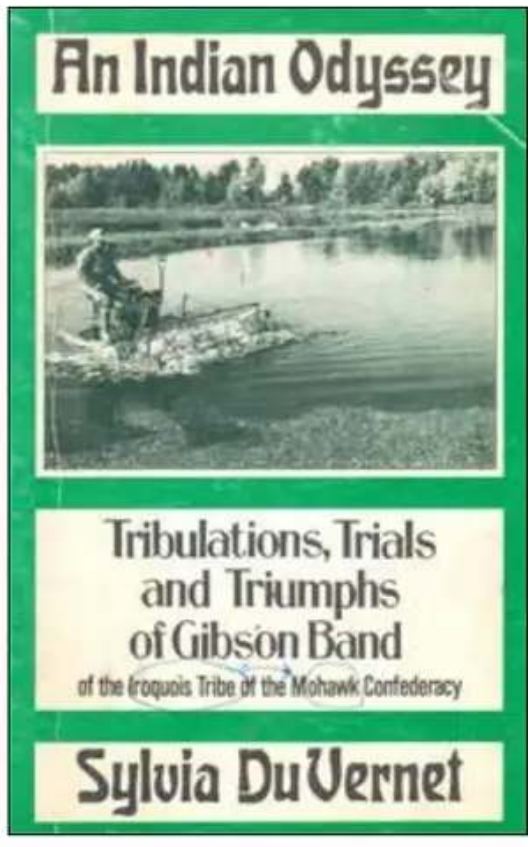
Declaring a place forbidden entices interest, and curious Sylvia DuVernet was more than primed with her notebook to explore China's "Forbidden City," the imperial palace complex at the heart of Beijing.

Photograph: Royal Ontario Museum, DuVernet Family

At her parents' Lake Rosseau cottage in the 1920s, young Sylvia witnessed from the margins the Muskoka Chautauqua assemblies and sensed the importance of leading writers and poets gathering each summer on nearby Tobin Island to experience nature, explore ideas and encounter their inner lives through





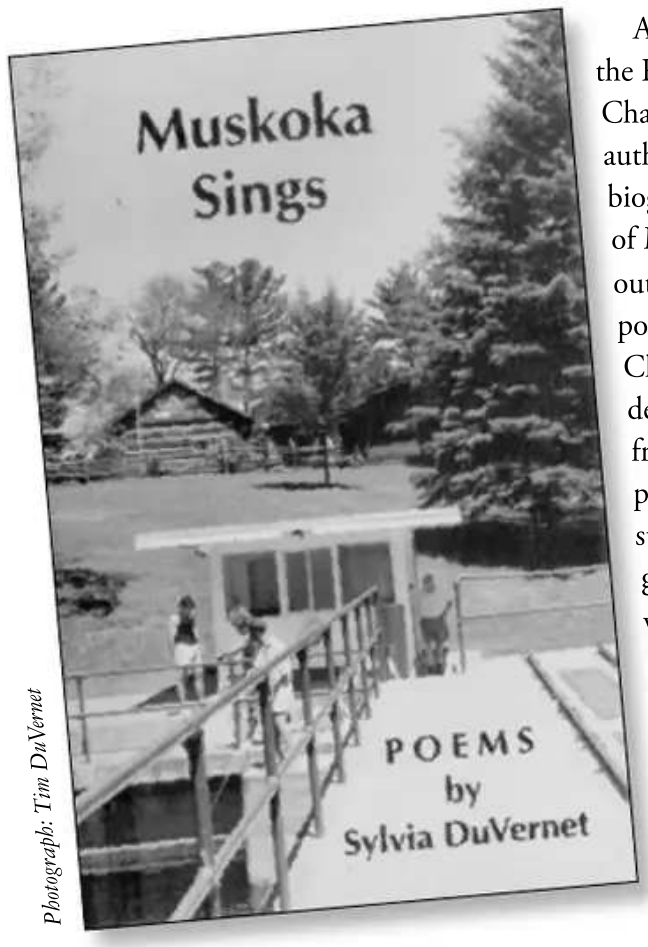


Photograph: Author's Collection

Publication of Sylvia DuVernet's first book, following serialization of its chapters in the *Muskoka Sun*, led many connected with the Chautauqua movement to supply DuVernet with additional information she incorporated in a revised edition. The original had 195 pages, the second edition, 301. Turning to another of Muskoka's unique stories, she wrote about the tribulations, trials, and triumphs of the Wahta community of Mohawk families who resettled in the heart of Ojibwe territory in the 1880s.

literature, theatre and active living – very much how she aspired to live.

Now, against the clock, DuVernet began writing about unique Muskoka phenomena imprinted in her consciousness, starting with the crucial yet little-remembered story of Chautauquans from far and wide assembling in Muskoka.



Photograph: Tim DuVernet

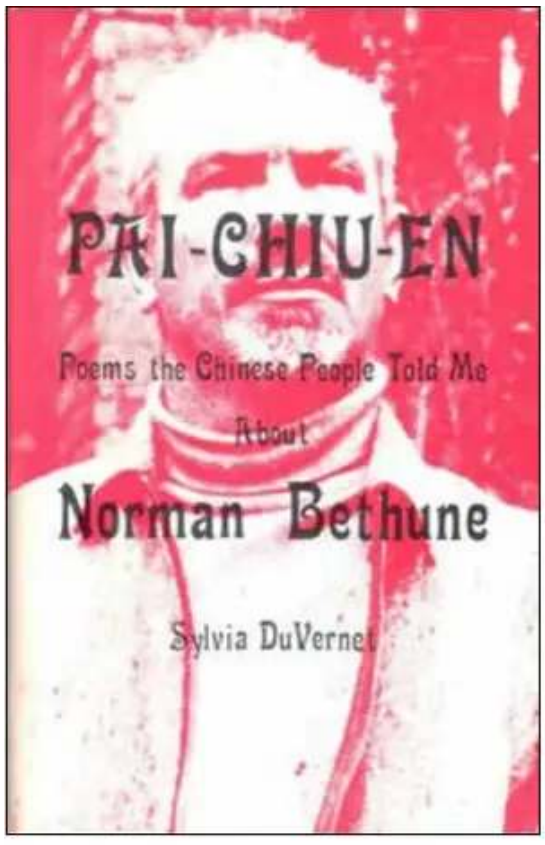
"I summered at Windermere from 1928 to 1932," she began, "diagonally across from the Muskoka Chautauqua Assembly on Lake Rosseau, but too young to be aware of what was going on. Recently discovering what I missed, I found great pleasure researching the activities of Canadian Chautauqua in light of the ideas its members explored."

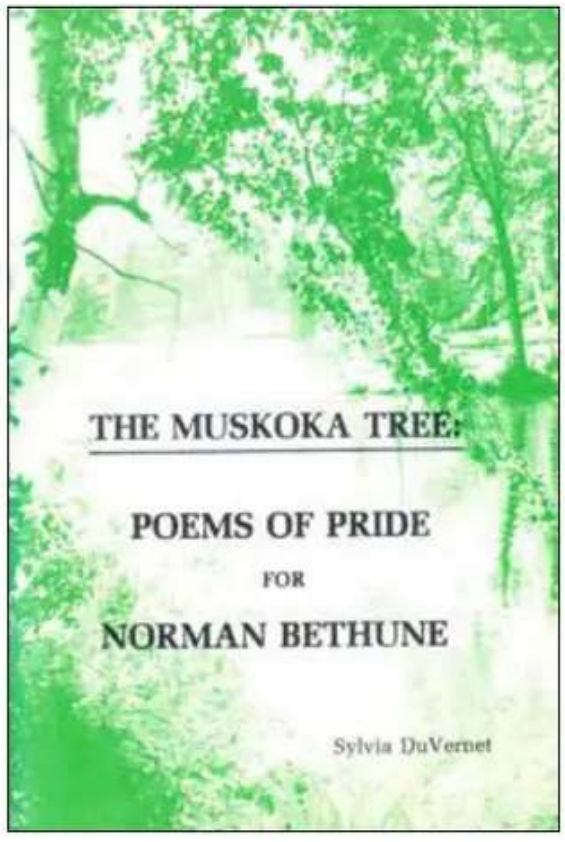
Addressing the spiritual disquiet animating the Roaring Twenties in general and Muskoka Chautauquans in particular, the researching author immersed herself in all of it, the biographical details, ideas, and contributions of Muskoka Assembly members. Ferreting out articles from scholarly journals and popular magazines, interviewing Chautauquans still alive or their descendants, DuVernet pieced together the fragments into her own "assembly" of their personalities and points of view. She studied the way these urban intellectuals grappled in heady Muskoka splendour with theology, philosophy, spirituality, astronomy, sociology and the human condition, portraying this most Muskoka-like happening by the diversity of its participants, the schools of thought in contention, and the consequences when spiritually minded people of high intelligence seek answers outside the realms of indoctrinated orthodoxy.

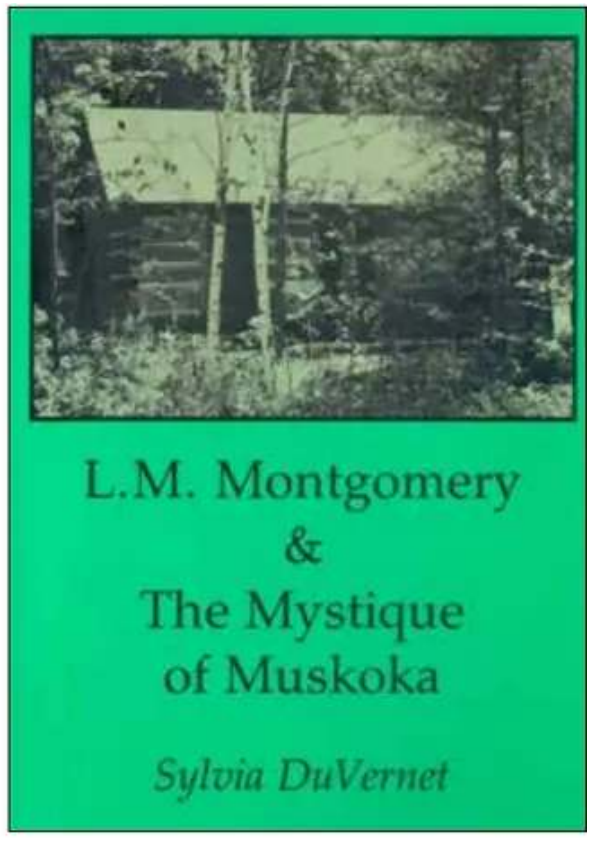
***Muskoka Sings*, a third book of collected Muskoka verse by Sylvia DuVernet, was published in 1991 and dedicated "once again to Robert J. Boyer who, way back when, invited me to write poetry for the *Muskoka Sun*."**

Upon completing each chapter, Sylvia turned them over to publisher Robert Boyer at his Bracebridge newspaper office who edited then serialized the saga in his widely read *Muskoka Sun* summer tabloid. Publication generated feedback to the author from an array of Muskokans proffering more stories, greater detail and telling photographs. By 1985, combining that motherload, her further detective work and consultations with professors Ronald Sweet at University of Toronto's graduate department of religious studies and John Webster Grant of the university's Emmanuel College, Sylvia completed *Muskoka Assembly of the Canadian Chautauqua Institution*, dedicating the book about an exceptional component of district heritage to its publisher. As the book gained wide distribution, Sylvia received more insights and materials from families once active in Muskoka Chautauqua. She urgently began writing an expanded second edition. Time was ticking.

Yet still alive, she compulsively turned to







Photograph: Author's Collection

Inspired by a wide array of topics, Sylvia DuVernet wrote *Pai-Chiu-En* in tribute to Norman Bethune's life and works as "emblematic of Muskoka virtues: relentless search for self-fulfillment while earning personal peace through involvement with others." When she travelled to China as a member of the Royal Ontario Museum's study tour in 1977, her discussions with informed Chinese people led to this book of poems. DuVernet was also fascinated by women's views of Muskoka, including L.M. Montgomery, leading to yet another of her interpretive Muskoka books.

another unusual Muskoka phenomenon: a Mohawk community in the heart of Ojibwe territory. As a girl in Port Carling, Sylvia interacted with members of both communities jointly selling their craftwork to tourists at the small reserve beside the Indian River in the village centre. Having now also recorded the role of Indigenous participants in Muskoka Chautauqua gatherings, and encouraged by

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Photograph: Tim DuVernet

During a well-attended launch event for DuVernet's 1987 poetry book at the Sandy Bay cottage near Port Carling in late June, the corsage-wearing poet holds a copy of her book in a plastic bag to "baptize" it with full yet dry immersion in Lake Rosseau waters. Her husband Ernie holds the 40th wedding anniversary certificate presented by Etobicoke MP Patrick Boyer to the Etobicoke couple, while Sylvia's editor and publisher Robert Boyer and Patrick's late wife Corinne completed the bond the two families shared. Robert's late wife, Patricia, to whom Sylvia dedicated them, had edited Sylvia's books of poetry inspired by Norman Bethune.



Photograph: Royal Ontario Museum, DuVernet Family

This photo of adventuresome Royal Ontario Museum members on tour in China shows a smiling Sylvia DuVernet front row, right end. The tour inspired DuVernet to create a book of poetry, a companion volume to *The Muskoka Tree*.

Ernie, she valued more than ever First Nation ways and wisdom.

Delving into research and writing about the Protestant Mohawk families fated to relocate from Catholic Quebec to Muskoka in the 1880s, she sought to unpack this complex history and its successive "tribulations, trials, and triumphs," delivering the manuscript chapter by chapter to her Bracebridge editor who again serialized them in successive editions of the *Muskoka Sun*. He also suggested she expand her interest in poetry with verse inspired by Muskoka scenery and doings. They, too, appeared on the paper's pages, giving the poet a further lift.

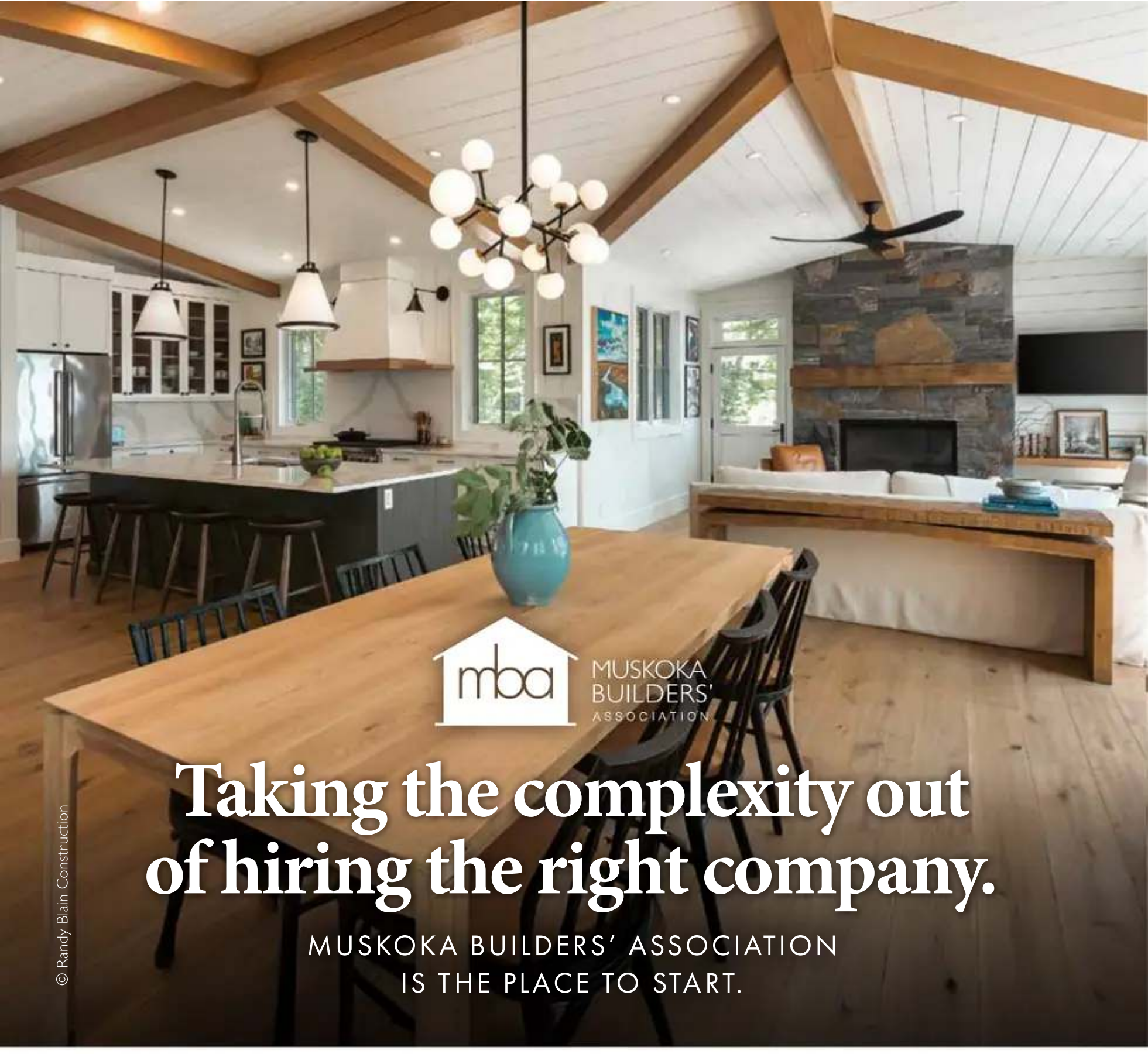
Publication in 1986 of *An Indian Odyssey* offered a well-intentioned non-Indigenous person's composite account. In the prevailing political culture four decades ago, DuVernet aspired to "open doors to understanding." Because different perspectives were in contention, she juxtaposed them, while also integrating documentary records with people's personal narratives to show the agitation by Wahta Mohawks concerned with "goals of land ownership, religious change, and self-definition as required by the challenge of newly experienced acculturation separated from, rather than integrated with, their own tradition."

With her books rather than her death notice appearing in print, Sylvia cheerfully advanced to yet another unique Muskoka topic: the importance of Norman Bethune – condemned during the Cold War by locals for being a Communist, uplifted by others as a man of peace. Her research about this complex and important man included travel to China and conversing with those knowledgeable about their national hero who was born at Gravenhurst in 1890.

Sylvia emerged from the shadow of death her physician had foreseen, into sunny upland space. Yet being sharply mindful of human mortality, she never touched lightly on matters nor seized upon glib conclusions. As a life-long seasonal Muskokan appraising unique aspects of district heritage, this participant observer's combined objectivity and familiarity with place informed balanced understanding.

At intervals her best poems were gathered into books, of which more than a half-dozen were published in Bracebridge, including *Beams from the Beacon: Poems of Georgian Bay* (1974), *Perceptions: Poems for Young People of All Ages* (1975), *More Muskoka Poetry* (1977), *Muskoka Seasons* (1987), *Muskoka Sings* (1991), and *Muskoka Metaphors* (1994). Of these works, wrote Robert Boyer in 1977, "The poetess has traced the changing seasons in Muskoka, as seen with the eye and perceived in the mind. Hers is more than a passing notice."





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Aaron Kreuter

Compelling Stories from Lake Burntshore

Article by Meghan Taylor

Aaron Kreuter's novel *Lake Burntshore* combines a coming-of-age story at a fictional summer camp in Muskoka with pivotal social and political challenges for the characters.

"The novel takes the bounded setting of a camp on the side of a lake in the forest to explore issues of settler colonialism, young love, and how we relate to the land, both here on Turtle Island and there, in Israel/Palestine," says Kreuter. "There's also plenty of canoeing, guitar playing, teenage high-jinks, and days off in Toronto."

A layered and nuanced book of decisions set in 2013, *Lake Burntshore* follows Ruby, a 21-year-old counsellor at Camp Burntshore as she navigates relationships, love, history and political beliefs. Ruby is prepared for a

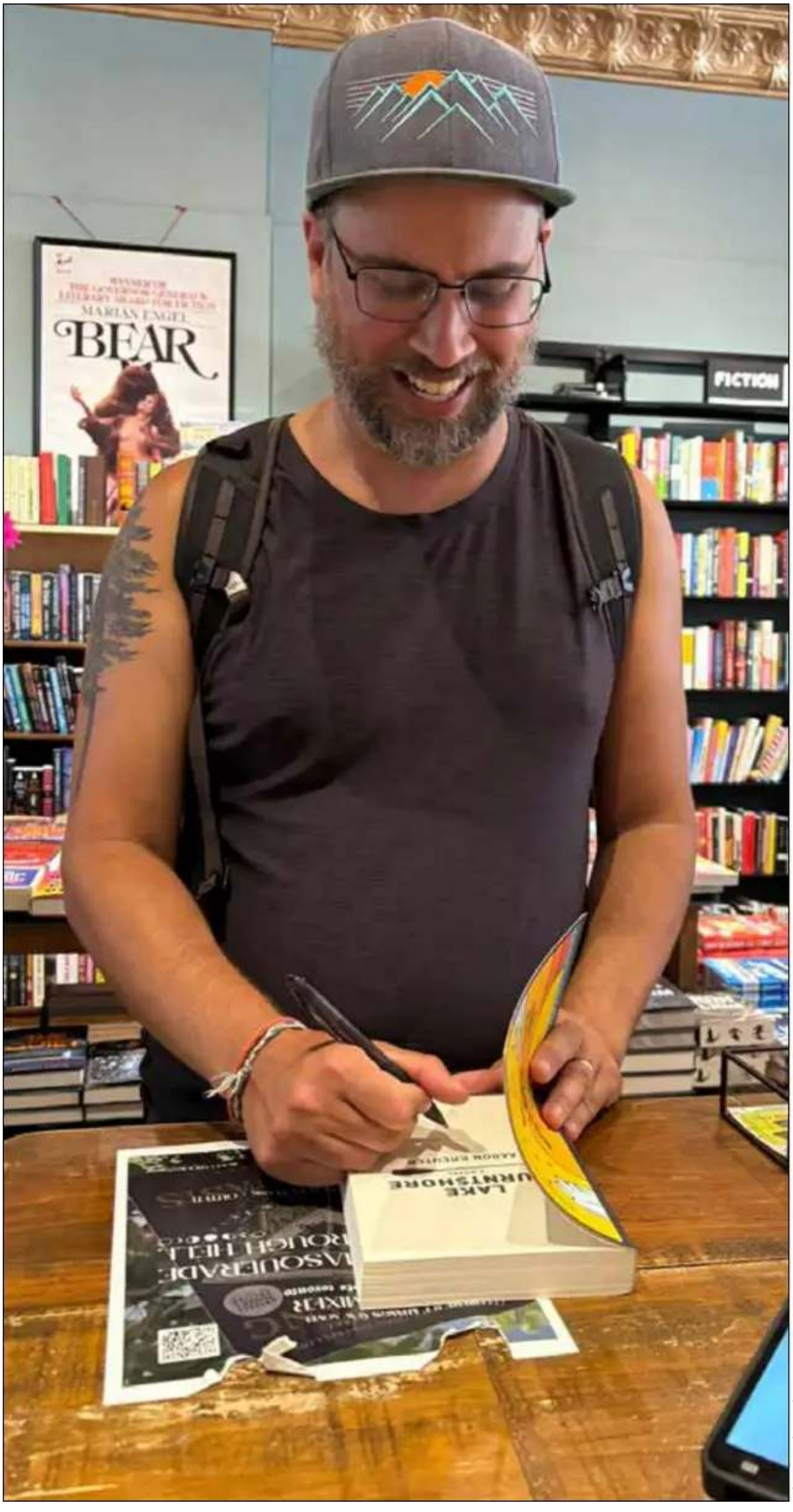
Photograph: Sophie E.

typical summer at camp. However, the camp owner's son, Brent, makes the contentious decision to solve a staffing shortage by hiring Israeli soldiers.

Ruby, a committed anti-Zionist, fights her developing feelings for one of the soldiers and must decide if she's willing to confront the issues of Jewish belonging and settler colonialism brought forth by Brent's controversial decision. As the story progresses, the initial conflict is not the only one looming – the relationship with the neighbouring Black Spruce First Nation is also strained by Brent's scheming. Ruby's summer by the lake is no longer a simple one as she contends with saving her camp.

Lake Burntshore may be fictional but the topics in the novel are very real, becoming more so every day.

"The ways we relate to the lands we live on determine what kind of lives we lead," explains Kreuter. "In our age of rising environmental destruction and climate change, imagining better worlds, whether in



Photograph: Sophie E.

Signing a copy of his recent novel, *Lake Burntshore*, at Queen Books in Toronto was a unique experience for author Aaron Kreuter.



Photograph: Aaron Kreuter

A lover of the outdoors in all seasons, Aaron Kreuter makes the most of winter, enjoying camping and snowshoeing.



Photographs: Aaron Kreuter

Aaron Kreuter spent many summers in Muskoka as a camp counsellor. He continues to enjoy visiting the area with regularity for camping, swimming and paddling.

Muskoka or elsewhere, couldn't be more timely. Plus, I just love coming up with the ten thousandth and one way to describe a lake in the sunset."

In its synopsis, *Lake Burntshore* "celebrates the contemporary Jewish world through its most iconic symbol – the often idyllic yet always dramatic summer camp." Kreuter has taken the familiar comfort of summer camp and mixed the experience with real-world issues – social, ethical and political.

"It is deeply informed by my many summers spent in Muskoka at various camps, and my reading and research about the region's history and land," Kreuter shares.

Kreuter himself was staff at a summer camp in Muskoka during his younger years, an experience he drew on for *Lake Burntshore*.

"I'm also a bit obsessed with the history of Muskoka," says Kreuter. "The Anishinaabe who have lived here since time immemorial, the stories of the early settlers and cottagers and campers and cities and towns and resource extraction. I attempted to put some of these competing histories into *Lake Burntshore*."



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Kreuter grew up in Thornhill, north of Toronto and began writing in his teenage years. While he began with short stories and poetry, the idea of a novel was already in his mind at a young age.

"I was 16 years old when the idea of writing a summer camp novel first occurred to me, though it would take 24 years and a bunch of other books before that became a reality," shares Kreuter.

After completing his undergraduate degree at Concordia University in Montreal, Kreuter has since been pursuing his "writer life thing." In addition to writing, Kreuter teaches at Trent University in Peterborough. What subject? Creative writing and literature, of course.

"I love the sound and energy of poetry, the creation and anything-goesness of fiction," he shares. "I truly believe that novels can change the world for the better."

With *Lake Burntshore* as his first novel, Kreuter has authored six books – five are collections of short stories and poetry, including the poetry collection *Shifting Baseline Syndrome* which was a 2022 finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award. His work has also been shortlisted for two Vine Awards for Jewish Literature, a Raymond Souster Award, and a ReLit Award. *Lake Burntshore* was recently included on CBC Book's list of "Six Sizzling Summer Reads," as well as in the *Toronto Star*'s list of "18 Essential Summer Reads."

In his academic work, similar to his literary work, Kreuter explores Jewish North American fiction, diaspora, settler colonialism, ecology, and Israel/Palestine dynamics.

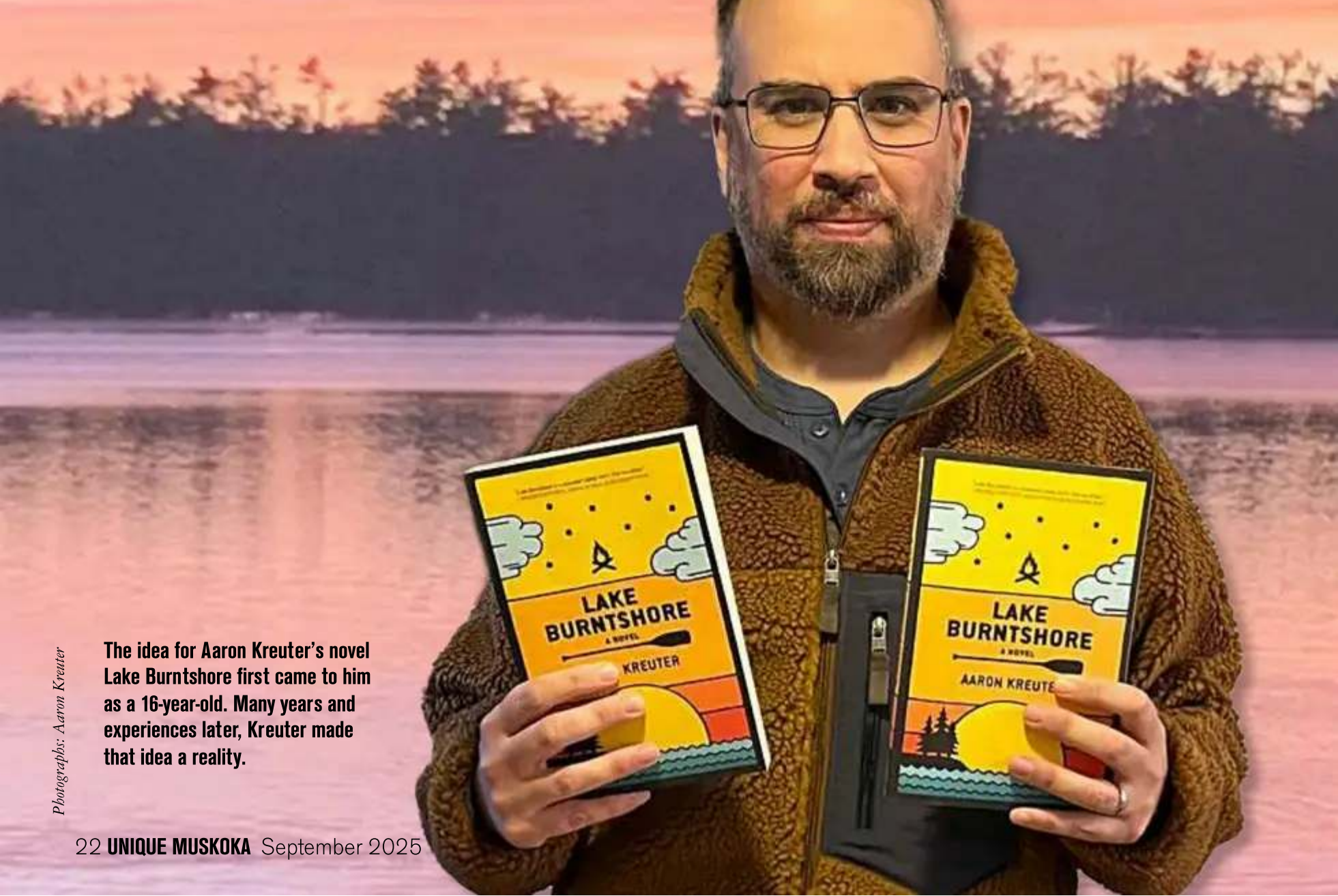
Since *Lake Burntshore* released in April 2025, Kreuter has been working on a collection of short stories that take place in the same world.

"I was very much not ready to leave those characters yet," he says. "After that, I'm hoping to embark on a young adult novel set on a billionaire's yacht hundreds of years in the future, tentatively called *There Has Always Been Forests*."

Kreuter thoroughly enjoyed "turning my love of Muskoka into a complicated, literary novel that both celebrates and complicates summer camp and cottage country."

"As many people who grew up in Toronto, I was always pulled north," he shares. "I have spent a lot of time canoeing and camping in Algonquin, which is right next door. And now that my partner's parents have a cottage in Muskoka, we're up here all year round, swimming and paddling and snowshoeing."

Kreuter's own life experiences are present in his written work. He also enjoys spending his time reading, playing guitar, being outdoors and spending time with his daughter.



The idea for Aaron Kreuter's novel Lake Burntshore first came to him as a 16-year-old. Many years and experiences later, Kreuter made that idea a reality.

Photographs: Aaron Kreuter



Photographs: Aaron Kreuter

Celebrating on launch day was a special experience for Aaron Kreuter as he welcomed his first novel, *Lake Burntshore*, into the world.



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Paddles of Purpose



An idea from former head of marketing for Algonquin Outfitters, Randy Mitson, the Charity Paddle Art Auction that takes place every two years combines passion for paddling with support of local artists and arts organizations.

Article by Bronwyn Boyer / Photography by Kelly Holinshead

A unique celebration of artistry takes place every other year, captivating locals and visitors alike. The Charity Paddle Art Auction, hosted every two years by Algonquin Outfitters (AO), is a colourful testament to Muskoka's love of adventure and creative spirit.

The story began a decade ago when Randy Mitson, then head of marketing at AO,

envisioned a way to blend outdoor adventure with local art.

"Randy's idea was born out of his passion for paddling and his desire to support local artists," explains Chris Bosworth of AO's marketing team. "He thought, what better way to celebrate our love for the outdoors than by painting on paddles?"

Mitson's concept quickly gained momentum, with support from AO owner Rich Swift and other creative minds in the company. The inaugural event showcased painted paddles, each a canvas expressing themes from wildlife to Indigenous art, capturing the community's imagination. "It was an impressive start," recalls Bosworth. "The response was incredible, and it really set the stage for what would become a tradition."

So far, the auction has raised nearly $105,000 for Muskoka's vibrant arts scene. The proceeds support various organizations, most notably the Huntsville Festival of the Arts (HFA) and the Huntsville Art Society.

"Our goal has always been to strengthen the community through art," says Dan Watson, executive director of HFA. "The Paddle Art Auction is a wonderful platform for local artists to showcase their talent, and for people to engage with art in a meaningful way."

It's only natural that canoe art and paddle art go together. Watson recalls HFA getting involved with the paddle auction around the time they began the Canoe Mural Project.

"During COVID, we had this idea with Gerry Lantaigne to paint murals on the bottoms of canoes and display them," Watson explains. "We had different themes, starting with Group of Seven and Tom Thomson, then last year we did Emily Carr, which will be included in this year's auction. We love how AO structured it in a way that supports a variety of arts and cultural organizations. It's been great because it's leveraged one event to benefit a collection of arts groups, which really strengthens the community as a whole."

Brent Ellerson, marketing and communications manager for AO, emphasizes the wide-open creative scope of the auction. Artists of all skill levels, from amateurs to seasoned professionals, submit their designs.

"There are no restrictions on themes," Ellerson says. "We've seen paddles painted with animals, camping and nature scenes, indigenous motifs, intricately carved paddles, and even one that was transformed into a functional guitar."

To date, the Charity Paddle Art Auction has raised nearly $105,000 in support of Muskoka's vibrant arts community.





Brent Ellerson, marketing and communications manager for Algonquin Outfitters, emphasizes the wide-open creative scope of the auction. Artists of all skill levels, from amateurs to seasoned professionals, submit their designs.





cutline

Dan Watson, executive director of the Huntsville Festival of the Arts and Brent Ellerson from Algonquin Outfitters welcome paddle artist Joyce Effinger as a featured artist for this year's auction. Although this will be Effinger's first time participating in the auction, she has been painting on paddles, saws, hand tools and canvases for many years.

The paddles can be functional or decorative, purchased or made by artists themselves. Some are sealed with marine-grade paint, allowing use in the water. "Most people display them as art pieces," notes Ellerson. "They're beautiful to look at and meaningful to own."

Some artists have stepped into the spotlight through the auction. Don MacKenzie, a local craftsman known for his elaborate carvings, created a series of paddles featuring three-dimensional landscapes and intricate leaf designs.

"Don's paddles became iconic within the community," says Watson. "Sadly, he recently passed away, but his work still exemplifies the creativity that this event fosters."

This year, AO invited paddle artist Joyce Effinger of Any Flat Surface Studio in North Bay. Although this will be Effinger's first time participating in the auction, she has





Participants in the Charity Paddle Art Auction can either purchase paddles through Algonquin Outfitters or source their own. Artists then design and submit their own designs, with all submissions due by October 31. Through the years, over 500 artists have participated in the event.

been painting on paddles, saws, hand tools and canvases for many years.

"We currently have a display of her work in our front window of our Huntsville store," says Ellerson. "It's part of our involvement with HFA's Art Crawl."

The auction also encourages emerging artists. With over 500 participants to date, the event has brought regional talent into the national spotlight. "The exposure artists receive is invaluable," shares Bosworth. "We've even shipped paddles across North America, from Western Canada to international audiences."

Participants can either purchase paddles through AO or source their own. They then design and submit their artwork by October 31.

"Some people even make their own paddles," Ellerson explains. "Then once they're completed, we display them at the Algonquin Theatre here in Huntsville. We built specialized custom racks that can fit about 40 paddles per rack for public display. Each paddle has a little QR code that you can scan for bidding in real time. That was an advancement we brought in last year to make it easier for people."

The auction itself is conducted entirely online during the first three weeks in November. Bidders can view paddles in person at the theatre beforehand or participate remotely.

"Last year, we had bids from around the world," says Bosworth. "People from all over want to own a piece of Muskoka's artistic legacy."

For Watson, the paddle auction is about more than aesthetics. "Each piece tells a



The Canoe Mural Project, an addition to the event, was born during COVID-19. Dan Watson recalls the idea to paint murals on the bottoms of canoes with various famous artists, like Tom Thomson and Emily Carr, as the inspiration. Some of the canoes will also be featured in the bi-annual auction.

story," he shares. "Not only through the art, but through the medium that it's painted on. And the fact that so many local artists can contribute to a fantastic initiative that's so important to our community."

The auction also encourages local businesses and organizations to display the canoe murals and paddles at their locations as a show of solidarity for Muskoka arts and culture.

"It's a way for companies to demonstrate leadership in supporting the arts," notes Ellerson. "Plus, paddles make fantastic, one-of-a-kind collectibles that connect owners to Muskoka's natural beauty and creative spirit."

While the event has grown steadily by over 100 paddles each year, the organizers emphasize that growth isn't the main goal. "We focus on quality, community engagement and supporting artists," Ellerson continues. "If more people want to participate, great. If not, we're happy with the meaningful connections we've built."

For the future, plans include expanding the scope of artwork and community involvement, perhaps even collaborating with new partners like Indigenous artists and cultural groups.

"Our vision is to keep this tradition alive and evolving," says Watson. "It's about fostering a sense of pride, supporting local talent, and celebrating Muskoka's beautiful environment."

This sentiment is echoed by Bosworth and Ellerson, who feel that love of nature is an integral part of Muskoka's creative culture. "We just hope to keep raising awareness," Ellerson adds. "I think at our core as an organization, we're here to enable people to get outdoors and enjoy the beauty of nature."

The Charity Canoe Paddle Art Auction exemplifies how art and community can intertwine to create something truly special. Every stroke of paint, carved detail and thoughtfully crafted paddle embodies Muskoka's spirit – adventurous, creative, and deeply rooted in the community. The event provides a connection to the soul of Muskoka, one stroke at a time.

For more information, visit www.algonquinoutfitters.com/paddle-art-contest



Painted canoes and paddles that are part of the auction can also be seen on display at local Huntsville businesses and organizations that support the event.





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Love, Lyrics and Life

THE HARMONiOUS PATH OF TODD & ROBYN

Article by Bronwyn Boyer / Photography by Josianne Masseau

A story of love and the transformative power of music has been unfolding in Muskoka. It's a story that started with humble beginnings, grew through shared dreams and challenges and continues to evolve with each note played and lyric written. That story belongs to Todd Blair and Robyn Henke, who perform as Todd & Robyn, a married musical duo that is inspiring audiences and musicians alike.

Robyn Henke's musical growth was subtly seeded in the small town of Norwood, just outside Peterborough, Ontario. Growing up on a back road, her childhood was filled with a sense of peaceful simplicity.

"I remember my grandmother was always humming a tune while she worked around the house," Henke recalls. "She loved singing and harmonizing, and it was always so natural to her. I think she planted the seed for me without even realizing it."

The influence of Henke's grandmother was subtle but profound. As a child, Henke was shy about singing in front of others. She would quietly hum tunes while wandering her rural surroundings, fearful of judgment. Her early confidence was fragile, and she confides that she often thought, "Who would want to hear me sing?"

A pivotal moment came when a friend complimented her voice and told her she should sing more. After that simple yet powerful comment, Henke started singing more openly, though still with trepidation.

Henke's musical confidence blossomed when she met Blair in Toronto. Blair recognized Henke's potential and gently pushed her further. Blair had already been learning guitar chords through YouTube tutorials on how to play his favourite songs. Shortly after he and Henke began dating, he noticed a guitar in the corner of her room and asked if she played. Although she admitted she hadn't really picked it up much, it inspired Blair to step up. They started playing and singing together for fun, and it felt so natural, they kept it up. Their first duet captured on video was the initial stage of their journey. After recognizing their collaboration had promise, they started testing the



Husband and wife duo Todd Blair and Robyn Henke, who perform as Todd & Robyn, are a testament to love and the magic of shared dreams.



Robyn Henke's confidence in her musical abilities flourished after meeting Todd Blair. After they began dating, they started playing and singing together for fun. Their musical chemistry felt so natural, they continued to play music together.

waters with open stages in Toronto.

Beyond their personal bond, they formed a formidable duo, each complementing the other's strengths. "I was so nervous," Henke admits. "But Todd's belief in me made all the difference. He helped me see that music is about connection, not perfection."

Blair's story began with baseball. During his formative years in Ajax, Ontario, it was his athletic talent and dedication to the sport that drove him.

Baseball took Blair to Connecticut, where he lived and played for four years. "It was an opportunity that felt like a dream come true at the time," Blair recalls. "It was intense, demanding, and I learned how to push through tough times, stay committed and work towards a shared goal."

Blair's time in Connecticut was filled with rigorous training, games and the camaraderie of teammates. After graduating with a degree in sports management, Blair entered Toronto's workforce. But his entrepreneurial spirit was always simmering beneath the surface. When the corporate world became less fulfilling, he decided to carve his own path.

"I've always enjoyed the ability to shift gears," he shares. "Being my own boss means I can play more gigs, work on other projects or take a day off when I need to recharge. That freedom is valuable, especially when juggling a creative passion like music."

Blair's go-with-the-flow philosophy has been a cornerstone of his approach to challenges. Whether it's navigating the uncertainty of the gig economy, managing the ups and downs of renovations or embracing the unpredictable nature of artistic creation, his adaptability and openness have kept him resilient.

"Things don't always go as planned," he notes. "But if you're flexible and trust that things will work out, you can find



opportunities even in setbacks. That's how I've managed to keep moving forward, both in work and in music."

Although he never saw himself as a musician, Blair's love for music and storytelling has always been a part of his life. His natural curiosity and creative instincts have fueled his interest in musical performance. His background in baseball gave him a natural ability to recognize music as a craft that requires practice, patience and persistence.

During their marriage of several years, Blair and Henke continue to be inspired by the idea that meaningful art often emerges from genuine emotion and shared experience. Their goal now is to continue developing their songwriting collaboration and eventually bring their original music to more audiences.

Henke's foundation is as equally multifaceted as Blair's. Using her formal education in business and marketing, she launched her own digital marketing company, with a recent pivot to course creation and coaching.



Todd & Robyn are now focused on creating authentic, original music that resonates with audiences. They aim to craft a unique sound rooted in storytelling, simplicity and emotional honesty.

"Having that background really helps us navigate the music world," she explains. "It's one thing to write and perform music, but it's another to promote it, book gigs, and manage the business side. We're fortunate that we can handle both sides ourselves."

Henke leverages her marketing skills to grow their online presence, curating content, managing their website, and reaching out to venues. Hosting online courses and helping freelancers organize their work feeds into her understanding of audience engagement and branding.

Henke shares that their marriage creates an environment of trust and open communication, which is essential for the



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Todd & Robyn's performances have grown from intimate open mics to larger showcases. A notable milestone that combined excitement and nerves was their recent participation in the Mariposa Folk Festival's showcase.



A guitar sitting in Robyn Henke's room caught Todd Blair's interest shortly after they began dating. Their shared musical talents have blossomed since their first duet.







vulnerability required in songwriting.

"Songwriting is incredibly personal," she says. "Being married means we've already practiced honest communication and compassion. That makes collaborating on music much easier and more authentic. We're comfortable sharing our feelings because we've built that foundation in our relationship."



Performing live was initially a daunting prospect. Henke's stage fright was rooted in her discomfort with being looked at and her uncertainty about how to act on stage.

"I used to feel awkward, not knowing where to look or what to do," she confesses. "Looking people in the eyes made me uncomfortable, and I was terrified of messing up."

Blair's relaxed approach and belief in having fun on stage helped Henke gradually shed those fears, giving their performances a feeling of palpable joy and genuine chemistry.

"I've learned to just focus on Todd and the fun of performing together," Henke shares. "When I look at him enjoying the moment, the audience senses that, and it makes everything easier. It's about sharing that joy and connection with them."

Blair admits that his own experience with performance anxiety is minimal but emphasizes that his background in sports, especially baseball, helped prepare him mentally for the stage.

"Playing sports at a high level taught me about focus, routine and handling pressure," he explains. "Performing on stage is similar because it's about preparation, then knowing how to stay present and let your skills take over."

Henke and Blair's songwriting process is as organic as their relationship. It's a blend of individual inspiration and collaborative refinement. They've applied the skills they've learned in vulnerability and communication required for a healthy marriage to their songwriting collaboration.

Their foray into songwriting was initially born from necessity. Blair began writing songs so they could participate in an open mic night at Bracebridge Hall featuring original music.

"I was pretty out of my element at first," he admits. "I had never tried writing a song before. But I realized that I just needed to start, to get ideas down and see where it would lead."

This challenge became a catalyst for Todd & Robyn's evolution. Blair began writing more regularly, inspired by personal experiences and the world around him. A misadventure in Scotland drove Henke to a meaningful musical catharsis. Though the trip went "wrong" in a few ways, it resulted in one of their first songs.

Henke's lyrics often emerge from her journal where she records personal experiences and emotions. She brings these to Blair, whose melodies and poetic flair add depth and structure.

"We both bring different strengths to the table," Henke explains. "I might write from my feelings, and Todd helps fit them into melodies. It's a give-and-take that keeps our music authentic and evolving."

Since fate brought Blair and Henke to Bracebridge, connecting with like-minded creative people in the area has been a catalyst for their development. They're particularly grateful to musician and songwriter Liam Kearney for refining their sound and encouraging them to push their

creative boundaries.

"Having Liam come in and give fresh ideas has been incredibly helpful," says Blair. "We've grown a lot through learning from and collaborating with him and other musical friends in the community."

Todd & Robyn's performances have grown from intimate open mics to larger showcases. A notable milestone was their recent participation in the Mariposa Folk Festival's showcase, an event that brought intense excitement and nerves.

"Playing the Mariposa showcase was a whirlwind," Henke recalls. "We went first after being selected from hundreds of applicants. It was nerve-wracking, especially because it was such a big stage and the audience was so attentive."

Although they didn't secure a spot in the festival, it was a valuable learning experience. "It pushed us out of our comfort zones, and I've noticed a huge jump in our confidence since then," reflects Blair.

Their approach now is to focus on creating authentic, original music that resonates with audiences. They aim to craft a unique sound rooted in storytelling, simplicity and emotional honesty. Their influences include bands like The Lumineers, Nathaniel Rateliff and Ontario artists like Cat Clyde and Jeremie Albino.

Todd & Robyn's next goals are to record an album, perform at festivals, and embark on regional tours. They plan to take part in the Via Rial Artists on Board music program, which will take them to Vancouver to play more shows.

The couple shares a feeling of optimism and excitement about their future. "We're just getting started," Henke says. "Every gig, every song, is a piece of the puzzle. We want to keep growing, collaborating, and most importantly, having fun."

Blair echoes her sentiment. "When you're genuine and enjoy what you do, people feel that. That's the magic we want to share with the world."

Henke and Blair credit their success so far to exploration, joy, and surrender. Their life is a trust fall, seasoned by past and future adventures, however unfamiliar and daunting they may be.

Like their songs, Todd & Robyn is a melody starting to form, with the promise of many new notes and chords. As they continue to write, perform and grow together, their musical marriage is a testament to love and the magic of shared dreams.



Robyn Henke and Todd Blair's songwriting process is as organic as their relationship. Their foray into songwriting was initially born from necessity. Blair began writing songs so they could participate in an open mic night at Bracebridge Hall featuring original music.

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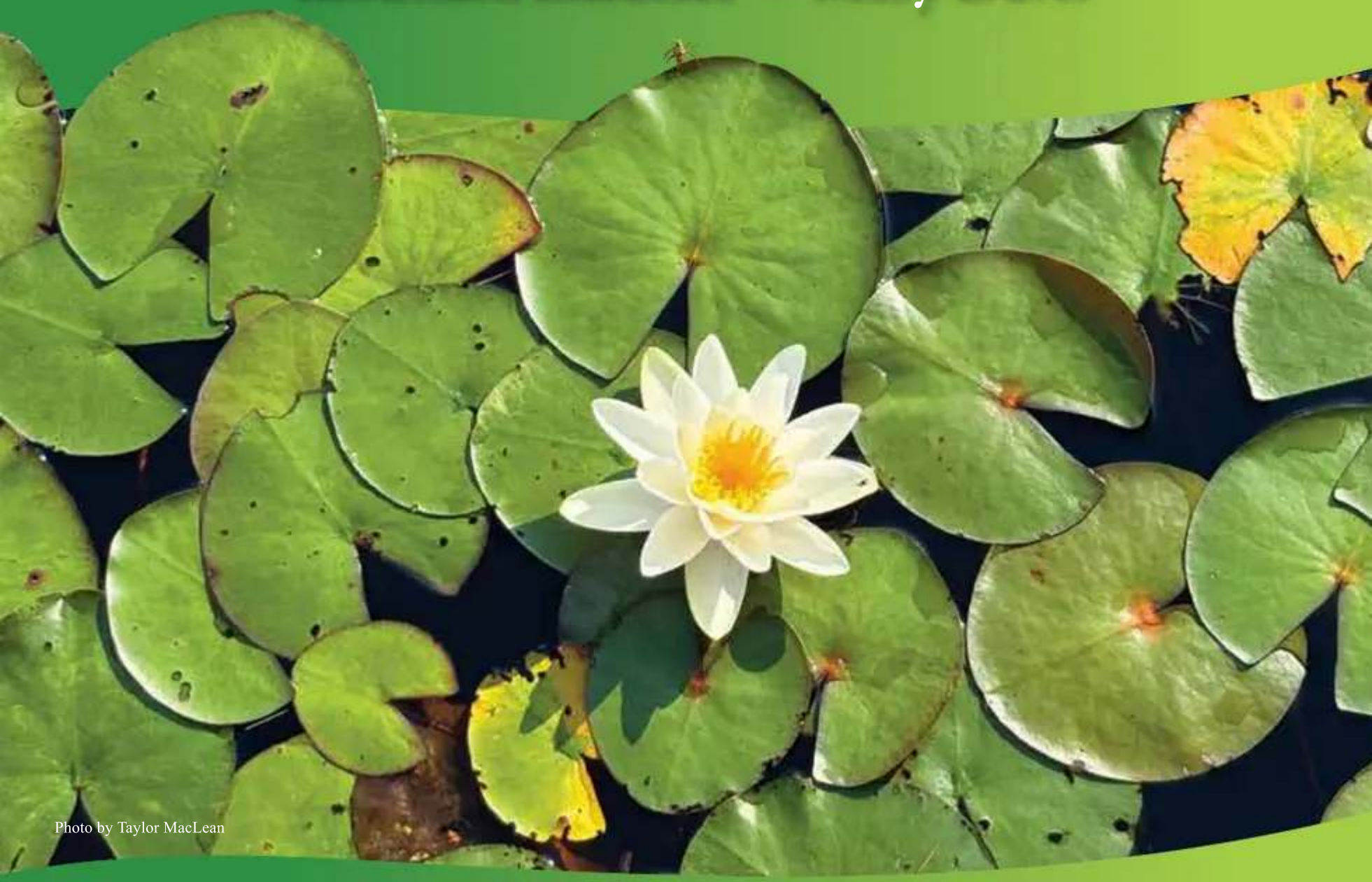


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Preparing for ENCOUNTERS

Article and Photography by Andy Zeltkalns

A diverse natural landscape has always made Muskoka a popular playground for outdoor enthusiasts who appreciate activities such as hiking, paddling, and camping. Shaped by a tapestry of interconnecting waterbodies and wetlands, beautiful forests, and rugged rocky outcrops, there are always opportunities to head into the wilderness to enjoy a taste of nature.

These natural habitats are also home to many different kinds of wildlife that people can come across while adventuring. While such wildlife encounters can be thrilling, in certain circumstances they may be unwanted and best avoided if possible.

According to Parks Canada data, wildlife attacks in Ontario are rare; Ontario has the lowest number of wildlife attacks per capita (1 in 374,318 people) with 38 attacks occurring between 2010 and 2021. Although this is a comforting statistic, knowing how to prepare and deal with a possible encounter in a safe and responsible manner is key to ensuring a positive outcome for both humans and wildlife.

According to Leslie Sampson, co-founder and executive director of Coyote Watch Canada, it is human behaviour that often impacts our interaction with wildlife.

"Baiting or feeding wildlife can cause animals to lose their fear of humans and make it more likely that a dangerous incident might occur," explains Sampson.

Wild animals have a natural fear of humans and shouldn't



Wild animals, like this black bear, have a natural fear of humans and should not be encouraged to lose this. Knowing how to prepare and deal with a possible encounter in a safe and responsible manner is key to ensuring a positive outcome for both humans and wildlife.



Knowing the types of animals you might meet and paying attention to your surroundings while outdoors can minimize the chances of a surprise confrontation. Some animals, like the fox, are curious so keeping a safe distance is always important.

be encouraged to lose this. "When in a natural environment, dogs should be kept on their leash as well," further elaborates Sampson. Free roaming dogs have the potential to harass wildlife and bring harm to themselves and their owners if they provoke a wild animal to defend itself.

Nate Smith from Huntsville, an avid outdoors person who works at Parks Ontario, spends a lot of his free time enjoying Muskoka's nature and is often found paddling and camping in the wilderness. Although Smith has crossed paths with wildlife many times in his travels, including finding bear tracks around his tent one morning, none of his encounters have been negative. His observations of moose, bears and coyotes have always been from a safe distance and Smith has never felt threatened. Smith attributes this to the practices he adheres to while exploring the outdoors.

"A lot of my campsites I use on Crown land are deeper in the wilderness and not regular campsites frequented by others, so



While wildlife encounters can be thrilling, in certain circumstances they may be unwanted and best avoided, if possible. While moose are majestic to see, a moose cow will fiercely defend their young in springtime if threatened and moose bulls are more aggressive from September to October during rutting season.

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wildlife isn't accustomed to people," explains Smith.

High traffic campsites in parks, with the constant smell of food and some people not practicing good camping etiquette, can cause wildlife to lose their natural fear of humans and increase the odds of negative events.

"While camping, I'm always mindful of how I cook, store and handle food near a campsite," elaborates Smith. "Food bags and containers need to be well sealed when not being used and should never be kept in a tent. Food preparation and cooking too close to your tent is also best avoided, if possible, and any food scraps or cooking residue should be cleaned up or burned off to minimize odours that can invite animals."

Food bags, and anything that can create an odour, when not in use, should be hung up or stored well away from the tent if possible. Toiletries, such as soap and toothpaste, or clothes with food odours on them can also be enticing to wildlife. Even small animals like raccoons and rodents can cause a lot of damage to food and equipment if they get inside a pack or tent so proper camping etiquette is paramount. When hiking or portaging in certain areas Smith also creates additional noise by



The range of the Massasauga Rattlesnake, Ontario's only venomous snake, does extend into the western and southern parts of Muskoka. If disturbed, the rattlesnake will most likely seek cover or use its rattle to warn of a threat. A strike from the snake is usually a last resort to defend itself.

whistling so there's less chance of surprising a wild animal and putting it on the defensive. As a last resort and for peace of mind, Smith will carry bear spray while camping or hiking but has never had to use it.

Although not common in this area, the range of the Massasauga Rattlesnake, Ontario's only venomous snake, does extend into the western and southern parts of Muskoka. According to information from Killbear Provincial Park, where this snake is more likely to be found, "Your chances of seeing a rattlesnake are slim due to their shy nature."

If disturbed, the rattlesnake will most likely seek cover or use its rattle to warn you. A strike from the snake is usually a last resort to defend itself but is possible if the snake is stepped on or an attempt is made to pick it up. As a "species at risk" the Massasauga Rattlesnake needs protection and should never be harassed or killed. If you do happen to hear or see one, identify the snake's location, maintain a distance of at least two metres and back away. Wearing protective clothing like long pants and boots, while hiking can reduce the chances of a bite if a rattlesnake does strike.

In the unlikely case that a bite does occur, and even though fatalities from a Massasauga Rattlesnake are extremely rare, it is still important to seek medical attention as quickly as possible. To put things into perspective, over the last 30 years, two to three people per year have received bites in



Ontario and there have only been two recorded deaths in the past 100 years with the last one being over 40 years ago.

As with most things, proper planning beforehand can help maximize the chances of a favourable outcome. When heading into the wilderness make sure you are properly prepared and are aware of the environment you will be spending time in. Knowing the types of animals you might meet and paying attention to your surroundings while outdoors can minimize the chances of a surprise confrontation. For instance, moose bulls are more aggressive from September to October during rutting season and moose cows will fiercely defend their young in springtime if threatened. A mother bear with cubs can also be dangerous if it perceives a threat.

Human behaviour often impacts interactions with wildlife. When animals, like deer, are fed or baited by humans, they lose their natural fear, making it more likely for the animal to become a "nuisance" or even create a dangerous situation.

Animal encounters can be incredible experiences, as long as safety for the animal and the human are kept top-of-mind. Observing proper camping etiquette and removing all traces of a campsite, packing food safely, and even whistling or making noise while hiking can all help to keep animals away from humans.

When you do see wildlife, keeping a safe distance is always crucial as is the importance of not disturbing dens or nesting sites. As Leslie Sampson of Coyote Watch Canada states, "We are visitors to the habitat of wildlife so be mindful. Prepare, be aware, and act safely and responsibly when you are outdoors."

Keeping these things in mind will help keep your next Muskoka wilderness adventure a positive one.

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Photograph: Patrick Boyer

Diverse Burial Grounds of Muskoka

A recent grave marker in Gravenhurst's Lakeview Cemetery is also one of the most creative – a simple stone slab cut to reveal a cross in its empty space.

Article by J. Patrick Boyer

Muskoka has more than 200 cemeteries, each with its own story, people and atmosphere.

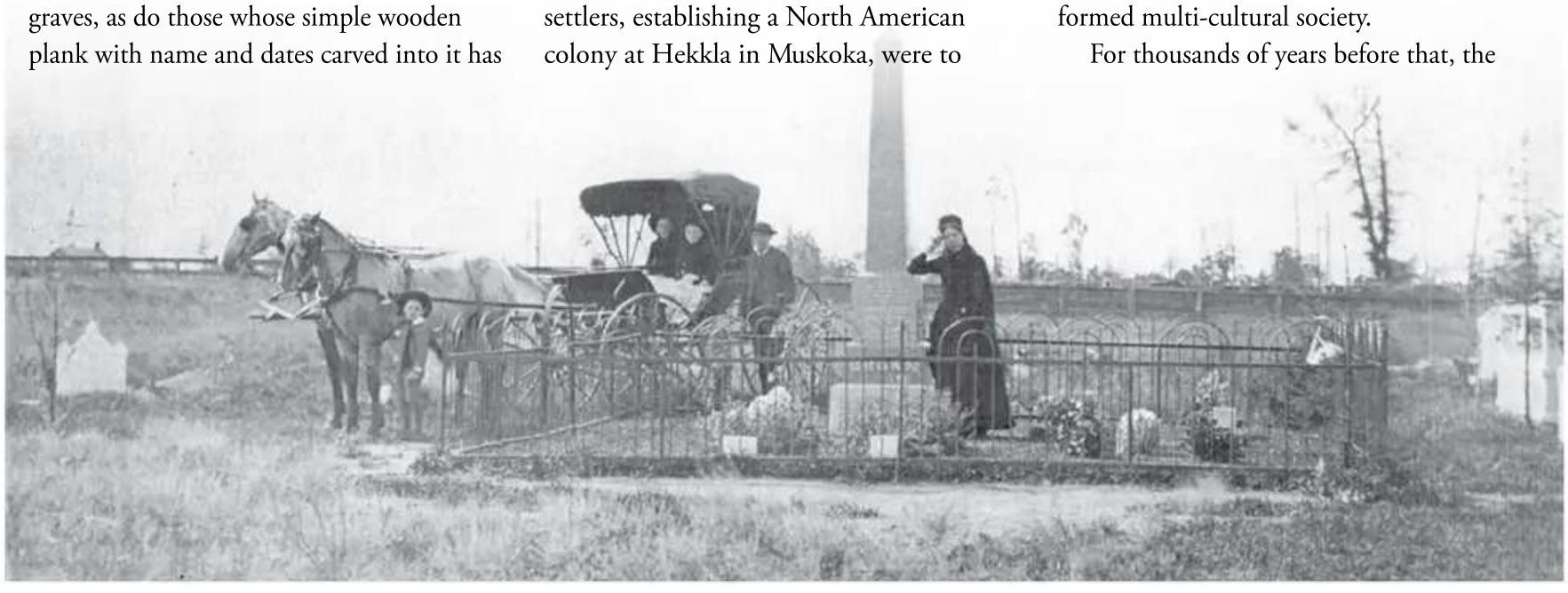
At some of these final resting places near small district villages, forests now encroach, and headstones appear to be retreating into the woods. In long-used town graveyards, small trees planted decades ago beside grave markers as a life-sign are now towering trees hiding the tombstones and tilting their ground. Individuals whose families could not afford a tombstone repose in unmarked graves, as do those whose simple wooden plank with name and dates carved into it has long since rotted away. Yet in the same burial grounds, unmistakable and seemingly indestructible, quality stonework and beautiful sculptures prominently herald the location of a wealthy family's reposing members.

At remote shanties deep in the townships, pioneer children died from many causes. Without a nearby churchyard or cemetery, settlers buried their remains in well-chosen locations, saying a prayer, perhaps singing a hymn, and in due course asking an itinerant preacher to conduct formal funeral rites for the departed child.

The first communal goals of Icelandic settlers, establishing a North American colony at Hekkla in Muskoka, were to build a school, then a church – poetically referring to its adjacent burial ground as a "church garden." As it turned out, the garden came into use before the building that eventually accompanied it.

In short, the burial places of Muskoka are quite diverse. Generations of funerals and committal services in Muskoka have taken place on a family's homestead property, in community cemeteries with extensive family plots, in churchyards, and in unmarked ground. Cremated remains would sometimes be scattered on waterways or forest floors or to the winds. A variety of disposal methods, shaped by pioneer conditions and religious rites, accommodated the earthly remains of settler society's deceased members. In the result, such variety in district burial grounds provides a composite portrait of a recently formed multi-cultural society.

For thousands of years before that, the



Photograph: Town of Gravenhurst Archives

Gravenhurst burials had been occurring since the 1860s in St. James' churchyard and Bethel Cemetery of the Bethel Church Mission, but in 1884 taking photographs was still novel when this one captured Dugald Brown's widow Louisa posing in grief at his Lakeview Cemetery monument.



Photograph: Patrick Boyer

As common as people planting trees too close to their houses was the practice of adding decorative plantings beside a loved one's tombstone. Cedars were popular for their symbolic link to the biblical Cedars of Lebanon representing strength, endurance, majesty, and holiness. In the absence of rules or common sense, devout Muskokans planted what became forests, playing havoc with coffins and grave markers.

cultural practices of Indigenous People in this vicinity dealt with death in a manner harmonious with their way of life. For the Ojibwe people across this region, knowledge keepers maintained rituals based on their understanding that time and space are circular and the world and living things as created by the Great Spirit have a spiritual dimension. Water, fire, plants and animals possess a spirit, but human dimensions are threefold: a spirit or soul that travels to other worlds, a shadow, and a body that decomposes and disappears after death.

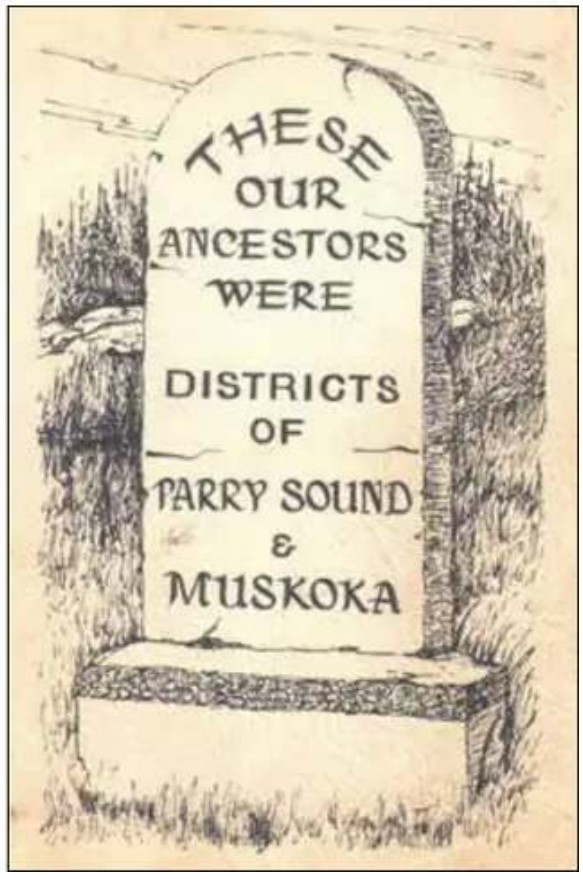
With the three aspects of Indigenous culture in mind, dying gives someone the chance to connect with the world of spirits, especially ancestral spirits who may give guidance and share wisdom; this is a joyful thing. As a result, Ojibwe funeral ceremonies had singing, drumming, and storytelling that brought laughter. With the afterlife a place of eternal happiness, there was no need to dwell on death which, with nature's circularity, was inevitable anyway. Bodies were placed with sight lines across water.

In the mid-1800s, early explorers and fur traders glimpsed something of Ojibwe burial practices at rockface crevices along the north end of Trading Lake (Lake of Bays) where the remnants of bodies, shrouded in animal hides or birch bark, had been entombed in dry cave-like spaces facing the lake.

Indigenous peoples hereabouts had well-developed ceremonies and particular practices for dealing with their dead which, in mutated form, remain part of the present district scene. Around 1860, the government relocated Ojibwe families from their settled community of *Obajewanung*, now the site of Port Carling, to Parry Island and Wasauksing First Nation, though a number moved south to rejoin their clans at Rama First Nation. By the early 1970s, when Flora Tababadung was Wasauksing chief and a new cemetery opened, three prior burial grounds had been closed, the result of both full occupancy and acculturation to settler beliefs and practices.

In west Muskoka on Wahta Mohawk land, burials over five or six generations since 1881 in the community's evolving cemeteries encompassed graves flooded by Ontario Hydro building a power dam, family plots which over time received dozens of coffins, the shift from a church burial ground to the present community cemetery and independence from a cemetery board's rules and regulations, for better and worse, because Ontario's Cemeteries Act does not extend to First Nation reserves. Throughout borderless Muskoka, Indigenous burial places stretch from Beausoleil Island and Moon River to Moose-Deer Point, Trading Lake, and elsewhere, back through time beyond memory.

Following contact, Muskoka was primarily settled by European-Canadians advancing northward, with the area above the Severn River receiving first homesteader burials in Morrison, Muskoka and Ryde townships. Gravenhurst's inaugural cemetery at St. James Church displays gravestones with pioneers' names and dates so weathered as to now be illegible. The large Bethel Cemetery began in the 1860s, in conjunction with the Bethel Church Mission establishing itself in Muskoka. By 1881, the town's Lakeview



Photograph: Patrick Boyer Collection

During the early 1970s, volunteers in Parry Sound and Muskoka districts under the leadership of Parry Sound's Anne Barnard poured through archives, cemetery legers and other records of those buried in public cemeteries, private family plots and other burial locations. By 1976 their unique 300-page book was printed in Bracebridge by Robert Boyer at the *Herald-Gazette* Press, preserving a vast amount of heritage information.

Cemetery opened, so named because Lake Muskoka was in clear view as the surrounding forests had been clear-cut to feed Sawdust City's lumbermills. The first Lakeview burial was for Carrie Bell and Mary Ella, twin daughters of merchant Jonathon White and his wife Elizabeth Fraser White. Born August 17 that year, the infant girls perished within a week of each other, on September 27 and October 4, from "spasms," a meaningless term reflecting the era's primitive medical science. In 1884 another burial, near their tombstone, was for Dugald Brown, an enterprising community builder, one of whose many businesses, Brown's Beverages, is still known today.

Given the world's different religions and cultures, methods for disposing of a deceased's body are radically diverse, from funeral pyres and elevated platforms in trees to placement in caves and crypts, on to interment and cremation. Today even "aquamation" (water cremation by alkaline hydrolysis) is now legal in Ontario and several other Canadian jurisdictions.

Embalming, or drawing off a corpse's body fluids, a known practice with Egyptians 6,000 years ago, was in Europe generally only performed on expired royals. It took the U.S. Civil War's cataclysmic production of corpses in the 1860s – including those of several Muskokans, most notably Muskoka Falls postmaster Richard Hannah who volunteered with the Union Army – to convince powers-that-be that universal embalming could prevent the spread of deadly water-borne diseases, such as cholera and typhoid.

The same thinking would come to apply to riverside cemeteries and garbage dumps which, in various Muskoka locales, leeched toxic fluids into passing watercourses, spreading contamination widely and contributing to preventable deaths. Today embalming is a norm, with instruction in its practice provided via internet to Ontario community college students in both English and French.

New interest in "green burials" is a trendy name for longtime practices known as "natural burials." Both require the same approvals, and no legal definition of their difference exists. Common practices at green or natural cemeteries include not embalming the cadaver, using a biodegradable casket or shroud rather than a grave liner and digging graves by hand rather than with earth-moving machinery. The in-filled graves are often covered with local plantings to avoid use of pesticides and marked by a piece of rock with the deceased's hand-chiseled name.

The recent trend to lay grave markers flat is another example of circularity in practices, or reversion to earlier ways. A "gravestone" was the stone slab originally laid flat over a grave, while a "tombstone" was the stone lid of a coffin with chiseled name, dates and words. When people began setting the slab or lid upright at the head of a person's grave to assist with visual identification, it became known as a "headstone." The three words are interchangeable. Today's egalitarian push toward "No Stone Left Standing" makes it difficult to find a loved one's place when it cannot be read unless standing almost on top of it or recognized from a distance by its distinctiveness or if it is covered by leaves or snow – a new hurdle parading as minimalist aesthetic.

Such samples from the wide range in practices reflect the global variety pack of spiritual beliefs and social rituals governing



Photograph: Edith Smith Collection

In 2015, a memorial plaque newly mounted at the Hekkla cemetery was unveiled, with three generations represented and the Canadian and Finnish flags displayed. These burial grounds had been opened in 1896, and though the church ceased most uses in recent decades, the "church garden" remains special to members of Muskoka's Icelandic community as their forebearers' final resting place.



Photograph: Patrick Boyer

Whether in heat of summer or winter's stormy blasts, this stone-carved mourner keeps her silent vigil at the well-tended grave of Peter McGibbon and his wife Mabel in the United Church Cemetery at Bracebridge.



Photograph: Patrick Boyer

Mickle Memorial is among Muskoka's most spacious cemeteries, allowing many future burials. Well laid out with winding roadways and treed areas, the organized burial ground has a well-equipped maintenance building discretely out of sight, a commodious mausoleum and an artful columbarium.



Photograph: Patrick Boyer

With a shift in traditional peoples' attitudes about cremation, Muskoka cemeteries opened columbariums to hold urns with ashes, just as they opened plots of land for interment, now a normal part of the burial business. In one of the district's largest burial grounds, seen above is the configuration of the Mickle Memorial Cemetery columbarium.

death and remembrance. Because humans exhibit such great differences one to another, as do their communities, the inevitable outcome in Muskoka has been a plethora of distinctive graves in diverse burial grounds – from ones now abandoned to their active contemporary successors.

Many of the district's cemeteries are identified by denomination: Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Lutheran, Salvation Army and United Church. Others are community-focused "union cemeteries" – as with Dwight Union, MacTier Union, Falkenburg Union, Ilfracombe Union and Torrance Union – small centres where it made more sense to inhabitants to let death draw them together rather than divide them along religious lines.

Also in this non-religious vein, some 17 Muskoka cemeteries have been identified by their community's name alone: Baysville, Glen Orchard, Port Carling, Britannia Locks, Hekkla, Williamsport, Matthiasville, Symington, Muskoka Falls, Paint Lake, Lewisham, Maplewood, Beatrice, Stephenson, Yearly, Ufford and Ullswater.

Quite a few are family cemeteries: Brennan Henry Family, Hollingshead Family, Hopcroft Family, Newman-Turley Family, Van Luven Family, Burgess Family, Spencer Family, as well as the Clear Lake Family Burial Grounds and Crompton Farm Burial Place. This category becomes much larger as a place for interments when cemeteries with a family name are also open to burials of others beyond kith and kin, such as Hutcheson Memorial Cemetery in Huntsville and Mickle Memorial Cemetery at Gravenhurst.

Well over 30 district burial sites bear a saint's name, either as a churchyard cemetery or its satellite grounds nearby, taken from churches known as St. Mary's, St. Andrew's, St. Anne's, St. John's, St. Paul's, St. James, St. Thomas, St. Ambrose, St. George's, St. Joseph's, St. Mark's, St. David's, St. Stephen's, St. Michael's and the generic All Saints.

Some are specialized, such as the "Legion Cemetery" within the Mickle Memorial Cemetery or the monastery cemetery of the Society of St. John the Evangelist monastery in Bracebridge, now deconsecrated. Muskoka is also home to notable memorial grounds centred around individual women, such as the Dyer Memorial (Huntsville) and the Memorial Park for Gertrude Annie Williams (Bracebridge.) In the 1960s and 1970s, the awakening ecumenical spirit brought anomalies of tolerance to Muskokans, exemplified by the "Catholic Section" in Gravenhurst's Lakeview Protestant Cemetery.

As society evolved, cultural practices changed and cremation incrementally became as normal as interment, with Muskoka cemeteries adding columbariums in which to lodge urns containing the deceased's ashes. Franklin Township has a cemetery known as Major J.H. Rattray Columbarium, a place for inurnment, while others simply added this service the way they sell lots for in-ground burials.

From Muskoka's pioneer-era basics to the present day, the bereavement sector has become another regulated domain, across the province and locally. Enactment of statutes governing cemeteries and undertakers, and in particular Ontario's 2002 Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, frame funerial and burial practices with government rules.

Establishing a cemetery requires municipal approval or, if on Crown Land, a nod by the Minister of Natural Resources. A public register of interments must be kept, a burial lot layout plan requires grave sizes compliant with regulations and rights certificates are issued by internet to those buying plots. Muskoka municipalities followed suit, enacting bylaws with rules and regulations restricting grave adornments to wreaths and flowers, prohibiting in-ground plantings. They and cemetery boards post notices about this regime of strict control, the same way governing authorities billboard a catechism of prohibitions at sports fields and public parks.

Ontario law requires all cemeteries to be licensed. Their owners and operators are



Photograph: Town of Gravenhurst Archives

The monument erected for Dugald Brown in 1884 still stands today, although the view around it has changed significantly.

required to contribute to a care and maintenance fund used to reinforce a cemetery's generational maintenance with family descendants honouring their ancestors by keeping their graves neat, the stones free of moss, sometimes scrubbing them clean, even erecting latter-day tombstones on their unmarked graves. Maintaining cemeteries in fashion rests on the four pillars of companies, municipalities, religious organizations and volunteers.

The rise of consumer protection movements led to Ontario creating a Bereavement Authority with delegated administrative powers to educate people about rules and practices around burials and help protect grieving families from predatory fraudsters.

Muskoka steamship captain Levi Fraser, a leader in municipal affairs and writer on local affairs, pointed out 80 years ago, "History has never been kind to the early pioneers, the men and women who changed Muskoka from a wilderness to a number of well-developed communities, who struggled and sacrificed not merely to make a living but uphold the best traditions of the nation. Not unmindful of the finer things in life, they built churches, schoolhouses, and roads – determined their sons and daughters would get an education and be prepared to take their places in life. Yet many have never been heard of after their obituary announcement. The unselfish part they played in developing our beautiful district is unrecorded and forgotten."

While there's truth in that, others do not lament the cycles of life or regret that humans' brief passages are soon forgotten on a planet where billions of people live and die and memories wash in and out like the tides at an ocean's rim. At one Muskoka cemetery a headstone is engraved the unsentimental epitaph:

"FATE'S FICKLE FINGER
WRITES AND MOVES ON
NEITHER PIETY NOR TEARS
WASH OUT A WORD OF IT."



Photograph: Patrick Boyer

In the 1800s a Gravenhurst carpenter found a way to resurrect a broken tombstone by framing the two parts in its own house.

The rituals people perform in the wake of someone's death express their ongoing relationship with the departed one. Burial ceremonies as we conduct them seamlessly distill a community's cultural values. The lore of past lives endure in oral tradition with our storytellers and in articles and books by our writers. Muskoka cemeteries not only illuminate the district's past but document social and cultural evolution of funerial rituals and burial practices over time.

Many graveyards are places for solemn meditation and peaceful quietude, though many now at Muskoka's busy roadsides have forfeited that quality. Larger ones in quieter areas provide ideal rendezvous spots for lovers and n'er-do-wells. Novelists needing a perfect name for a character have prowled these precincts jotting down colourful names from tombstones.

Earlier Canadians organizing election victories "voted the graveyard" by compiling voters' lists of deceased individuals whose names and dates of birth they copied from tombstones, checked on election day by a polling station clerk when someone showed up impersonating that former voter and handed them a ballot.

Photographers have seen ethereal light and moods so enchanting in a cemetery's seasons and times of day that they've captured images from dramatic to otherworldly.

Some who've lost a cherished life partner made a practice of returning with a folding chair to sit for hours beside her grave, perhaps talking to her as before, or reading a book in her familiar remembered presence. Others return at intervals, perhaps bringing fresh flowers on his birthday, or their wedding anniversary. Kids play hide-and-seek among tombstones, and charlatans organize ghost tours to spook the gullible on moonlit nights.

Graveyards offer much beyond a place where ashes return to ashes and dust to dust. The really good ones should be on anyone's bucket-list as unique places to explore and pay respect, before it is too late.



Photograph: Patrick Boyer

With so few sculptures in Muskoka cemeteries, those present attract attention. This one at the grave of Mabel and Peter McGibbon is less obvious than others, hidden by the mature cedars. Prominent in central Muskoka because of his Bracebridge medical practice, Peter and Mabel became widely known throughout Muskoka when he served as the district's member of parliament in Ottawa.

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Photograph: Bala Cranberry Festival

Bala Cranberry Festival returns in 2025 to celebrate its 41st year with live entertainment, an artisan market, a family fun zone and all things cranberry.

Bala Cranberry Festival to celebrate 41st year

The Bala Cranberry Festival returns this October, taking place from Friday, October 17, to Sunday, October 19, 2025. This annual event provides attendees with an opportunity to enjoy a weekend filled with various activities, local flavours and community involvement.

Visitors can participate in an artisan market showcasing handmade crafts, experience live entertainment featuring local performers, and enjoy street performances. A range of local food options will be available, catering to different tastes. Families will appreciate the Kid Zone, which includes attractions like a trackless train and carnival games, along with special entertainment designed for children scheduled for both Saturday and Sunday. Those interested in updates are encouraged to follow the festival organizers on social media.

In addition to the main event, other activities will be offered, such as the Rotary Club of Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Duck Race, happening on Saturday at 3 p.m. Attendees can also explore a vendor and farmers market at Portage Landing, presenting more opportunities for local engagement.

Guests are welcome to visit the Muskoka Lakes Farm and Winery during their stay, although it should be noted that the farm operates independently from the festival.

Exciting fall fairs set to kick off in the region

As autumn descends upon the region, a vibrant array of annual fall fairs is set to take centre stage, inviting communities to come together in celebration.

The festivities begin with a milestone event – the 150th annual Severn Bridge Fall Fair, scheduled for September 6. This eagerly anticipated fair will be held at the Severn Bridge Fairgrounds, located at 1153 Southwood Road in Gravenhurst. Attendees can look forward to a lively lineup of musical performances, a diverse array of vendors, a children's maker market, and a hall filled with prize-winning produce and homemade items, alongside various engaging events.

Following shortly after, the 2025 Bracebridge Fall Fair and Horse Show will take place from September 12 to 14 at the JD Lang Activity Park. For over 150 years, this fair has served as a gathering point for locals and visitors alike to celebrate the fruits of the farming season. Highlights of the event include an exciting midway, a petting zoo, pony rides, tractor and horse pulls, and demonstrations of traditional crafts like spinning, weaving and wood carving.

The season continues with the 143rd edition of the Huntsville Fall Fair, taking place from September 19 to 21 at the Huntsville Fairgrounds, located at 407 Ravenscliffe Road in Huntsville.



Photograph: Matt Driscoll

Fall fairs throughout Muskoka celebrate the harvest with exhibits, live music, horse competitions, tractor pulls and midway rides.



Photograph: The Government of Ontario

Premiers from across Canada convened in July at Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville to discuss key topics including national sovereignty, emergency management, healthcare and Canada-U.S. relations.

Fairgoers can enjoy an array of attractions, including a lively midway, fascinating exhibits, and live music featuring exceptional local talent throughout the weekend. The excitement culminates on Sunday at 1 p.m. with a demolition derby, promising an exhilarating end to the fair.

Ford welcomes Carney and Canada's premiers to Muskoka

Premiers from across Canada gathered at Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville for a critical summit in July. Key topics included emergency management, energy security, national sovereignty, Canada-U.S. relations and healthcare. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, chairing the Council of the Federation, welcomed the leaders, highlighting the charm of Huntsville.

Ford hosted a dinner for the premiers at his cottage, marking a collaborative spirit among the provinces. The council's leadership rotates annually, with Rob Lantz of Prince Edward Island set to take over in July 2025.

The summit wrapped up with several important discussions. Premiers focused on enhancing co-ordination in emergency response and tackling wildfire challenges. They emphasized the need for national projects to strengthen infrastructure and security. In light of global uncertainties, enhancing trade relations with the United States was a key topic of discussion, as were efforts to harmonize labour and immigration frameworks across jurisdictions.

Notably, Prime Minister Mark Carney attended, fostering federal-provincial discussions. The summit also saw over 100 healthcare advocates protest outside the venue, calling for accessible public health services amidst concerns about the shift toward privatization. Additionally, several provinces signed agreements to dismantle internal trade barriers, aiming for increased interprovincial commerce.

Wanda III returns to Muskoka's lakes after 22 years

Wanda III has returned to the Muskoka lakes after a 22-year absence, offering public cruises and private charters for interested passengers.

This 94-foot yacht, originally constructed in 1915 for Mrs. Timothy Eaton, features a



Photograph: Mark Harris

***Wanda III*, a 94-foot yacht previously owned by Mrs. Timothy Eaton, has returned to the waters of Muskoka following a five-year restoration process.**

12-foot beam and a cruising speed of 24 miles per hour, marking a significant achievement for its time. Following its re-dedication by Prime Minister Jean Chretien in August 1996, *Wanda III* has become an important part of Muskoka's yachting history.

After undergoing a five-year restoration process, *Wanda III* is now recognized as the second oldest electrified steam yacht in the world. John Miller, president of Muskoka Steamships & Discovery Centre (MSDC), noted the commitment of the team involved in the restoration. "It's remarkable to see *Wanda III* sailing again," he stated.

Rick McGraw, a director of MSDC, emphasized the contributions of donors in maintaining *Wanda III*'s legacy. With a new boathouse at Muskoka Discovery Centre, the yacht is suitably safeguarded for future use.

Former Huntsville resident honoured with King Charles III Coronation Medal for cardiac research

Dr. Ian Drennan, a former resident of Huntsville, has been awarded the esteemed King Charles III Coronation Medal in recognition of his significant contributions to research in cardiac resuscitation. The award ceremony took place on June 22, 2025, at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto.



Photograph: Muskoka Doppler

Former Huntsville resident Dr. Ian Drennan has been awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal in recognition of his significant contributions to research in cardiac resuscitation.

Nominated by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Dr. Drennan has shown exceptional dedication to improving the lives of individuals affected by cardiovascular diseases through his research efforts. His work focuses on enhancing the outcomes of those who experience cardiac arrest, an area he is deeply passionate about from his experience as a frontline paramedic.

Dr. Drennan's educational journey began at Pine Glen Public School and Huntsville High School before he furthered his studies at the University of Guelph and the University of Toronto.

Expressing his gratitude, Dr. Drennan stated, "It was a huge honour to be nominated and to receive the award. I have dedicated many years of research to this cause, and it was incredible to be recognized alongside my peers."

This recognition highlights not just Dr. Drennan's personal accomplishments but also the vital importance of ongoing research in the field of cardiovascular health.

Muskoka Doppler celebrates 10 years of local news coverage

As the era of the local newspaper slowly fades, the heartbeat of local news remains as strong as ever.

Over the past decade, *Muskoka Doppler* has slowly established itself as the go-to source for local news across Muskoka and Parry Sound.

"It is hard to believe that *Doppler* will on September 8 complete its 10th year as a local online news source in Muskoka and east Parry Sound," says *Doppler* publisher Hugh Mackenzie.

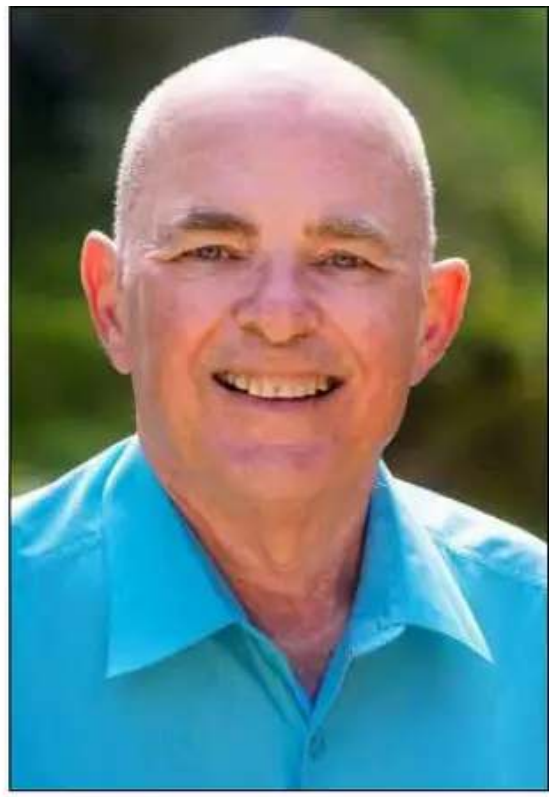
Established in 2015 by local journalists, *Doppler* has become a key resource for residents of Huntsville and surrounding areas seeking relevant news. The organization is focused on delivering timely local stories that inform and engage the community.

Doppler prioritizes local content, highlighting notable community members, showcasing local businesses and providing extensive coverage of news and sports events. It also features a variety of perspectives on topics of local interest, contributed by writers with connections to Muskoka.

The platform encourages community input, creating an interactive space for reader engagement. Over the past 10 years, *Doppler* has significantly expanded, now reaching more than 120,000 readers from both permanent and seasonal residents of Muskoka and Parry Sound, as well as a global audience with ties to the region.

To enhance its service, *Doppler* now has two specialized websites: *Huntsville Doppler* and *South Muskoka Doppler*, allowing for a tailored approach to news delivery for the distinct communities each serves.

"As we complete our first decade, our amazing and dedicated team of local professionals will continue to be innovative and thorough in providing local news and information to the communities we serve," says Mackenzie.



Photograph: Muskoka Doppler

Hugh Mackenzie, *Muskoka Doppler* publisher, is thrilled to celebrate 10 years of sharing local news.

Nursery Nights concert series returns to Sandhill Nursery

Sandhill Nursery has announced the return of the Nursery Nights concert series for its third year. This concert series will take place on the grounds of the nursery, creating a distinctive atmosphere for audiences to enjoy a variety of performances. In collaboration with the Huntsville Festival of the Arts (HfA), Nursery Nights aligns with the annual Fall Festival at Sandhill.

The concerts will be held in Greenhouse #4,



Photograph: Rosseau Pumpkin Festival

The village of Rosseau is set to host the Rosseau Pumpkin Festival, a family-event for all ages, on October 11. The annual event attracts thousands of visitors.

an 1,800 square foot space notable for its rustic décor and good acoustics. Attendees are encouraged to arrive early to explore the attractions at Sandhill's Fall Festival, which includes activities like a pumpkin slingshot, two mazes, a scavenger hunt, cornhole games and art installations. Refreshments will be available for purchase.

This year's Nursery Nights features a range of performances, including folk music and comedy acts. Dates to note include Old Man Luedecke on September 13, David Francey on September 27 and Irish Mythen on October 3. The program also includes the Garden Variety Improv Show on September 19 and Yuk Yuk's On Tour on October 18.



Photograph: South Muskoka Hospital Foundation

Local resident Bob Jacob and South Muskoka Hospital Foundation executive director Leah Walker celebrate Jacob's recent $1 million donation to the foundation.

Old Man Luedecke, a Juno Award-winning artist, is known for his engaging banjo playing and storytelling, providing a folk sound that resonates with listeners. The Garden Variety Improv Show will feature improvisers from Second City, such as Dave Pearce and Linda Kash, who will create scenes based on audience suggestions. David Francey brings his storytelling heritage to his performances, while Irish Mythen captivates audiences with powerful singing.

South Muskoka Hospital Foundation receives $1 million donation

The South Muskoka Hospital Foundation has received a $1 million donation from local resident Bob Jacob, aimed at improving healthcare services in the community. Jacob, who has transitioned from being a cottager to a full-time resident, is motivated by the principle of being "Kinder, Braver, Together," a sentiment inspired by artist and philanthropist Lady Gaga.

"Investing in your community is an act of kindness," Jacob stated. He is focused on ensuring the South Muskoka region has the necessary resources to provide timely medical assistance when needed.

This significant donation is expected to enhance patient care and access to essential medical services. Jacob anticipates advancements in testing capabilities, improved diagnostics and enhanced connections to specialists.

Leah Walker, executive director of the Foundation, commented, "This generous contribution extends beyond equipment; it symbolizes hope and health for our community. We are extremely grateful for Bob's vision."

The South Muskoka Hospital Foundation continues to work alongside local residents, donors and healthcare professionals to ensure the hospital can offer accessible expert care and cutting-edge technology for everyone.

Rosseau Pumpkin Festival returns October 11

The village of Rosseau is set to host the annual Rosseau Pumpkin Festival, an event that attracts thousands of visitors. Scheduled for Saturday, October 11, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. along Victoria Street, this community event is free to attend and will feature various attractions.

Families can partake in several activities, including six large moonwalk inflatables for children. Creative options such as pumpkin painting, cupcake decorating and face painting will be available to engage younger attendees. There will also be stilt walkers and the chance to meet animals from Muskoka Goat Away and Amanda's Exotic Pets.

The festival will feature contributions from over 50 local vendors and live music by Jeff Young of the Muskoka Roads Band. Various food vendors will be present, including the BeaverTails pastry truck, while activities like balloon twisting and airbrush body tattoos will offer additional entertainment.

Located on the north shore of Lake Rosseau within the District of Muskoka and the Township of Seguin, Rosseau is a small village that draws seasonal residents during the summer and fall. Since its beginning in 2012, the Pumpkin Festival has aligned with Thanksgiving weekend, making it an apt time for community gatherings.

The festival also aims to support local businesses, many of which participate as vendors. The event depends on the efforts of volunteers who dedicate their time leading up to and during the festival to ensure its success.

With a plentiful supply of pumpkins for the occasion, children will have the opportunity to take home creatively decorated pumpkins, celebrating the autumn season. The Rosseau Pumpkin Festival serves as both a tourist attraction and a means to strengthen community ties, making it a noteworthy event this fall.

Feature by Matt Driscoll

Sensational Sandwiches

Article by K.M. Wehrstein / Photography by Brittany Clark

Though sandwich-like dishes existed in ancient times, the modern sandwich was invented by John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich, in the 19th century. The earl did not appreciate his lengthy gambling sessions interrupted by trivialities such as eating, so he ordered roast beef placed between two slices of bread and thus avoided getting the playing cards greasy. The idea spread within the British aristocracy (no doubt related to gambling in some other cases), and the rest is culinary history.

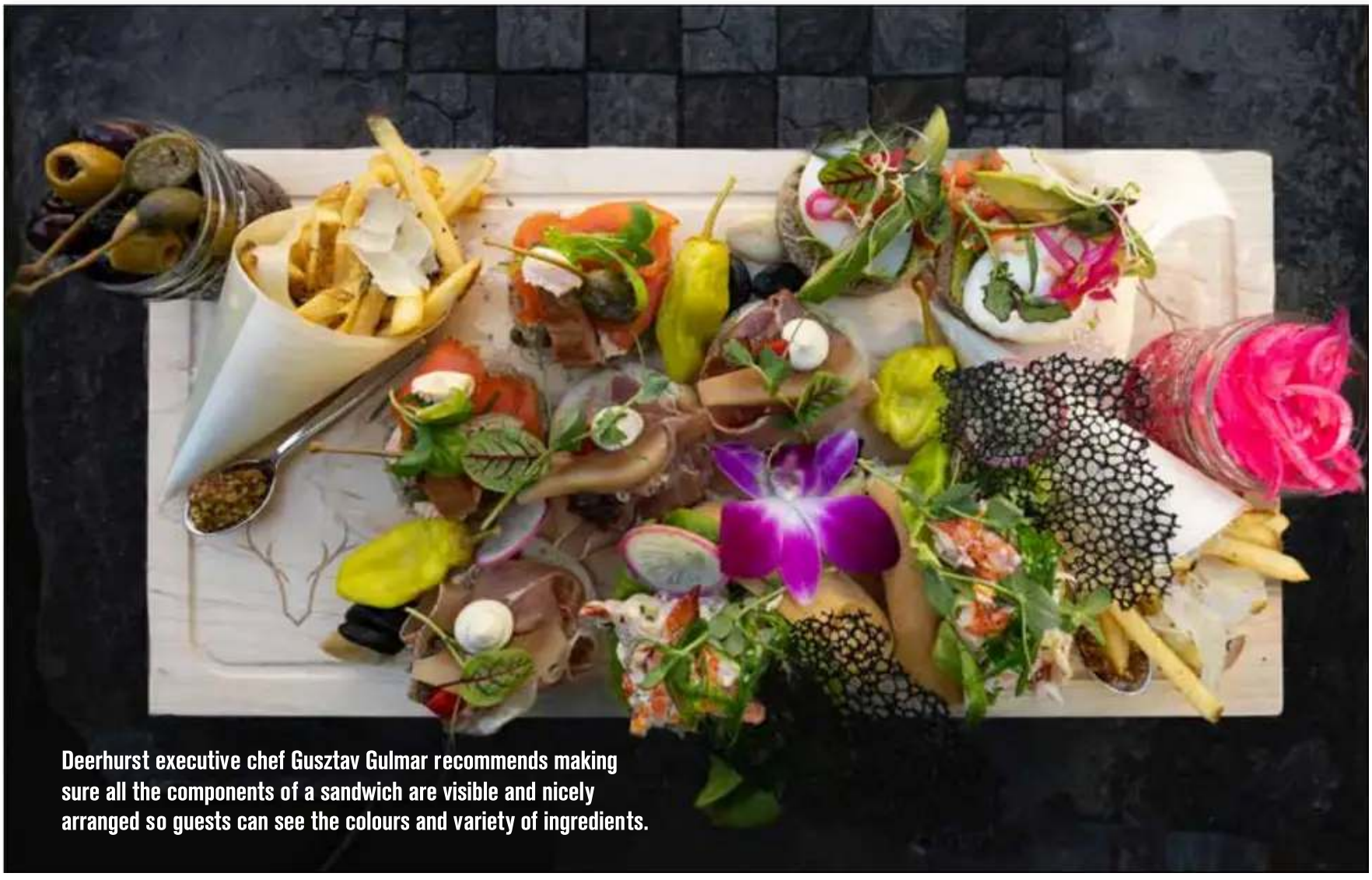
Accordingly, we shall start with a steak sandwich, but it's no ordinary steak sandwich. Well Fed Eatery in Gravenhurst, which specializes in sandwiches, was founded in 2011 by Annette Gillan. Retiring in 2023, she sold the business to chef Phillip Jakel and his wife Bella Goudie, who works elsewhere but helps at Well Fed on evenings and weekends.

Jakel, who was born near Frankfurt, Germany, met Goudie, whose family goes back three generations in Muskoka, at Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School when they were in their mid-teens and he was on a student program to learn English. They maintained their relationship long distance while he took his chef training in Germany, apprenticing in three five-star hotels, among other places, and she attended Waterloo University.

After a nine-month sojourn in New Zealand, the couple returned to buy Well Fed in June of 2024 and get married in September. Staying in Muskoka is their plan. "The way of life is easier here, and I don't think I would have advanced as fast in my career in Germany," Jakel says. "This business gives me the opportunity to do what I like doing. I don't wake up in the morning and go 'Oh no, I have to go into work.' And I have my staff along for the journey." He and Goudie employ four other people.

"We've been planning this for years," says Goudie. "We were going to open a food truck, and then this opportunity came up."

They aim to provide something they feel



Deerhurst executive chef Gusztav Gulmar recommends making sure all the components of a sandwich are visible and nicely arranged so guests can see the colours and variety of ingredients.

is missing in Gravenhurst, an alternative to fast food chains that provide little nutritional value in their fare. "Food isn't cheap," Jakel says. "If it's cheap, it isn't food. Everything we do is from scratch. It didn't come out of a freezer bag."

Vision-wise, the trick is to balance old favourites demanded by existing customers with innovations to draw in new customers. "We're going for more contemporary and trendy," Goudie notes.

That includes international elements such as a southern-USA-style crunchy chicken sandwich with sriracha mayonnaise, a Chinese-style pork belly sandwich and schnitzel on a bun, German style. There will also be vegan and vegetarian options.

So, yes, not every steak sandwich has a layer of roasted red pepper that melts in the mouth, combined with the pleasant freshness of arugula and the delicate smokey tang of Gruyere cheese wedded to a particularly flavourful cut of steak. You'll be able to try this sandwich at Well Fed as a special starting in October and on the regular menu next year.



Chef Gusztav Gulmar prefers to serve sandwiches open-faced so guests can see all of the elements and enjoy a visual feast to accompany the flavours.

In other cultures and regions across the world, there are different takes on the sandwich. The spring roll is one of these variations – a bread-type covering around a tasty filling. This spring roll is not deep-fried like one might assume. Instead, it is served cold.

The Muskoka Natural Food Market in Bracebridge was founded some 35 years ago by Jane Langmuir, who was also involved in founding the Toronto health-food store, The Big Carrot. In November of 2015 Langmuir retired and sold the store to Jed Corbeil and Curt Dunlop, and it moved into its current location on Canada Day

Steak Sandwich

- Phillip Jakel and Bella Goudie

Ingredients

2 slices brioche bread
3 ounces flat iron steak
1-2 Tbsp chimichurri sauce (homemade or store-bought)
2-3 slices Gruyere cheese
¼ cup roasted red pepper (sliced)
A small handful of fresh arugula
½ tsp olive oil
¼ tsp fresh squeezed lemon juice
Salt and pepper, to taste
Olive oil or butter (optional, for toasting bread)

Method

1. Season steak with salt and pepper.
2. Heat a skillet or grill pan over medium-high heat with a bit of oil.
3. Sear the steak for about 2 to 3 minutes per side or until it reaches your desired doneness.
4. Let the steak rest for 3 minutes, then slice thinly against the grain.
5. Lightly butter the brioche slices and toast in a pan or toaster until golden brown and slightly crisp.
6. Spread a layer of chimichurri on one or both slices of brioche (the sandwich holds together better with both)
7. Layer sliced steak on bottom slice.
8. Place roasted red pepper over steak.
9. Place slices of Gruyere cheese on top.



10. Toss arugula in lemon juice and olive oil, season with salt and pepper to taste, and top sandwich with a handful of arugula.
11. Top with the second brioche slice.
12. Slice in half if desired. Serve immediately while the steak is warm and the cheese slightly melted.

Wine pairing: Rosé.



Well Fed Eatery in Gravenhurst specializes in sandwiches, like this steak sandwich that will soon grace the menu.



A pop of colour can take a sandwich platter from humble to spectacular.

2016. The shop offers healthy foods, natural health products, gifts, clothing and more, and has boasted the Deli Lama eatery for some 20 years. Whether in a package or on a plate, Muskoka Natural Food Market started serving up vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free and locally produced foods decades before it was cool.

Chef Sheila O'Rourke was born in the

Fresh Garlicky Spring Rolls

- Sheila O'Rourke



Ingredients

Sauce

¼ cup tamari
1 Tbsp Mirin
1 Tbsp sesame oil
2 Tbsp lemon juice

Filling

¼ cup olive oil
2 Tbsp minced garlic
1 tsp chili flakes or 1 fresh bird's eye chili, chopped
1 cup firm tofu, crumbled
3 green onions*
2 stalks celery*
1 medium carrot*
1 medium red pepper*
1 cup cabbage*
Salt and pepper to taste

Wrap

1 bunch fresh lettuce, romaine or Boston
6 sheets rice paper

*Julienned, can be substituted or add your favourite vegetable.

Method

1. On low heat, sauté garlic in oil until golden brown. Add chili and tofu, turn up the heat to medium-high, and cook until tofu is golden brown (about 5 minutes)
2. Add all julienned vegetables and sauté briefly, just enough to warm them up so they remain crunchy.
3. Add sauce, adjust seasoning.
4. Let the mixture cool down before wrapping. Moisten rice paper, lay on a wet towel, put a layer of lettuce in the middle of the rice paper, place about ¼ cup of veggie/tofu mix on top. Roll, then tuck in the ends and roll some more. Cut into cylindrical sections and serve with peanut sauce.

Yield: 4-6 servings

The spring roll is one of many sandwich variations – a bread-type covering around a tasty filling. Chef Sheila O'Rourke adapted this spring roll from an existing menu item at the Deli Lama.



southern Philippines and came to Canada in 2004 seeking better opportunities. She worked as an executive chef in Jordan, Ontario (Niagara region) for 11 years, then came to Muskoka in 2023, as her husband Kevin O'Rourke's family is here.

"I like being closer to nature, so this is a nice option for us," O'Rourke says. "I have three dogs, and they love it too." Another boon was a saner work/life balance: "Executive chef is a 24/7 job."

O'Rourke received a challenge: to produce something vegan, low-carbohydrate and delicious. She adapted a popular vegan Deli Lama dish, Garden Fried Noodles, by eliminating the noodles and wrapping all the other ingredients into a spring roll with rice paper.

"The flavour resonates from where I come from," she says. "It's close to a dish we have in the Philippines, pancit – I tweaked it to make it low carb."

Three out of three – yes, it's delicious, a complex, gently crunchy mix of subtly

Open-faced Smoked Chinook Salmon, Milford Bay Smoked Trout and Paté Sandwich

- Gusztav Gulmar

Ingredients

200 g smoked salmon, sliced
1 fillet Milford Bay smoked trout
50 g Milford Bay smoked trout paté
8 slices of Muskoka Rye bread by Windmill Bakery
60 g plain cream cheese
40 g capers
1 sprig fresh dill
4 ounces apple cider vinegar
4 ounces cold water
30 g of fresh cut chives, finely chopped
½ head of shallot, finely chopped
1 medium-size red onion
4 tsp of maple syrup
Salt to taste
½ bunch of red watercress (optional)
Four Season Greens basil seedlings (optional)

Method

1. Pickled red onion: slice the onion thin, lengthwise. In a bowl, combine water, apple cider vinegar, a pinch of salt and 2 tsp remaining maple syrup. Add the red onion slices. Place in the fridge for 24 hours before using.
2. Slice smoked trout without skin into ¾-inch wide strips.
3. Spread: Combine remaining trout with cream cheese and 2 tsp chives. Whip until it has a smooth, spreadable texture.
4. Caper relish: strain the capers from the jar. In a small mixing bowl, combine them with shallots, 2 tsp of maple syrup, dill and some chives.
5. Time to build: Cut the bread into thick slices and lightly toast them. Spread trout mixture on each slice, cover with two slices of smoked salmon and one smoked trout strip. Top with caper relish, pickled red onion and a couple of dots of trout paté (use tiny spoon or piping bag). Garnish with red watercress and basil seedlings, if desired.

Serves 6-8

Wine pairing: Chardonnay or Riesling. Gulmar adds: "Lots of wineries in Niagara – keep it Ontario."



Executive chef Gusztav Gulmar enjoys serving the same ingredient prepared using two different methods in the same dish, as he's done with this sandwich that includes smoked salmon, smoked trout and smoked trout paté.





Chef Phillip Jakel's steak sandwich features fresh ingredients, including a layer of roasted red pepper, the pleasant freshness of arugula, the delicate smokey tang of Gruyere cheese and a particularly flavourful cut of steak.

tangy flavours. The Deli Lama peanut sauce absolutely makes it; it's not as sweet as Thai peanut sauce but is much more elaborately loaded with different flavours. Its recipe has been around as long as the store has, originator uncertain.

O'Rourke says rice paper is unnecessary if you use Boston lettuce leaves as a sort of cup. It falls apart as you bite it even with rice paper, but messiness is another property of sandwiches, and definitely part of their allure.

Deerhurst Resort suffered a culinary tragedy on the morning of April 25 when The Antler Steakhouse burned down. No one was hurt, but the building was written off and demolished.

Deerhurst executive chef Gusztav Gulmar was on his way home from Germany when he was texted the news. "We were all geared up for the season," he recalls. "The chefs were ready, the menu was ready – and then this happens."

Antler aficionados will be pleased to know, however, that all Antler staff are still employed at Deerhurst, and popular dishes such as the 50 oz. tomahawk, 24 oz. porterhouse and 7 oz. wagyu steaks can now be had at another Deerhurst restaurant, Compass. The Antler's next incarnation will be built elsewhere on the Deerhurst property, but not this year; the resort was too busy renovating its glass-surrounded restaurant Eclipse to create a much more open central

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Making a sandwich, or any meal for that matter, an experience means involving multiple senses. A spread of sandwiches that smells, tastes and looks spectacular means taking time with the preparation of all elements.

space, and introducing a new café, Row & Roast.

In typical grand Deerhurst style, chef Gulmar presented not one sandwich but a vari-coloured, flower-decorated spread of them, including some which were served to Prime Minister Mark Carney and Canada's premiers during their July summit meeting. These sandwiches are not on any regular Deerhurst menu; they're reserved for corporate and VIP events. "It was fun to roll it into the room and see them all look at it," Gulmar reminisces. So, consider yourself a VIP while reading this!

For Gulmar, open-faced is the way to go. "Sandwiches taste great, but you don't see anything. If you can combine all the colours and flavours, then you have the vision and the taste all in one. It's always about presentation for me."

With the right honourable premiers, we'll be sharing a spectacular sandwich that combines salmon, smoked trout and smoked trout paté – following Gulmar's penchant for serving the same ingredient prepared using two different methods in the same dish.

The trout and salmon sandwich allows for a flavour comparison. Results: trout is much stronger, at least the way Milford Bay Trout Farm smokes it, deep and rich and intense; the salmon delicately caresses the tongue. You just wish you could keep eating it long after it's gone.

Put away the peanut butter and jelly and enjoy these creations instead!



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Muskoka Magic

Article by Carola Grimm

My move to Muskoka came on the heels of a divorce in 1991 when I knew it was time to leave Toronto. Although born in Toronto, most of my childhood was spent living near or on Georgian Bay. I moved back to Toronto when I was 18 and became passionate about photography for which I won several awards. A few years later I started a hand-painted children's clothing business called Critters.

As kids, my sister Ileana and I always drew and painted or were out hiking the nearby forests. Although we lost our mother early, she painted and we clearly had been influenced.

With my business and my sister's famous, humorous Grimm T-shirts, we decided to share a booth at craft shows, first a few small shows and then we were invited to the One of a Kind Craft Show. A few years later, we were accepted to the Muskoka Arts and Crafts Show in Bracebridge, and just like that my Muskoka journey started.

I quickly fell in love with area and would drive to see the towns. It was during a drive through Port Carling I knew I had to open a business there. In a few years I found myself buying one of the oldest homes in Port Carling, steps from the Indian River. It was the month of May when I arrived and I had not heard of the *Segwun* or her loud horn blowing tradition as she comes into Port. To say it was startling was an understatement but what a vision she was.

Nor did I know about the spring peepers that were incredibly loud, yet in a short time their sound became the most relaxing sound there was to me. To this day when I hear the peepers, I still stop to record them and send their sounds to my friends and family living in the city.

My business idea now began to hatch, and I decided to open a handmade Canadian craft store in Port as there was nothing of the kind at that time. I was lucky to find a tiny space and the shop Grimm & Critters was born.



Photograph: Brooke Lawrence

The store was a success, offering crafts and both my sister's and my clothing products.

The business grew and I quickly moved to a larger space in the newly-built Wallis Mills complex. The larger space now made it possible to show my own paintings, my papier mâché sculptures with the iconic Miss Muskoka as the store mascot, and the works of over 30 talented artists I had met over the years. I was kept so busy that the children's clothing business had to end and thus I changed the store name to Grimm & Co.

Since I was now creating larger paintings and sculptures, it was time for a new home with a proper art studio. After much searching, I bought a stunning 8-acre lot on well-known Partridge Lane outside of Bracebridge. It was there I found the tranquility I needed and the companionship of so many like-minded souls – people who had all taken a chance like me, moved to Muskoka and were figuring out how to carve out a life and career. Every day felt like a holiday and every day was inspiring.

Meanwhile the store in Port Carling was doing very well. Now, the gallery was able to feature the work of 60 Canadian artists and I moved it to a larger space. I made the name change to Red Canoe Gallery at this time. However, there were challenges mounting as Port Carling became busier and busier. It had been my dream for years to transition the business to focus on fine art. After 29 years in Port, I started the search for a new gallery space.

After a chance encounter with a connection in Bala, a new space was sorted and Red Canoe Gallery moved into its new home at the north end of Bala in the fall of 2023. This year marks 32 years in business and October will mark two years in the new Bala location. The gallery space is full of light and it's the most perfect venue to display fine art. Plus, we can operate year-round.

The inspiration of Muskoka on my artistic career has been huge. Yesterday a huge painted turtle made its way past the gallery front door – not something I would have seen at work in Toronto. I am thankful for the life I am living and the freedoms I have, and for the beauty that is all around. My Muskoka experience continues every day.

Carola Grimm is a multi-talented artist and owner of Red Canoe Gallery in Bala, Ontario. She lives, works and creates in Muskoka.

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