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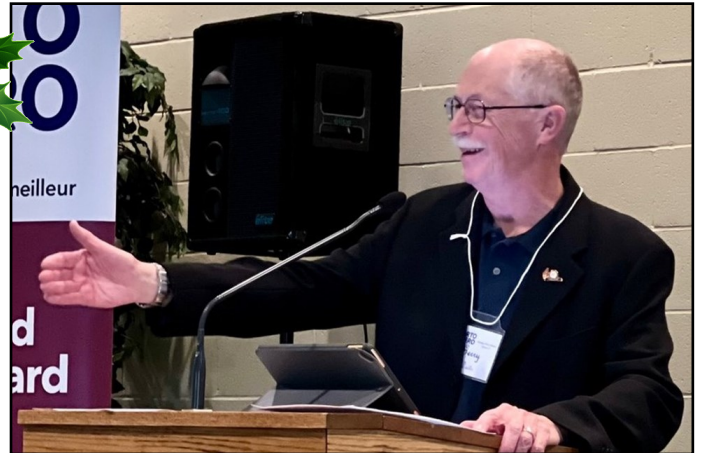
# THE CHRONICLE

*Hastings-Prince Edward District 19*

*December 2023*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

***“If you can read this thank a teacher”...  
and maybe an eye care specialist!***



Most of us first experienced the quotation, “If you can read this thank a teacher” as a bumper sticker used by teacher federations to counteract the negative attitude of many of our critics, particularly at the time of negotiations with the government. In actual fact, the quotation is attributed to former U.S. President Harry S. Truman. It is one of those

self-evident thoughts that remind us of the key role that teachers play in helping young people to become fully-functioning adults in a society that demands a high level of literacy. We should be very proud of the pivotal role we played in developing a literate population, but how many of us pause to recognize that “reading readiness” also depends on good sight, something which many of us take for granted; that is, until we don’t have it.

About twenty years ago, an excellent optometrist correctly diagnosed that I had Fuchs’ Dystrophy, a condition in which the cornea (usually in both eyes) swells and thickens leading to glare, blurred vision, and eye discomfort. Only in the past few years have the symptoms become an issue, and so my most recent and excellent optometrist, Dr. Jeff Guthrie in Bancroft, referred me to an ophthalmologist in Kingston who, it turned out, could not see me for at least a year. His second referral resulted in an appointment almost immediately with Dr. Saama Sabeti, an ophthalmologist and cornea specialist in Ottawa. As a result of her knowledge and surgical skill and the care provided by her and the wonderful team with whom she works, the sight in my left eye has been restored and I now await the second stage with a cataract surgery and cornea transplant on my right eye.

As I have thought over the process I have gone through in the past year to keep me from becoming the grumpy old guy sitting in a rocking chair in the corner of a room, lamenting the fact that he can’t read, can’t watch tv, and can’t drive anywhere, I am astounded by the progress that has been made in the science and treatment of eye issues since I was a child. (As an aside, I might very well remain the grumpy old guy, given my curmudgeon status, but with good eye sight!)

However, upon reflection over the past several months, I have realized how grateful I am for the teachers, at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, who have taught and trained the highly-skilled professionals who perform these miraculous procedures that improve the quality of our lives. Not only is Dr. Sabeti an outstanding surgeon, but also she is a caring, empathetic doctor who inspires confidence and trust, qualities that many, but not all, of our health care professionals have learned. To a certain extent, emotional intelligence is learned, and clearly good parenting and good teaching were factors in Dr. Sabeti’s development into a fine doctor. I am grateful and very proud of my fellow educators that we are, to some extent, responsible for the development of these amazing people. We are living longer, healthier lives because of new knowledge and scientific breakthroughs being made by the kids we taught. It’s just as simple as that!

So if you can read this, by all means thank a teacher, and perhaps an eye care professional. — Gerry Watts

## ACTIVE LIVING IN WELLINGTON



Member Brenda Brookes followed up her chat at the fair by sending a “note” (in beautifully written long-hand) to Executive Member Marg Werkhoven. With Brenda’s permission, excerpts of that note are included below.

*Dear Marg,*

*“Ever since we met at the Seniors’ Active Living Fair on Thursday, I have been thinking, going over in my mind about much in the past but mainly about my teaching career.... I have always been interested in education but the world in which I lived*

*had ideas different from mine. To start with, war was declared before I could take my eleven plus examination. I was evacuated out of London to the country and sent to a boys’ school – Sydenham Central. I wanted to be at a Grammar School and to be a Grammar School student!*

*When I came home from evacuation, I was sent to Forest Hill Central School where work I had done already was being taught to girls and boys who had remained in London where there were no schools during the early part of the war. I asked my principal, Dr. Cracknell, if I could go to a Technical College. He said, “If you’re sure that is what you want; they will be glad to have a girl like you.” He wrote me what was known as an Exhibition Scholarship and I was off! I made the right decision. I never looked back.... I learned how to make clothing patterns, design and fit garments and do dressmaking. At sixteen years old, I went to work as a clothing designer at British Celanese in Hanover Square, London. I worked there until my marriage, from 1940-1951.*

*We had four children about two years between each. The weather is not great in the UK and we had a Canadian neighbour who told us that Canada has nice summers. We went to Canada House. They heard about our work experience. I always taught, besides my day job, a class of adults who paid to learn.... My husband, Roland, was a shoe maker. They looked around at our four rosy-cheeked children and said, “If you want to emigrate, here is one thousand pounds.” We were away! We had to repay the fare but it didn’t take too long, once we were employed in Canada. As far as teaching goes, I was never educated to teach teenagers. I had much to learn when Mr. McNeil, the Principal at P.E.C.I. offered me a teaching job at the high school... He asked, “Are you interested?” Was I? I was working two jobs: one at a Sewing Centre during the day and one at Irene and Lyle Hagerman’s Dairy Dip from 5 p.m. – 11 p.m.... Each job only paid \$4.00 an hour! The teaching job was \$6500 per year. I was off!... Teaching was the hardest job I have ever done in my life but I loved it. What’s more, it paid more than four dollars an hour!” — Brenda*

Brenda went from P.E.C.I to Bayside. In her “note” to me, she shared a few stories from that school where Linton Read was principal and Marg Werkhoven was VP ('81-'84). The above picture is of Brenda taken at Bayside SS 1982. She also mentions Irene Wuorinen (now Hiebert), whose book reviews she enjoys in the Chronicle. She retired from Bayside in 1987. — Submitted by Marg Werkhoven



Many RTOERO members dropped by to chat with our own John McLellan (above) at the District 19 Seniors’ Information and Active Living Day booth in Wellington on November 2.



## NEW MEMBERS – SEPTEMBER TO OCTOBER 2023

RTOERO District 19 welcomes our new members.

Joanne Barry

Robert Fleming

Moya Hamilton

Monique Saar

Shelley Reynolds



Editor's Note - Submissions are always welcomed. Please send letters, comments, poems, rants, photos and artwork to mike at: [walsmich@gmail.com](mailto:walsmich@gmail.com)



## OUR OCTOBER MEETING... WE VALUE YOUR INPUT!

*"In a world where so many are hungry, may we eat this food with humility and in gratitude to all who have helped to bring it to our tables, vowing to respond in turn to those in need with wisdom and compassion; and in a world where so many are lonely may we share the friendship of this meeting with joyful hearts. Thank you, and bon appetit!"*  
Words of Gratitude by Harry Marissen



We read the comments made by members who attended our May AGM and implemented some of the suggested changes. As you may recall, our meeting was a post pandemic celebration at no cost to our attendees. This meeting cost more than \$7,000.00 (using money not spent during the pandemic) so it was not financially feasible to continue the practice of a free lunch. The ideas that were suggested by members at that meeting included: a later start time to enable people from out of Belleville to attend, an invitation to bring a guest, more time to socialize, a lighter lunch and a lower cost than \$20.00 per person. We served soup, sandwiches and sweets at the meeting that ran from 11:00 to 1:30. We had a speaker, Sean Kelly, but no entertainment. At a cost of \$10.00 per person we welcomed 55 attendees, including 6 guests.

During the social time our executive members spoke to attendees about their reaction to the changes. This new format was extremely well received, so we have a new model to consider for next year. A former president of our district, Ron Poste, was highly complimentary of the well run meeting by Gerry Watts and our executive. The one suggestion from a few members was we need to have more "egg salad sandwiches"!

What a success it was! Thank you to everyone who attended. — Diane Turrall, Treasurer





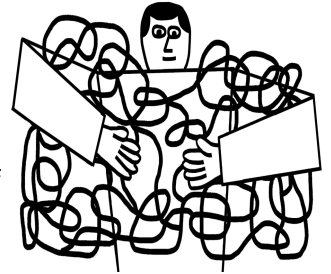
## SEEKING COMFORT AND JOY IN THE TIDINGS OF 2023

*Dear Reader: We live in a media maelstrom of disaster, violence and carnage. Closer to home, we stoically prepare for Christmas in spite of worrisome omens of woe. The question was posed to a variety of readers, "Where do you find comfort and joy in the year 2023?" Please enjoy this sampler. Editor*

Somewhere in the world, innocent civilians have died in wars every single day of my life. I checked, trying to gain some perspective on the current gruesome conflicts assaulting me through the television in my living room. As a senior who follows current events now more than ever, it's like dancing on a razor blade between a state of "well-informed" and that of "overwhelmed".

Right now, I'm avoiding the news. In the Information Age there is no separation among international, national, local, and personal tragedies. We're all drinking through a fire hose but, the truth is, educators have always been in this circumstance.

We could not stand off to the side wringing our hands. We had a front row seat to any number of uncomfortable realities in the classroom. In my time it was the children of Vietnamese boat people, Mohawk students attending school with their colonizers, communities devastated by the loss of students killed in car accidents and tender-aged children trapped in abusive homes.



One might be forgiven for giving in to despair—the complete loss of hope—which can lead to inaction and closing oneself off from the world but, in our classrooms, that was never an option. The collateral damage was sitting right in front of us. We were 'in charge'. It was "go time".

Arguably, despair is not an option for us in today's world either. We have the skills to respond, to do something. We've built careers with these skills. What could we do then, and what can we do now?

My colleagues and I couldn't stop the war in Vietnam, but we could teach English as a second language and set up our new Canadians with buddies; we couldn't eradicate centuries colonial of injustice, but we could support a Mohawk Student Council and SweetGrass Ceremonies; we couldn't solve the drunk driving crisis, but we could band together to offer counselling support for students and parents as well as drug and alcohol education; we couldn't solve the child abuse epidemic, but we could fulfill our mandate to report disclosures to the proper authorities and end the suffering, one student at a time.

We knew our efforts were far from perfect but, the point is, we worked together and did something. Action with peer support was our antidote to despair then, and it can be now.

So, first things first: if you can read this—you're not alone. You continue to be part of an extensive teaching sorority/fraternity. If you're not already involved, go inside our big tent to "find your people" and do something to support your causes, whatever they might be. Find your own version of comfort and joy, perhaps through a regimen of healthy self-care strategies, and reach out to have a positive impact on your unique corner of the world. You'll find me "forest bathing", spending quality time with friends and family, reading inspiring literature, supporting writing groups, donating to local charities, and being mindful of many blessings and simple pleasures. What about you?

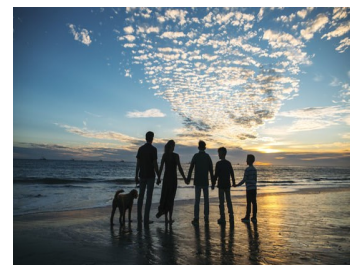
Remember, we've trained our whole lives for this. — W.R.S.



Anyone with a sense of morality is shocked and disheartened by the daily news these days with horrific wars in Ukraine and Gaza to mention only a few of the news items these days that send us scurrying from the tv in search of something- really anything! - that will lift us out of the trough of despair.

Spending time with my wonderful wife and great adult kids restores me to my default position of general happiness and contentment with life, and playing with and walking (not to mention frequently cuddling on the floor!) with our beautiful Golden Retriever Sooky provides the icing on the cake!

Then I can face the world again, but I must admit that I no longer watch the nightly newscast and read fewer newspapers and more novels. Meditation certainly helps. — GW





Hostility coupled with mean spiritedness are wide-spread and commonplace. Earnest declarations made in false faith, by figures displaying a preference for secrecy and deception over the truth. Is it time to turn off the evening news to heal my battered sensibilities? Traditionally, December and the Christmas season reliably provided a sense of comfort, joy and refuge. Am I losing this source of consolation? I volunteer at a local 'food kitchen' as a prep cook in a local church basement. It serves about 80 individuals, a hot cooked meal from scratch, once a week. Access is open to all, no questions. In the last year I have found myself increasingly drawn into its workings. There have been many moments causing me to pause in incomprehending astonishment. Three vignettes persist.

One day I was surprised to see a younger man seated in the middle of this assembly of senior citizens. Athletic with a full dark beard, he had joined the 'regulars' for lunch. I recognized him by the vintage football jacket he wore from a prominent local high school. The embroidered name on his shoulder told me exactly his identity. A local sports hero, perhaps 'golden boy', who at one time was touted as Belleville's next CFL Star. I whispered to myself on the verge of intolerance, 'What is he doing here?' A wordless answer left me gasping. The young and mildly boisterous man after finishing his meal, wheeled his chair away from the table and proceeded through a maze of guests to the elevator. He had no legs. My hostile gaze collapsed. There you go sitting in that cozy chair of judgment. Finding peace of mind might begin by withholding judgment in favour of deep acceptance.



There are about 25 volunteers who for the past 25 years have offered a hot luncheon, every week complete with take home dinners. Sitting in the middle of the action are 3 or 4 young adults, who never receive any food or drink but are among our regulars. They are part of a care home sponsored by Community Living and for various reasons are unable to swallow and must be fed by tube, permanently. "How was lunch today?", I lamely ask and they smile tolerantly. Feasting on the intangibles of a community meal, a seat but no plate at the table, was my second glimpse into the whereabouts of comfort and joy. The meal is funded by donations from local churches, individuals and more recently the city of Belleville. One of the first to arrive for lunch are two grandparents who frequently bring their youngest grandchild, of 6 months. I watch as this baby is carried and toured, if not danced from person to person around the basement auditorium. The more able bodied hoist him aloft while others follow his movement with protective approval. Kitchen staff join in and the soon-to-be toddler is swiftly back at his grandparents' table.

The innocence of a child leading everyone to greater purpose and well being. A third 'epiphany'? The number of surprising occurrences never ends. Kindness and pervasive gratitude punctuate every conversation, flowing naturally from person to person. Mental health problems recede, amiable spirits celebrate the passing of another week, relationships blossom, a lone soloist opens into song before every meal, a brain injured pianist accompanies a blind pianist in duets, watched over in the silent companionship of a support dog. Is this the nativity of a mood change? Everything moving in surprising and unforced harmony. Will I find the tidings of comfort and joy in this unique location? I'm unsure. But maybe this is a place which serves second helpings of hope! — MW



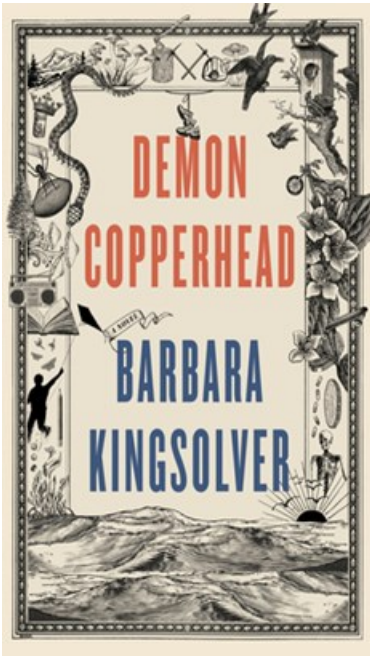
After the solemn reverence of Remembrance Day, the battle begins each year once the holiday season kicks off. My twin aunts, Comfort and Joy, lobby me to come visit one or the other of them over the Christmas holidays. Maybe it could be categorized more as a bidding war. Each aunt tries to up the ante to entice me in a crazed, competitive type of family bloodsport. Auntie Comfort lures me with everything cozy on the home front. Hot chocolate — of course with extra marshmallows — is up for grabs. Her homemade quilt in front of a roaring fire is ready to envelop me and send me into a relaxing land of bliss. Her voice is so angelic as she sings O Holy Night on Christmas Eve. Following this musical interlude,

I melt into 500-thread count, Egyptian-cotton sheets that are sprinkled with festive reindeer to remind me that Santa is on his way. Not to be outdone, Aunt Joy's Christmas vacation features a bevy of exciting and happy adventures. Sleigh rides across fields of glistening snow and tobogganing with her favourite pup, Happy, helps us pull everything back up the hill. Singing carols along her lane with a group of neighbours is always a fun event. She has the craziest, festive hats ready for us to wear too on our musical journey. Making side-by-side snow angels is a Christmas morning tradition with Aunt Joy. This year, however, I am beating them to the punch and have invited both of them to come visit my home. My inscribed note I hoped was sincere and humble:

Comfort and Joy, May we share time together This Christmas,  
Where our togetherness is everything,  
As we celebrate our many blessings,  
And heavenly season of God's love.



At night I enjoy turning off all lights save for the tree lights and sitting and listening to Christmas music. I sit quietly and remember family and friends. — Bill Edwards



## DEMON COPPERHEAD *by Barbara Kingsolver*

For a fan of Victorian literature, reading *Demon Copperhead* will be an echo of the Charles Dickens novel, *David Copperfield*. Barbara Kingsolver has consciously created a parallel storyline and cast of characters, using present-day Appalachia as her setting, in order to revisit the theme of poverty and how it affects children. In the opening pages, Damon, nicknamed Demon, is born to an unmarried, teenaged, trailer-inhabiting Mom who is too drunk to realize that she is in labour.

As he grows up, Demon endures the assaults of an abusive stepdad, the near starvation of foster care, the perils of child labour, and the pain of ill-fated loves and losses punctuated by too few moments of adult or peer warmth and support. Briefly, in middle school and early high school, his life takes a turn.

He lives in a stable home environment, school is made manageable, his talent for drawing is recognized and he finds a place of achievement and status on the school football teams. Yet, deep in his heart, he has trouble trusting how well life is going. Then he gets injured on the field. The coach calls in a less-than-attentive doctor who prescribes pain medication. Lots of pain medication. And the

downward spiral begins: no football, no living comfortably, no sense of achievement. Just dosing to get through the day. As the reader's heart sinks, the question becomes, "How do I continue reading when all seems so grim?" And the answer lies in the character of our narrator. Demon is a likeable, well-intentioned youngster simply trying to survive the vicissitudes of his universe. We care about Demon and cheer him on as he seeks, against all odds, to find his way.

While the opioid crisis and other details update the Dickens story, the underlying theme of institutional poverty and its impact on children remains as pertinent as ever. Plus ca change... *Reviewed by Irene Hiebert*

## MY TOP FIVE

Recently, a reader of The Chronicle book reviews asked me to list my five favourites among all the books that I have reviewed so far.

- Here is my list:**
1. *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver
  2. *The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams
  3. *Hamnet and Judith* by Maggie O'Farrell
  4. *A Town Called Solace* by Mary Lawson
  5. *Warlight* by Michael Ondaatje

*Do keep in mind that if you ask me tomorrow for my list, the titles may change.*

*Christmas shopping inspiration, anyone? — Irene Hiebert*



## In Memoriam September - October 2023



RTOERO District 19 honours our members who passed away.

David Farmer

Nancy Jackson

Diane Kalnay

Marjory Pearsall

Jane Rathbun

David Reynolds