

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Finding Meaning In Our Membership

Not long ago, I happened upon a TV commercial for a children's puppet show called "Donkey Hodie." Those of you with young grandkids are likely familiar with the show, but I wasn't, and I chuckled, recognizing the pun on the novel Don Quixote. Most of us are familiar with the musical "Man of La Mancha" and I must admit that I think of its hero whenever it appears that I am "tilting at windmills," which appears to be quite often with about the same results. However, the commercial caused me to think about our dear friend and fellow RTO member Phyllis Canning (Mowat), who passed away in January after a long illness. Phyllis loved donkeys and her farm became somewhat of a sanctuary for donkeys whom their owners no longer wanted. Her heart went out to these wonderful creatures much as her heart went out to all who were lucky enough to be loved by her.



Phyllis and husband Chuck Mowat spent most of their careers in Hastings County – Phyllis at Tweed-Hungerford Senior Public School and Chuck, an elementary Principal. We became close friends soon after my wife Laurie arrived at Tweed and Phyllis took her under her wing as the new teacher, later describing her as "that wee waif with her long hair and overalls standing in the doorway." Once Laurie and I married and Phyllis discovered that she and I had ancestors from Inverness, a small farming village in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, I could do no wrong! She loved the "down homers" and adored all things Irish. Phyllis and Chuck's farmhouse, which we came to see as a second home, was a magnet for friends and family and a centre of fun, great food, and wonderful conversation. Phyllis and Chuck simply absorbed us into their extensive web of family and friends.

Phyllis was kind, loving, witty, well-read, and, to use her word, whimsical; and embraced family, friends, students, and fellow staff. She understood the importance of connecting with others. Research shows that this is the most important strategy in living a long, happy, and healthy life. George Vaillant, the previous director of the famous Harvard project, wrote in *Aging Well* (2002): "Close relationships and social connections are crucial for our well-being as we age." Vaillant's findings over the lifetime of the participants in the study revealed that individual lifestyle choices can be more important than genetics, wealth, and race, among other factors.

At this point in our lives, connection is vital to our continued health and happiness. Post-pandemic, many of us are still struggling. As RTOERO members, we report in our annual surveys that we joined because of the benefits plan, but RTOERO is more than benefits. Like Phyllis and her network of friends and family, we support each other and help each other to overcome social isolation and to deal with the inevitable crises in our lives. Any of us could purchase our benefits from the competition, but for most of us, our membership means far more.

Phyllis Canning knew the importance of social connection, and even if you didn't know Phyllis, her story serves us as a reminder of the importance of others in our lives and the importance of our membership in RTOERO. — *Gerry Watts*



NEW MEMBERS – NOVEMBER 2023 - FEBRUARY 2024

RTOERO District 19 welcomes our new members.

Cassandra Bellwood

Cathy Maddox

Heather McMaster

Brenda Semark

Teresa Brown

Lee Mahon-Prophet

Sara Rader-Martin

Jennifer Sulek

Pieter De Boer

Robert McGall

Jeff Richardson

Gloria Vella-Bowry

Shari Groover

RTO AGM LUNCHEON REGISTRATION FORM

Wednesday, May 22, 2024 11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

(Registration begins at 10:30... time to socialize.)

Maranatha Church, College Street, Belleville

Guest Speaker: P.C. Aaron Miller

(OPP Police Constable from Picton will speak on Frauds and Scams)

\$15.00 per person Please note that your district subsidizes this luncheon of soup, sandwiches, beverages and desserts

Deadline for registration: Wednesday, May 8, 2024

(Please Complete, detach and mail or email)

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Guest(s): _____

Paid by: _____ cheque _____ Credit Card through RTO site

Pay by Cheque payable to RTO District 19. Cheque & registration form mailed to:

Maxine Walker, 1056 Sidney Street, Belleville, Ontario K8N 4Z5

Or Pay by Credit Card online: Complete the form, take a picture and email the picture to:

Maxine Walker at maxine.walker@sympatico.ca

Go to RTOERO District 19 Website and scroll to bottom left corner and press:

Pay online for District 19



Are you still mostly isolating?

Do you want to do something weird and fun? I am one of the people who, for a variety of reasons, have been being extra cautious to keep clear of the virus. This means no longer doing many of the things I did before that line in history of March 2019 (make your own list here). For the first while, much was available by that newly discovered magic called zoom. It allowed me to continue to see specific groups of friends, and family and generally continue social relationships on the computer. Slowly others started back to meeting in real life. Mostly I did not.

Then I noticed an advertisement in RTO/ERO publications about a thing called Chime In. Go online once a week to meet up with people you don't know and chat it suggested. That sounded super weird – why would I want to talk to people I didn't know? What would we even say?

Try it, I said to me. (I'm isolating - there wasn't another person around). It's free and I still can stay in my pyjamas.

So I tried it – and have continued to join most Wednesdays at 1:00 for a year or so. There are 15 to 20 people there most weeks from the many who have registered. Some are regulars and some drop in when it works for them. The coordinators (yay Tammy and Deanna!) usually provide a starter conversation topic and then randomly sort whoever has joined into groups of 3 or 4 people. The small group discusses the topic or veers off to anything else for half an hour. Often it starts with where are you? Then everyone goes back to the main group, gets another topic and we go into different small groups for another half hour. There is no shortage of discussion.

Turns out it isn't weird at all. It is just some people from somewhat similar backgrounds having a chat as if at a coffee shop – although it is bring your own coffee. Try it. You might like it! And you might meet some new friends.

Go to <https://rtoero.ca/>, put Chime In in the search function to find the spot to register. — Leslie Lewis

They Left Us Everything by Plum Johnson

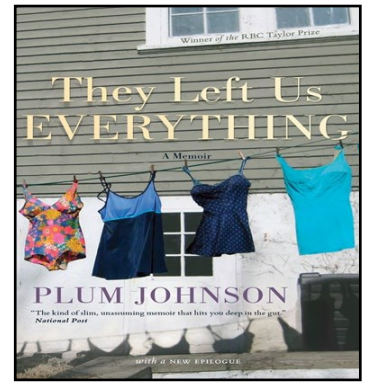
On page one of her memoir, *They Left Us Everything*, Plum Johnson tells us she is 63 years old and that Mum, aged 93, living 45 minutes away, has left three phone messages. Mum wants her to call. Plum observes that nineteen years, one month and twenty-six days of eldercare have brought her to her knees. The next morning she drives from her Toronto home to Oakville to see her Mum who still lives in the family home on the shores of Lake Ontario, a house that Mum calls "The Most Beautiful Spot on Earth".

Mum, a widow, is on oxygen, hard of hearing and cantankerous. She has a live-in caregiver but still looks to Plum for support and companionship. When Mum gently passes away, Plum's three brothers arrive. Together, they plan and deliver a rousing celebration of life event at their local church which honours their Mum's eccentricity, sense of humour and spirit of individuality.

Then, the work begins: the 23-room family home purchased in 1953 must be emptied and prepared for sale. Plum volunteers to move in for six weeks to sort through papers and photos, empty closets and drawers, arrange the dispersal of the furniture and so on. She is disoriented, frazzled and grieving. More than a year later, Plum is still in the house, processing its contents, and processing the life she has lived in this house with her parents and brothers. She has discovered facts about her parents as individuals and as a couple that allow her to see them through a fresh lens. While consulting and reminiscing with her brothers, all four siblings deepen their sense of family connection. As frustrations melt, acceptance and appreciation strengthen.

Ultimately, Plum realizes that most of her generation had parents like hers with similar stories. Impacted by the Great Depression and World War II, they raised their children "to be frugal, disciplined, and obedient". "I thought I was writing about my family, but it turns out I was writing about a generation", observes Plum on the final page.

— Reviewed by Irene Hiebert



Hi, Reading it for the second time, in order to write the review, I was struck by the parallel processing: while she processed the physical contents of the house, she was able to process the life she had lived in the house.

Life provides opportunities for insight! Even in a senior age group we can see connections and achieve enlightenment.

A satisfying reading experience. — Irene



In Memoriam November 2023 - February 2024



RTOERO District 19 honours our members who passed away.

Roseann Barnett
Alan Brown
Harriett De Boer
Phyllis Canning
Norma Crofts

Hilda Denyes
Mary Goulah
Kenneth Gray
Terence Hiddleston

Doreen Kirkham
Nellie Lockyer
Phyllis Lucas
Beatrice MacDonald

Helen McAvoy
Louise O'Sullivan
Walter Raniowski
Milton Robinson

Towards A Flourishing Life Part 1

In the modest chill of this past winter the question arose, "Can we live beyond this day after day tedium of simple survival?" Exotic travel, advertising's seductive vision and the gaiety of Facebook, may offer an attractive vision of being-well and living a happy life. Unfortunately, in our world this version of living can be somewhat exclusive, if not unattainable for many.

Is a 'good-life' within everyone's grasp? Is that sense of flourishing and wellness, a common birthright? For many years I adopted a vague win/lose mentality. Presiding over the everyday 'ups and downs' was an imaginary 'Jumbotron of Life'. It passively collected the plus and the minus of daily existence, the wins and losses telling me, "How things are really going." Needless to say, putting 'points on the board' in the first half of life is nothing like 'scoring' as time runs out. But should life not offer something that everyone can experience and find rewarding in abundance?

See, if you don't agree with our contributors that the pathway to well-being is perhaps a more inward and introspective destination. It empowers and challenges all of us, to seek growth and betterment for both ourselves and others. Please enjoy our submissions. Your Editor

Live In The Moment...



To experience joy in my life, I have to live in the moment. Staying conscious helps me stay fixed on the present, dwelling neither in the past or future. I also meditate, starting with one minute a day and am patient with myself when intrusive and disruptive thoughts occur. I keep a gratitude journal, writing down 3 things I am grateful for each day. I also make an effort to enjoy nature (eg. walk in the woods) as often as possible.

I also get lost in various activities such as reading, painting, puzzles, swimming, and my new adventure, wood carving. Trying new activities allows my thoughts to focus on the present moment, rather than worry about the past or future. I meet regularly with friends for lunch or breakfast, nurturing my many social networks of support.

In conclusion, my main points are: develop a consciousness - be aware of your thoughts and of the power you have to change them (remember thoughts are real, not necessarily true), try new hobbies, work at maintaining and nurturing your network of supportive and positive friends and experience nature as often as possible.

Wishing that you all focus on positive thoughts and live a life full of joy. — Brenda Dillon

I Made It! — Jyoti Singh

We are all survivors in our unique ways. We encounter precarious situations and try to overcome hurdles as best as we can. Sometimes we do a great job and at other times not so much. I always thought of myself as a mere survivor who struggled and managed to keep head above water, but thinking back and looking at those circumstances, I feel I more than survived.

Adjusting to Canadian culture at the age of twenty-one, I felt comfortable in my new environment and home. But the loss of my spouse at the age of thirty-five left me devastated to parent two young children under the age of 8. I went to teachers' college as a young widow, then became a primary teacher while raising my young children, who later became successful professionals. Twenty-five years of teaching was a satisfying career. When it came time to retire, COVID arrived. I managed life without a focus or clarity by continuing with simple daily routines.

Then, slowly and surely, I carved another path for myself. I'm delivering *Meals on Wheels*, teaching ESL and Punjabi to students. I enjoy my weekly art lessons and I'm painting birds and flowers in nature. I thoroughly enjoy my monthly writing group and the supportive members.

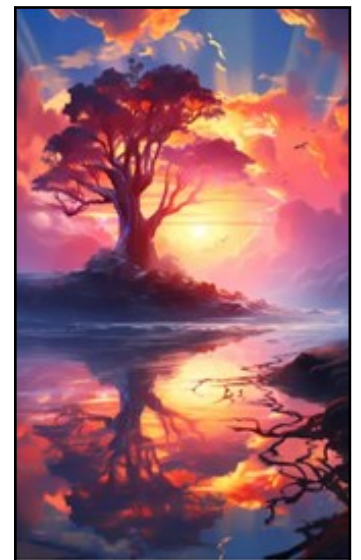
Recently I have joined a quilting group where ladies eighty-plus are a talented and fun group to be with. These activities make me fulfilled and contented and I wake up looking forward to a day full of the activities I enjoy.

Grief

Can come
Gradually,
Or Suddenly!
It catches you
Unprepared...
Off-guard...
In disbelief...
Your world is shaken.
You are numb.
Plans are changed in an instant.



*Gradually memories surface.
At first they tear you apart.
Then you catch yourself
Smiling - inside at least.
In time smiles tentatively
Reach your face.
A memory makes you laugh
Aloud.
And you are healing.*
— Sheila Himburg



A Request - Your editors would welcome submissions from District 19 members. Prose, poetry, works of art and general commentary as well as an odd rant will all be most gratefully received. Please send to Mike at: walsmich@gmail.com