

Living in the North- Looking out my Backdoor

If you were raised in the North, you probably crave the outdoors. What a great feeling to look out your window and witness nature's wonders and sometimes fury. We often take for granted the many rewards of living in the North, the serenity, the peace, the wild animals, the smells of the forest, the grass, the freshness of the air after a rainstorm. "To venture deep into the forest or head out on the lake in all seasons is something that we look forward to each day. The McLauchlans' live their life surrounded by wilderness, birch trees, the lake, snowshoe, and walking trails. Daily they watch the many species of birds and wild animals from their kitchen window.

The McLauchlans' are a couple who work together towards making the North their home. For as long as they can remember they have promoted the North, locally and at a Provincial and International level, together.

Alan was not born in The Pas, but he loves living at Rocky Lake and plans on staying for a long time. Alan decided on a career with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as a teenager and in 1975 went to Regina for RCMP training. His first posting was The Pas, and it was in The Pas where Alan met his wife Johanna. Johanna was a young woman attending Grade 12 at MBCI, who spent a lot of time supporting the family business of The Pas Florist Shop. Her family, the DeBeers arrived in The Pas in 1962, bringing with them their young family. Johanna worked closely with her mother (Mary DeBeer) who taught her the business of flowers. By the age of 14 Johanna had mastered floral design and was learning first hand business. While going to school and working at the florist store, Johanna also worked as a dishwasher at the Dutch Drive Inn which was across the road from her home. Her father (Gerardus DeBeer) built the store which included a 3-bedroom suite in the back where the family resided. Johanna was not afraid of work and sought employment at Scotia Bank as a teller, worked in the janitorial services, and at Profits Furniture. Al and Johanna met on a blind date, and Johanna was immediately enamored by the red headed, blue eyed young man who came to the store to introduce himself. They double dated at a baseball windup and within one year, Alan proposed to Johanna. They are married in 1978 and that is when their life journey together begins. This is their story of making their dreams come true through hard work, supporting each other, and becoming involved in the community.

The McLauchlans' top priority is family. They do everything for their family and love spending time with each of their 5 grandchildren. Although Johanna wanted a large family, they settled on two children, both healthy boys, Andy and Pete, now adults with their own families. Following close but in no order include friends, community, business, volunteerism, and balance. As long as I have known them, they each have had a fishing rod in their hands and a reddish tint on their face from being outdoors basking in the sun. Their life is full of fishing, fish fries, boating, snowmobiling, working on their Rocky Lake Birchworks and Consulting business or helping within the community at fundraisers such as the Jimmy Jackfish and Bill Bannock Fishing Derby. Their life is complete when they are on the shores or waters of Rocky Lake.

Together they have played many roles in each community that they have lived in. Life as a police officer involved moving every three to four years. Within the 26 ½ years that Alan was working with the RCMP he was stationed in The Pas, Brandon, Norway House, The Pas, Pukatawagon, and finally again in The Pas. The job held many risks, as each situation could potentially escalate. A mundane situation could turn sour. "I was fortunate to work with good band constables, community members and other RCMP officers" said Alan. Alan worked on building trusting relationships with these people. Alan is grateful for

the life that the RCMP career choice brought to him. He met his wife, has seen new communities and the country and each year he further developed life and work skills delivered through RCMP in-service training.

The entire McLauchlan family are outdoor people. They all love to fish throughout all the seasons. Johanna and Alan raised their children in the outdoors, selecting snowmobiling, boating, fishing, hunting, walking, and picking berries as family entertainment. In almost every community that they were stationed within, they had the opportunity to see the lake within plain view of their home. They love to swim in the summer time and get out on the lake on their pontoon boat complete with BBQ. With every visit to the lake, they see something new. There is so much to explore.

Johanna is the visionary and could see their future living on a lakefront property. In 1991 they find the sanctuary that they were looking for and purchase a cabin located on Rocky Lake. Rocky Lake East Shore becomes their home, and soon inspires a business venture involving non timber forest products. As a young man, coming from Ontario, Alan would tap maple trees with his grandfather and studies the possibility of tapping birch trees from the shores of Rocky Lake. In the first year, they bought enough equipment to collect sap from 15 trees. The end result was about ¼ cup of syrup. This did not deter the couple from continuing. Today they have captured a niche market and export their products across the globe to France, Kazakhstan, United States and South America. They have built an automated plant that becomes their focus for a short time in the spring when the sap is running. They make a gourmet syrup, one of 9 producers in Canada. It has become a great success. A little piece of The Pas is travelling around the world in a bottle in the form of Rocky Lake Pure Birch Syrup and Birch Breakfast Syrup. They have expanded into other products from the forest such as Chaga Tea, Cottonwood healing salves, wild rice, and xylitol. All of these products are sold from their website RockyLakeBirch.com.

Joanne and Alan both worked in the community of The Pas for many years prior to transitioning to operating their own consulting businesses. In 1990, while raising her family, Johanna worked towards a career in Business Administration. Johanna worked at The Town of The Pas Municipal Offices as the first female Treasurer for 6 years and gave 20 years of her life maintaining the financial records of the Town. During her time with the Town of The Pas, she took opportunities to learn how the municipality works. She worked within many positions from accounts receivable/utilities clerk, social services/purchasing clerk, RCMP municipal clerk to Payable Bank reconciliation clerk and provided financial training to other personnel. She assisted her mentor, Richard King in the 1990's and created a step by step manual detailing the Towns Financial duties. While she was employed, she continued to study through the University of Manitoba to attain her Municipal Administration Certificate and studies towards her CGA certification. Today Johanna, continues to work within her Consulting business for new entrepreneurs. She is involved in securing grants for those interested in starting up a new business and offering services in financial planning and bookkeeping.

Alan transitioned from the RCMP to UCN as the coordinator of the law Enforcement Program in 2001. It was a huge change from policing to teaching. Vastly different and stressful, especially teaching adults as they come to the classroom with so many other life responsibilities and issues. Alan was a guiding force for many students enrolled in the law enforcement program from 2001 to 2013. After 12 years of service at UCN, Alan once again decides to change directions.

In 2010, Alan ran for the position of Mayor within the community of The Pas. He was elected in 2010 and what was designed to be a ½ time position, felt more like a ¾ to full time position. Al was inspired

to run as he felt that he had the skills needed to place the community on a level playing field at the provincial level. The province had different priorities and Alan and the council at the time knew that they needed to speak to our northern issues. He found the job extremely rewarding and commented that The Pas had grown within these years. The railway was purchased by new ownership, grain was shipped through the port of Churchill, and the Centennial Committee created a great celebration for the community. The downtown core was policed using foot and bike patrol as well as walk and talk policing. Walk and talk was a program where one police officer was in a vehicle and the other one on foot talking to each other. They enforced the downtown core, being present and visible and enforcing laws. He built strong relationships and worked well with OCN and the RM of Kelsey. Alan made the town well known at the Manitoba Legislature. Although Al was not re-elected, he continues to work towards the betterment of the community and the North.

Alan was recently elected as the Vice President of the Chamber. Alan believes that we have so much happening here and that we need to get that message out that we are open for business. "We need to promote ourselves. If we promote the North, we can generate new business". He has been working on a Northern Tourism Strategy for the past 3 years through Travel Manitoba and will bring his expertise and knowledge to the Chamber of Commerce.

He is also a board member of the Opasquia Trails. This project is one of a kind. Most recently the group has built a viewing platform on Grace Lake and installed a set of binoculars. This area has so much potential for locals and tourism. Grace Lake offers many species of birds and wildlife in a natural marsh setting.

When Alan was with the RCMP, he participated in a fishing derby in Dauphin with his friend and fellow RCMP officer Mal Hollett. They were both Rotarians and were tired of selling tickets to fundraise. They presented the idea of a fishing derby to the Rotarians as an alternative to fundraising. Although there was some opposition at the time, the event took off and had as many as 900 derby participants. It has also generated a good clean fun event for the community and has brought awareness to the potential and beauty of the North.

The Jimmy Jackfish event started in 1997 by a committee in which Johanna and Al were involved. It is a small derby but in 2018 the prize money was increased as did the number of participants. There is a strong committee in which Johanna is the chairperson, from the Rocky Lake East Shore Community that works on the many duties of the derby. It takes many volunteers, and each year people step up to the task. They ask their volunteers what they want to do and then assign them that job. Every job is important from greeting, to taking tickets, to drilling holes and so much more. This year they have not cancelled the event but will follow the restrictions as we move towards 2021.

Their neighbors at Rocky Lake are the people that they rely on. They have made friends in each job that they worked at and in each Northern Community where they were stationed. They love to have coffee and lunch downtown at the local coffee shops. When they have visitors, they take them to the Sam Waller Museum and the Christ Church, both rich in history. Together they enjoy getting takeout and sitting by the Saskatchewan River. If Alan has any regrets, it is that he did not develop the riverfront while he had the opportunity as the Mayor. He knows that there is so much potential in this area. He likes to keep his mind sharp by staying involved. He looks up to those people still volunteering at the age of 92 and 96. He wants to be one of these people. Chuckling Johanna says "I believe that I have

come full circle; from dishwasher at the Dutch Drive in to Chief cook and bottle washer for Rocky Lake Birchworks.”

Al and Johanna’s believe in supporting and contributing to the North. Their thoughts: “Work forced us to move away. The area has everything we want. We have good health care, services, and some family here. Why would we move from here? Everything we need is here. We have built our life here. We have skills that we can offer to the community. As long as the community wants us, we will contribute.”

Thank you, Alan and Johanna McLauchlan, for sharing your story. Together and individually you have brought much to our community’s wellness and success.

Make Shift Happen

Submitted by Denise Duncan