

SAUNDERS, JO Soprano (BV Archivist)

I had a contented childhood growing up in the Yukon, Alberta, Ontario and Germany. The best part of my life started 46 years ago when I married my adventurous husband and we moved into our 150 year-old farmhouse filled with antiques on a farm out of Chesterville, ON. I live there to this day. For four years, we had no running water - (Saturday night bath in a galvanized tub in front of the old Findlay Oval wood stove – water pumped by hand up from the cistern in the cellar). Now I have a condo on the Sir John A. Parkway where I stay in the winter and for part of the week in the summer. We had a variety of farm animals - my favourite were the chickens. Within the first year, a tornado cut through our property blowing away the cow barn, horse stable, pig pen, chicken coup, drive shed and most drastically – the outhouse! (first to be rebuilt).

We also had lots of children – 14 foster and/or adopted plus 2 birth children. My son is a professional engineer working as the project manager for a company doing renovations on Parliament Hill. He has a lovely wife (a teacher in Kanata) and the two most beautiful grandchildren in the world! My charming daughter is an ER nurse at the Civic. She lives in Westboro. Both my husband and I were elementary school teachers with the Upper Canada School Board. As a young family, we did a teaching exchange in England and a sabbatical year island hopping around the South Pacific (Kingdom of Tonga, Western Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii). Tragically my amazing husband, Rob, died suddenly of a brain aneurysm aged 54 which was devastating for his family and his community. My daughter and I have soldiered on in the international development area, volunteering with NGOs in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar.

My passion is trees (I'm not an expert – I'm a lover). I own a certified forest. We have planted and sold thousands of trees. I am a member of the Ontario Woodlot Assoc. and the Society of Ontario Nut Growers (who knew?). I give tree talks in the schools reminding the students of all the benefits of trees – social, emotional, mental, environmental, spiritual, physical, economic, aesthetic etc.. I am a passionate environmentalist.

Music (specifically, extremely simple piano playing) has been woven into and throughout my life. I never thanked my parents enough (or maybe not at all) for paying for lessons, driving me to lessons and expecting me to practice for hours and years. My life would have been very sadly different were it not for the piano. I now have an electric one in my condo and luuuve it!. I opened a secondhand shop in our village 26 years ago. It has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for charities.

I try to be a minimalist in my old age. I am on the board of Directors for the Population Institute Canada – the exploding human population (250,000 per day) exacerbates all other problems we face. I am crazy for zumba and enjoy my yoga class. I am a volunteer with Dying With Dignity and Nature Canada, a Big Sister to a Little Sister, a member of the Unitarian Congregation, a Grannie with the Stephen Lewis Foundation.

My traveling days are over except to go tenting annually in Algonquin Park as we have for decades. With any luck (or maybe a lot of luck), I have another 10 – 15 good years left ahead of me – so it is now or never to ... ??