

Rina Giacalone: This is interview number one with Udo Schomberg. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself?

Udo Schonberg: Well, yes, I grew up in Northern Germany and came to Canada in 1960. Basically, I wanted to travel the world but I met a young lady and got married and that was the end of my world travel. So we landed in Montreal, studied in Montreal ia University, and went out to graduate work at McMaster in Hamilton – and then ended up in the Maple area, having a job and what have you. We moved to Maple in 1975, if I am not mistaken. Bought a house and back then...I worked at Keele & number 7 highway just couple of miles south of Maple. When I told our staff that I was moving to Maple, their reaction was “What? Maple is the boonies.” It’s quite true, because I recall that there was only one traffic light between Maple and my workplace and that was at number 7 highway. The rest of the stuff was clear sailing, so I could go to work in 5 minutes, come home from lunch. The downside of that was, looking for another job would always have – needed travel into Toronto and I really couldn’t bring myself to waste that time day in day out. Difference in career probably wouldn’t be all that different anyway; accounting is accounting is accounting whether that’s in downtown Toronto or downtown Maple it’s the same. So consequently, I stayed with the company for 25, 27 years.

RG: Interesting, what did you do for a pastime? Growing up...

US: Probably everything (laughter)...

RG: What was your favourite?

US: Cycling, if you go back to Germany. I was twenty left. We would do a lot of cycling; in fact two friends of mine and I cycled to Paris and back – that’s from Hamburg, that’s 1000km each way, 2000km in twelve days. We actually learned to sleep on our bicycles (laughter), but when you’re young your dumb, it was interesting. We did a lot of hiking, swimming, all regular things - back then of course there were no computers, there were few telephones, if you wanted to have any fun you had to do it yourself. Which is quite different from what young people do nowadays. In Canada, I pretty well kept on with these activities, skiing was a new one because northern Germany does not have much of snow so skiing is not an option – and going to the south of Germany was out of the question because of cost. So cross-country skiing was a new activity (show’s pictures) Here’s one of the – this is my wife and a friend and we were skiing somewhere I believe east of Keele – King Sideroad, yeah....

RG: How old were you here?

US: Oh, mid-thirties I would think....

RG: Looks like fun...

US: Yes we did have a lot of fun back then. These incidentally are wooden skis, they’re grasshoppers, which were also going out of style back then – we’ll see fibreglass coming in. But they have more class, more character than fibreglass...we would pack a lunch, make a fire in the snow and have picnics out in the bush.

RG: Did you tent outside too during all of this?

US: We did that a couple of times – but it was another friend – my wife, she had enough sense to stay away from that. [...] is fun but it can also be very very demanding. I recall one trip we were in Haliburton, if I recall correctly, and the temperature dropped to 35 centigrade below. Everything you had, is just frozen solid, and because you had to take your boots off at night otherwise your feet would freeze.

The ski boots were frozen in a curvature – and we had to make a fire to thaw them out and straighten them out to put them back on. So it can be demanding, I have also taken part in organized trips and they were somewhat easier. There's one I remember Humber College put on – and that was basically a winter safety course. So you learned how to ski, how to rescue, how to bring out a stretcher – which is incidentally quite difficult. So these were a lot of fun activities that we enjoyed but as I said they are demanding – there's no, anyone who tells me they go out – we're camping now, we're not going to the summer hut – we're out in the snow, a metre snow, if you fall down there's a 40 pound pack on your back, try and get back up – it's not easy, not easy at all. These are all things that we have never thought about, if you think your feet are here and your backpack and your head is on the floor. How do you get back up? With great difficulties...These are things we learned as a whole, if you go out there you damn well better be careful. God forbid you become a stretcher case, because they couldn't bring you out – you'd have to be helicoptered out I suppose because there's no place to land or to get the ambulance to...And usually, you [...] If something happens then yes, then you are in great difficulties. That's the main lesson we took back from the Humber trip, and as a result we never had an injury. We also did a lot of camping – we had a piece of property in Barry's Bay – that's Algonquin Park. Landlocked, so we had to go by boat, the camp place was probably 100 ft. up above sea level – so everything had to be backpacked up the hill to the campsite. Again, you are a long way from the car, 5-7 km, if something happens on this property, it would be serious. As a result, we never had any accidents, we had close calls but no accidents. Close call for example, one of the kids one night got lost in the fog, he didn't know where he was but we heard him, we found him. But it was basically the fact that we were very very careful with the axes and the saws and the fires and everything else that goes with it. You know, fuel for the Coleman lamps, you don't put that near the fireplace, it goes way back where the fire can't get to it because [...]. This was basically the upshot of the camping trip with Humber College – they stressed safety safety safety...holy smokes, you haven't thought about this one, haven't thought about that one. But, basically the ability or the inability to get a body out of the environment to a safe place, be it a hospital or whatever, you don't want to go there. So that was the learning experience with Humber..

RG: You seem to like these extreme sports, what draws you to them?

US: They are not...they don't start out to be extreme sports, they end up to be extreme sports (laughter). The skiing colleague of mine gave me a pair of skis, you know he had given up skis, you know that sounds like fun – Seneca College in King had a big ski program and I took some lessons – oh yeah that's great, then one day somebody came up to me and said "you know they have a winter camping trip" Humber College went out of Seneca that's its starting off point... I said "that sounds like fun, let's try it." If I had known what I got myself into, I probably would have said "no, no thank you very much." So it's backing into this stuff, "no, that doesn't look too bad" and it is demanding...yeah...I am not, I wasn't looking for adventures of that degree, it just turned out to be that.

RG: Do you do any other sports or activities as extreme?

US: As extreme...I do some volunteer work at Kortright and we make maple syrup. Well, if you come through Kortright as a visitor its very nice, you go down the pathway to the old fashioned side and you see the old fashioned side then you go to the modern [...] Everything is explained to you and it sounds very nice, then you go on and go home. If you are working at Kortright, if you're working at the old fashioned side you're there at 9 o'clock in the morning to 3 o'clock in the afternoon and there is snow and its cold and its raining. [...] And we give out samples and...

RG: How long have you been doing this for?

US: Seven years, eight years...

RG: You still currently do that right?

US: Yes, yes, yes. And now maple syrup there, they call volunteers in to help out.

RG: Can you recall any interesting stories from these events at Kortright? I'm sure you meet lots of wonderful people there too...

US: Well, I guess one the most pleasant experience experiences was the – a bunch of, I think they were Chinese, Yeah, they were Chinese students. I had gone to the local MP, MPP Greg Sobara, they give you a bunch – bags of Canadian pins, there are 100 in a bag. And I stuck some in my pocket and when these Chinese fellows came by, I said "Hey" – you know they're visitors [...] I said "would you like a pin?" I thought there were 5 or 6 standing around me – it turns out there were 80 and when they saw these pins they said 'oh can we have one' – they thought that was the cat's meow. I had the impression that getting this little pin was the most exciting experience that they had in Canada. That was kind of – all of my pins were gone, but that's what they were for....you know you could get more from Greg Sobara whenever you want to. Generally meeting people, you know just seeing the public there, the public that comes to these events is of a different genre than your public out on the road – you know they are different, they are friendly, they are interested in what's going on – they are paying a lot of money, I think the admission is 7 dollars, and the car is I think 5, so four people to get in there is \$30-40 each...you can spend a lot of money on this sort of activity. And, as I said, meeting them is fun – we usually end up giving out samples or explaining certain aspects of the yoke to them or how the stuff is harvested. How the trees are drilled and all the activities that take place – depending on what is needed. So we are, because we've been there, when I say we there's a group of about 6 who've been there for years, so we know the ropes – so when they say "can you help out?" – do whatever [...] So you usually have, well at least 2 on the fires and depending on the size of the group, 1-2 staff members leading the group, you have 3-4 volunteers to help out. Because at times they have had as many as 2000 people come through in one day, it's too many, you can't, on it really gets to be too much. Because you can no longer talk to anyone, you just haven't got time....So if you get 500-700 people, then if someone has any questions you have time to answer them...but if it gets to be more than that...

RG: I think it's so admirable that you've been doing this for seven years...what drew you towards this?

US: I didn't set out to be...it just evolved, I met one of the staff members from Kortright and at that time I was starting to look at doing something different. He said "why don't you come out and help?" Now, I said "well..." he said "go down there and tell them who you are...and you know they'll explain to you, they have classes for the new volunteers, and what have you and everything is laid out what they want to do what they don't want to do..." Well that sounds interesting...then they found out I was an accountant..."Oh that's wonderful, we need someone for computer data entry..." I said "No no no no, listen, I've done that for forty years, I'm done with accounting if you haven't got something outside forget it.." He said "Oh no no, most of the activity is outside...they have the gift shop outside, crafts, arts and crafts on the inside" but that's not what I want to do so that's how I ended up with the maple syrup...and again, I, you know time flies. In fact at one time I met a young lady, we were also volunteering, in fact she was doing the community work...she said "hey Udo, how are you doing?" I said "Hey, who are you..." "My name is so and so..." I said "Oh yeah so, how do you.." but I had the name tag on but she knew who I was... "I don't really.." she said "Oh no we worked 4 years ago together a graduate of Queen's" (laughter) Holy smokes, I didn't realize I'd been here this long...you know, years just go by without one realizing what's going on...so that's, I think I've been there now 7 years or 8 years...

RG: How many hours a week did you dedicate a week at Kortright?

US: It's really up to you, they phone if they need somebody and if you have time, if the activity appeals to you – you say "okay, fine." At maple syrup, we probably put in, 5 days a week, 30 hours a week for four weeks. That time a day, it adds up. It really takes a lot, that's when they need people because they have schools coming in every day, they operate 7 days a week. Maple syrup festival we crank up the hours...other than that there isn't all that much, there's a new one, the next two coming up, middle of September they have a cooking event where they bring in local chefs and use local products. And they asked me to come down and help out there, I don't know what I'll be doing there but that's usually not, they don't need rocket scientists down there, they just need warm bodies...(laughter)

RG: But you're definitely very open and friendly...Kortright Centre is an amazing place in the community, are there any other places that you go to in the community that you enjoy spending your time?

US: Not really, I have helped out at the Church...I've done their books because they had problems...

RG: Which church is this?

US: The Presbyterian church, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Keele St., it's just behind the house. My wife is very active in the church and they had problems with their accounting systems so I get it straightened out, I get it cleared up but I don't want to get involved but guess what? They took five years...so I just resigned this year, or I'm in the process of resigning – turning it over to other people. Primarily because the accounting function, it entails money, it's good internal policy to have a change in personnel...so that if something has gone wrong it would become obvious. And as I said I didn't want to do it in the first place, I guess they were stuck, I guess you go in and get it organized and let somebody else do it...Well, they're not only doing a good job, just keep at it...So these are the two activities if you like that...well out of the church of course came this thing here, the tree carving...

RG: And where's the tree carving?

US: On the church property, on Keele St, it is the Northwest corner of Keele St, standing up against the fence...I figure it's about 6 feet tall, a bit over 6 feet tall...and it represents the former minister Aitken, who was as I said before, he was at the church from 1865-1880 and then went to New Brunswick, he is the father of Lord Beaverbrook – a famous Maple resident. And the carving came about because of an experience I had in Orangeville, they have tons of carving up and down the main drag. I looked at one of them and the carver seemed to be able to, or had done similar work, so I phoned him and he came down and looked at it and said no problem. I was just instrumental in organizing, getting all the ducks in a row, and finally out came this figure here. So the tree was saved and it should be good for quite some time, you know...

RG: Were these items carved on the spot or were they presented afterwards? How long did it take for that to happen, were you present for the whole process?

US: About 2 days...(showing pictures) [...]

RG: Where was the tree cut?

US: The tree was cut at a level about, how high would that be? Ten feet? It's probably ten feet...But because of the location, there's a power line here, there's a fence right behind it and the tree was quite large so we had to have professional people come in to take the tree down. So they came in a big boom truck and chopped it up....And...there are the beginnings of the carvings...

RG: That's incredible...

US: And all he had to work with was an old photograph of Minister Aitken...

RG: What tools did they use to carve?

US: Primarily chainsaws and grinders...

RG: Have you ever carved a tree?

US: No no no, oh I can't even draw a straight line let alone do something like that...I was just, my prime interest was to preserve the tree as much as possible, the thing took 120 years to grow. Then the city decided...what is this? The three most important things...in something like that...That's a good..

RG: Tree carving in Maple (looking at photographs). So have you been involved in any other activities?

US: No, not really, not that I can...

RG: Anything recent?

US: No other than coming to the library and getting books...

RG: You enjoy the library right? The environment of the library...

US: Oh yeah, this is the cat's meow, this is wonderful.

RG: What do you like about the library?

US: Friendly staff, helpful staff, excellent selection of material, and of course it's brand new, you know what is there not to like?

RG: What type of books do you read?

US: Everything, anything, fiction, non-fiction...

RG: What's your current interest right now in books?

US: Anything at all, environment probably more so than anything else because that is more on the books...I've read quite a few of the recent theories. An excellent book I can recommend is written by a writer from Toronto, it deals with the oceans, or the decline of the water in the oceans, now...hmm...I'll think of it...very catchy name...

RG: So you're really into the environment?

US: The environment is certainly a concern of mine, we try and live, if you like, a clean – the property for example, we had it evaluated by the town, they had some sort of program last year...Our driveway is not paved, it's sand, we have quite a few trees, in fact somebody said our backyard looks like a jungle, we have quite a few birds of course, obviously because the property is a fair size. [...] As a consequence there's a lot of birds, rabbits, you name it – not much good for the garden but it's fun to be around. So we try and keep, certainly our property and the neighbour as well, as green as we can...And so far, these people that came by, said that there's not much more you can do, be achieved for the trees and grass. You know now of course, there's no more poison to kill the butterflies, well it kills the butterflies too...We have a compost, and our garden has seen nothing but compost – we've never used fertilizer, that's a fun

thing. We didn't set out to do it, it just evolved over the years – my wife said “this works, we don't need any fertilizer...” Initially we had dung that we got from the local farmers but we gave that up because we didn't need it anymore. So yeah, the environment is probably fairly prominent in the background – but then again, it wasn't a deliberate attempt – it all evolved over the years [...] To give you an idea, we have two plastic green barrels, they hold about 200 litres each. So if you take your water off the roof, it runs into one barrel, overflows into the second one and then any overflow goes onto the grass. A couple of years ago there was great concern about West Nile Virus and my wife read in the papers that standing water causes a problem. It said, put a goldfish in the [...] – I said “oh that sounds like a fun idea.” So she went off and she bought 3 little gold fish about this size...in fact they were so small, we had to put a net over the outflow so they wouldn't go. Two of them died, but the 3rd one hang in there – so come Fall, now what? the thing is just sitting there...Oh she says, “we've got an old aquarium” the kids had it for some reason and its sitting around somewhere. So she filled it up and put the fish in, well it survived the winter. So come next spring, now what do we do? Put him out in the barrel again. This is now four years, the guy is about this big. So again, it started out as a fun project, now it's a good conservation [...] You don't find too many rain barrels with fish in them, but the thing is what do you do with the fish? I'm not about to kill him, he doesn't do anything, he's a fun guy to have, and he eats the larva – there's no mosquitoes coming out of that barrel. So again, this is one of the fun things that happened to come about, hadn't thought about it...But it wouldn't be better if we didn't have it, because it's like a kid. Somebody has to look after him, if you go away, somebody has to look after this guy because he has to be fed because there isn't enough nutrients coming down the chute, you know, to keep him. So that's the environmental issues at Naylor St in Maple.

RG: So you seem to like a lot of scenic places too...I mean, you work at Kortright Centre, you enjoy reading about the environment, you have a great concern for the environment. What do you think about the opportunities we have here in Vaughan? Do you like the space, have you noticed a transformation?

US: Oh yes, and as far I'm concerned not for the better. You know Vaughan is being paved over at a great rate...there's nothing I can do about it. But no, I would have – this library here would not be here, these would be cornfields. So yeah, the growth of Maple, but its not only the growth of Maple its growth anywhere – is of great concern, but there's nothing I can do about it so I'm not worried about it. I can look after my little corner and that's being done. The town should say “well we...do our best” Yeah they do something, but its not nearly good enough. For example, why doesn't this building have a garden on the roof, why is there no grass on the roof? Or a vegetable garden, I don't know if you want people running around up there they may fall off. But there's no reason why this thing can't be cooled by grass, there's no reason why the rain water running off here goes into sewers, that could all be used. So when they tell us they're environmentally concerned, no they're not. They talk a good line, but they're not doing nearly as much as they should. So this is...but then they're politicians, that's what they do, they tell you stuff so that they can get re-elected. [...] (29:28)

RG: How do you think this has affected your pastime activities?

US: Oh I don't think it has, we sort of do our own thing and let the rest of the world look after themselves. No we have not, I don't think we have been influenced by the...because we live right at Keele St. the traffic is horrendous and the noise is most annoying but then again what do you do about it? You know, the property is developed and I don't really want to move because you have your neighbours and your friends and everything is working else other than the traffic noise. So can you go to council and say “hey can you close Keele St. off?” No not likely, you live with it...it's not worthwhile getting wound up about it.

RG: Have you noticed a difference in the community you live in from when you first moved there in Maple? Because you said before there was not that many buildings and it was more green...

US: Well, once you came north of number 7 on Keele St. I mean there were fields, nothing but fields. Now it's paved over, okay people need jobs, people need to work. I understand that but I don't have to like it. And I think, a lot of things could have been done quite differently, quite more environmentally safe and more effective. These are certainly things, as I said before, there was one traffic light at number 7 highway. You could shoot a canon down Keele St. or up Keele St., you wouldn't hear anything – now you can't even cross the road without taking your life into your own hands.

RG: So you think it's affected the quality of life too?

US: The quality of life has decreased, has decreased for us. Now, because people move into the area from the city, for them it has probably increased so I can't speak for them. I can only speak for myself and I'm sure I am speaking for my neighbour as well. For us it has decreased, there's no question about it. But again, I'm aware people have moved from a 50 storey concrete bunker to a nice townhouse or whatever, they probably think that's quite alright.

RG: So how did these pastimes make you feel? Do you feel a sense of fulfillment. What draws you to them and how have they enriched your life?

US: Oh, I'm quite happy with my state in life, it has been fun. I have pretty much done most of the things I wanted to do. I am fairly healthy, not rich but I can afford the things I am planning to do. And what more can one ask for? But primarily, health is good, and food is good, beer tastes good...our families are growing up, the kids are healthy, grandkids are healthy, so what more can one ask for?

RG: Do you think there's any positive benefits from hobbies, pastime activities that you have done?

US: I suppose the one thing that came out of all this, as you grow older and wiser there are things that one can change and things ones cannot change. And you tend to the factors that you can change, the ones you cannot change just leave them, don't worry about it because its going to happen anyway. I'm not going to worry about whether its going to rain tomorrow, its going to rain whether I worry about it or not. I'm not going to worry about the traffic, I know the traffic is there and worrying about it is not going to change it. So, the things that I can not affect, I can't do anything else, I wish had that wisdom 50 years ago...but that comes with being around the block a couple of times.

RG: So I'm just about to wrap up, anything you'd like to conclude...

US: No I think we pretty well covered a lot of area, I don't know what you do with all of that, that's your job, that's not my job...

RG: You seem to have done a lot of interesting things in your life and that's just amazing and it has been a pleasure interviewing you and that's the end of this interview..