

Local author captures family history in print and song

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BY JANET RICHARDS

Belleville - When Dave McClenaghan started researching his family tree, he had no idea he would end up a published writer and a recorded musician.

A retired manager for TransCanada Pipelines, McClenaghan and his wife, Joanne, moved to Belleville in 1998.

After about ten years of gathering information and researching his family, McClenaghan decided that he wanted to

do more than just compile information and timelines in a binder. He felt telling the story would be more compelling and interesting for his family. The CD was the first form that the story took; McClenaghan thought it would be a good way for his family, his 13 grandchildren especially, to hear the story.

The CD, "The Passage of Time" contains three songs and four sections of spoken narrative by McClenaghan.

"If somebody listens to the CD they will have the whole picture," says McClenaghan.

The first song he wrote is the first on the CD. "Where I was Born" was written in 20 minutes one day as a challenge to himself. McClenaghan, who doesn't read music, subsequently wrote a song about his mother's life and then decided that if he wrote a song about his father, the story would be complete.

The CD was recorded at Pinnacle Music Studios in Belleville in April of 2003. When he decided that he would like to write the story as a book, McClenaghan intended it to be for his family. "I began to show it to people and ask if there was a wider appeal," he says. "They said there was."

He enlisted the help of friend Norman Lawson to proofread and edit. McClenaghan describes the book he ended up writing as, "a love story about a hero, my hero, my mother".

The story chronicles her life beginning in England. After meeting her husband Joseph, she returned to Canada with him, where they settled in Cache Bay, just outside North Bay. She was a pioneer of sorts starting the Cache Bay branch of the Canadian Red Cross. She also served as chair of the Brit-



■ David McClenaghan turned a genealogical research project into a book about the life of his mother and encourages everyone to make an effort to record family histories for future generations.

Janet Richards photo

ish Flood Relief organizing the mailing of care packages to soldiers during the World War II. These were only two of the many service and volunteer roles she took on. Elsie also cared for her invalid husband and raised eight children. A pivotal point for McClenaghan when deciding to write the story of his mother's life was the discovery that his father had been a Barnardo Boy, a ward of the Barnardo's homes for waifs in England. He and his brother were sent to Canada as Home Boys to work. McClenaghan says as far as he knows, his father never told anyone, including Elsie, about that part of his past. The most important thing that McClenaghan learned from the process he went through was the need for family histories to be preserved and passed down.

"I want to encourage other people to do the same thing," he says. "It's so important that we record family histories in one manner or another for future generations."

As a high school drop-out who had never written before, the response to his book was a pleasant surprise for McClenaghan. Published in December, 250 copies of the book were produced. McClenaghan says he has gone through 125 or so to date. The book and accompanying CD are available at Greenley's in the downtown village or by contacting McClenaghan at <jdmcclen@sympatico.ca> by e-mail.

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