

Hastings Co  
-Bio - M

Heidi's mother: Intel  
Aug 13/86

MORGAN, Christine

Aug 13/86

# 'I'm flat broke' ... ...feel like a 'stranger'

By CHRIS MALETTE  
Staff Reporter

ELDORADO - Christine Morgan says she feels like a "stranger" in her own community.

The mother of six-year-old Heidi - whose case of a rare bone disease won the hearts of Quinte and Ontario residents in recent months - says her neighbors are talking about her "like I'm living the life of luxury from money donated to us for Heidi's operation."

The truth of the matter, she says, "is that I'm flat broke. I don't know what I'd do without the help of people dropping off the odd bag of groceries."

Heidi's bone disease reached an emergency stage last month when doctors in London, Ont., found she may have been permanently blinded by a bone "spike" growing inside her skull and an immediate operation was performed to correct the problem.

"But, many people think that's it. The problem is over and the London operation - paid by OHIP is the end of all our problems. The truth is, Heidi's been told she'll be 17 before she can be given a clean bill of health."

Morgan says her neighbors and "former friends" in Madoc "won't even talk to me when I go into town to do some shopping. They think, in their minds, there is no reason we should be helped anymore because we've gotten all kinds of money raised for us that wasn't needed."

More than \$10,000 was in a Bancroft trust fund for Heidi to travel to Texas for an operation by a leading world surgeon in facial surgical procedures the child required.

But, it was found the procedure could be done in London "and we did not get one cent of that trust fund. It's mostly been returned to the donors and people now think we're in no need anymore."

Morgan says the situation for her and Heidi is far more grim than her neighbors realize.

"My house is for sale and I'm taking all the antiques I had in my shop and selling them at an auction in Trenton soon. I hope that'll give us enough to make it through the winter."

Her home antique business at first was deemed in contravention of Madoc Township zoning bylaws and she was issued a cease-and-desist order when she returned from London with Heidi last month.

However, she has convinced council her business is in fact conforming to township zoning and

was allowed to re-open, she said.

"But that has left me with two weeks of the tourist season - my trade season - left. It's just not enough for us to live on. The house is for sale and I can't even sell my old 1979 car."

Heidi is "progressing as well as can be expected," said Morgan, but the radical surgery has taken its toll on the youngster.

"They literally had to remove her mouth from her head to do this surgery and we won't know until the next couple weeks whether she's going to need a mesh to hold her eye in its socket. My baby is in a terrible amount of pain and my job - around the clock - is to try and make life just a little bit more comfortable for her."

She says she wants people to "understand that while everyone thought we had money to burn before the operation, I spent everything I had to transport her to doctors appointments and other expenses. I had phone bills of \$350 one month and \$500 another. I had to drain all my savings to pay gas and other expenses and now there's nothing."

She says she's "eternally grateful to the people who have stood by us so far."

But, to others who think she's been "greedy" in seeking public support for an operation paid for by OHIP she suggests "they walk a mile in my shoes."

Her plight fell on deaf ears when she asked her MPP if there was anything he could do to help. Jim Pollock, MPP for Hastings-Peterborough, suggested Morgan go on welfare, she claims.

Pollock, contacted today regarding Morgan's comments, said he suggested Morgan "apply for social assistance if she had no other alternative."

"If she's in dire need, that's her right (to seek assistance)," said Pollock. "But, I'm not promoting people accepting welfare if they don't need it."

"I am a workaholic. I have the ability to work and want to work out of my own home when I can. I could never go on welfare. It just is not in me to take money in that manner when I know there are people out there who can't work and need it as the last resort."

"Right now, my door is open to anyone who would like to talk to me and get this misunderstanding in this community straightened out. My own neighbors don't even talk to me anymore. These were the people who wished us good luck and now they walk right on by. It's strange."