

# Cramahe volunteer collects Jubilee Medal

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It was a long time earned, and a long time coming, but Taffy Knapman finally collected her Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal in a June 20 ceremony at Hart House in Toronto.

The award is given by the Department of Canadian Heritage to Canadians who have made a significant contribution to Canada, to their community or to fellow Canadians. It commemorates the ascension to the throne of Queen Elizabeth upon her father's death on Feb. 6, 1952.

Taffy might have been part of the group to get their awards but her invitation was sent with the wrong name and address. Fortunately, she got it eventually when the postal staff in Brighton recognized that the envelope was CNIB related.

The award was further delayed to accommodate presentation of the Dr. Dayton M. Forman Award to companies or individuals who have furthered services to the blind. This year's award went to Microsoft Canada for donating \$2.5 million to improve the digital library at the Canadian Institute for the Blind.

That dovetailed with Taffy's volunteer

work. For close to 30 years she has donated massive amounts of time, much of it in support of the CNIB lending library.

In the early seventies Taffy worked as a secretary for Bell Canada. Some of her time was spent training young men to use the computers that she loved. When she inquired about applying for a job as a computer operator she was told she was the wrong sex and she was too old. They wanted men in their twenties. She'd been with the company 22 years. She quit and went straight to Coca Cola where they were looking for people with her knowledge. She stayed there five years. That decision made by the Bell still rankles.

Ever since she had read Isaac Asimov as a child, she had wanted to have a computer. As far as she knew, there was only one in the world and it covered acres in the Pentagon.

Once they came onto the market she kept pricing them until they were within her reach. She bought an Apple with 16K of memory. She joined a computer club, played some games and made some programs. Within five years she had graduated to a model with 128K RAM.

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Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal winner Taffy Knapman takes a moment with her other love - flowers. Taffy was presented with her medal in a special ceremony in June.

PHOTO BY BOB OWEN

## Taffy Knapman honoured

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While at Coke she began her volunteer work with the CNIB. Her husband Howie was already volunteering, fixing talking book machines and later, Braille machines. Someone was needed to teach the blind how to use the new machines. He suggested that she try it. When they needed someone to help in the library she stepped in. The officials at the CNIB hadn't realized how popular the lending library would be. With the new portable machines it was much easier for the blind to access the printed page.

She claims she went to the CNIB offices after finishing her day at Coke and worked six hours.

Coordinator of Library Systems and Operations, Diana Deshane disputes Taffy's recollection. She says that Taffy would start in the afternoon and sometimes didn't finish until four the next morning. They both agree that she preferred the night hours. Diana commented that she liked to work alone and avoided any fuss. She never attended any volunteer awards nights. In a phone conversation last week Diana enthused about the Jubilee Medal recipient, noting that she was the kindest person.

Taffy picked up her nickname when she went to the CNIB. There were three Marilyn's all

working on the mainframe. Two had to be different. She had an Apple computer so she became Taffy.

Taffy says she 'went to heaven' when the CNIB acquired its first main frame computer. Those six hours of volunteer work suddenly got much better.

In 1983 Taffy and Howie bought some land and moved to Colborne. They camped on their property for three weekends. It rained for two. They had to find a house. Howie continued to work in the city, commuting back and forth on Mondays and Fridays. Taffy continued her volunteer work for the blind, working from a terminal at their home on Parliament St. It was pre-Internet. Her unit had no memory. It was just a screen and a keyboard that could be plugged into the main computer in Toronto through a phone line. It allowed her to continue the work she had been doing.

Diana remembers that Taffy would come to the city with vegetables in her trunk to share with the staff. She had grown them on her lot in Cramahe. Diana had never seen yellow peppers before.

In 1994 Howie retired and they moved to their new home on Beach Rd. in the south east corner of Cramahe Twp.

Taffy is still doing the same things today - changing addresses for CNIB members Canada-wide,

entering applications for library service from patrons in the area from Peterborough to

Prince Edward County, and processing orders for books from anywhere in the world, sometimes in French.

Last month she changed 214 addresses.

Sometimes it involves sleuthing. Recently she got a letter stating from a gentleman stating that Sue (not her real name) was no longer living with him. By checking the book that the girl had signed out, Taffy realized she was under 10. Taffy went to the main frame and called up all the people registered with the same first name, then eliminated all those over that age. Up popped the girl's full name, and Taffy had her solution.

Normally she works from 80-120 hours a month, mostly in the early mornings and evenings. She's not pulling any of those all-nighters anymore, although she admits that she's sometimes up until 3 a.m. in the winter. Last month she wasn't able to get in all the time she needed because of internet problems.

She was actually offered a job with the CNIB once, but it was a day job. She offered to do it until they found someone willing to work days. Her stint lasted three months.

She's never thought of quitting. In the summer she is able to fit in her gardening and reading, and she takes pictures.

She offers that the CNIB work piles up and someone has to do it. As long as hydro is available, computers exist and she can work, she'll continue.

Taffy and Howie have been married 44 years on September 5.

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