

# Best friends too soon gone



LOON TUNES  
and  
OUTDOOR NOTES  
by Len Landry

As I approached my wife Rita, I noticed that there were big tears in her eyes, and she was actually sobbing, as she tried to turn away.

Now, as any regular fellow might do, the first thing I did was check the date. It was Feb. 18. I wasn't Rita's birthday. I had that one covered back in January. It wasn't our anniversary. And I had remembered Valentine's Day. Thus, I concluded, there must be some other reason for the sadness... and perhaps I wasn't to blame after all...

Actually, Rita and I were attending Enviro-Watch-1, a meeting of environmentalists from across Southern Ontario, dedicated to preserving our precious air, land and water, all of our great outdoors, from sly corporate polluters who would just love to fill each and every Niagara Escarpment quarry with garbage... garbage from other communities... garbage that would poison your environment.

To be sure, the show was running a little behind schedule. There was no great upset in that.

To be sure, the talks were emotional, true-life accounts, but there were no tear-jerking tales to this point, anyway.

"So why the waterworks Rita?" I asked.

"Poor Joan. Poor John and Joan..." she sobbed.

So now, like any regular fellow might do, I thought, "Splitsville... too bad... they seemed well matched. Nice people..."

At this juncture, I should explain that John Minns was the master of ceremonies of this Enviro-Watch event, and he had devoted an enormous amount of time and effort ensuring its success. Joan had worked equally hard in the background, an unsung heroine, supporting her husband's efforts.

"Split eh? Too bad," I said.

"No, no... not that," Rita corrected. "Dead... this morning..."

And I stopped in my tracks.

"Joan's very upset... John doesn't know yet," Rita continued, wiping away the big droplets from her huge, pretty eyes. "Cancer. They had to put her to sleep... their dog. Oh, we mustn't tell John... He'll be so upset. He won't be able to continue..."

"What?" I exclaimed. "All this fuss! It's only a dog... For God's sake, it's only a dog!"

Now, have you ever spoken without thinking? Sure you have. It's an all-too-common human failing, but I thought that I'd been taught better by my parents, and especially by my grandfather, during those private discussions and dealings on that old fishing boat on Balsam Lake, back in the '50s and '60s.

"Only a dog, eh?" I thought to myself. "What a stupid thing to say."

After all, our family had a dog once, a beautiful mongrel of Besinji and Collie heritage, named Ginger. She cost my parents ten whole dollars and was a present for my sister Christine, but of course, we all enjoyed the pet's company. Ginger had one of those forever smiling faces, open-mouthed, tongue hanging, full of vitality and mischief.

After we taught her not to rip up the sofa or perform her dog-duty behind the rec-room bar, well, she had almost total rule of the house.

The Besinji heritage, an African hunting background, meant that she was very quiet, rarely barking, and odorless. In fact, she would clean herself much like a cat licking its body, all of which seemed strange behavior for a beast blending the best of a Labrador's stature and the friendly face of Lassie.

Only a dog, eh?

Everyone should be so lucky to have such a great companion, such an ardent lover of the Outdoors.

Who was there to clear my mind of worry and hurry during difficult times in high school and college? Who would always smilingly agree to a walk so that I might think and forget that rejection by a pretty girl at the dance the other night?

Who would race back and forth across the ol' Gibbons Place front lawn in a most unique game of football? Who was the best running back the old homestead has ever seen?

Only a dog...

Who always stole the show and the ball during those classic road hockey games that always got just a little too intense?

"Ginger! Bring back that ball! Now! Ginger!"

Who would look back at us, big smile on her face, as if to say "Sure boys... once you settle down and realize that it's only a game... Sure you can have your ball back. Meantime, just try, and catch me..."

Only a dog, eh?

Ginger was put to sleep on the vet's advice when cancer started to make life miserable for her. She was eleven human years old and she had the friskiness of a puppy until the end.

And did the family cry that day for only a dog?  
You bet we did.

John and Joan Minns invited us over for some wine and cheese after the Enviro-Watch meeting. We looked at John's paintings and pictures of their beloved late pet. It seems that she was quite the camper and enjoyed fishing too.

along with the other Minns' dogs, one of whom lay pensively at John's feet.

And I don't think it was the wine, or the cheese for that matter, but if you listened carefully, I swear, Honest Injun, that you could hear a couple of dogs barking from a place far away, one as if to say "Ginger!... You bring back that fish right now! Ginger!... Ginger!... Ooo I'm going to get you... Ginger!"

**SHORELINES:** Don't forget to pick up your new Fishing Regulations Summary for 1989, now available at all good sports stores. The price is right... 'free.'

**ON THE HORIZON:** More about fishing at the Lakeview Generating Station. See you in two weeks.



Angela Stiles' trophy case must be on the verge of being overcrowded.

The 11-year-old Glen Williams gymnast recently added two silver medals to an already impressive array of hardware as she placed second overall at a pair of Pre-Novice competitions.

Angela was second overall at an international meet in Columbus, Ohio and followed that up with another second-place finish at the Ontario Regional qualifying meet in Burlington.

Angela's father Bob reports the young athlete is currently preparing for competition at the Elite Canada meet being hosted by Seneca College on Feb. 24-25.

# "Rocky" nordic victory for Limehouse skier

Most athletes are accustomed to receiving trophies and medallions for their winning efforts.

But for Limehouse resident Tim Parker a rock will do just nicely.

A rock was just what Parker, 17, won when he cruised to first place overall at the annual Algonquin Marathon cross-country ski race at Algonquin Park on Feb. 17-18.

The rock which Parker received for his winning display is actually a piece of carved and polished granite and the GDHS student wouldn't trade it for a dozen more traditional trophies. "It's kind of a unique trophy," he said.

The Algonquin event combines two races with competitor's times tallied to give an overall standing. Parker came fifth in the 40-km marathon on Feb. 18 and combined that with a first in the 26-km "loppet" on Feb. 19 to produce an overall winning time of five-hours, 11-minutes and 30-seconds.

Parker also won first in the 19 and Under division in the 40-km distance.

"It was a good race," said Parker of the grueling event. "There were some 600-metre climbs where you'd see stars and almost pass out by the time you reached the top."

The win at Algonquin is yet another highlight in what's been a strong second season back in cross-country, or "nordic" ski competition for Parker.

After competing in the nine to 11-year-old categories Parker left competitive skiing for about five years, returning to racing just last year.

Prior to the Algonquin race he helped GDHS capture second overall in Halton by placing third at the Glen Eden-based GHAC competition on Feb. 13. He probably would even have placed higher had a course discrepancy not played havoc with official lap-counting.

At the Eastern Canadian nordic championships where Parker represented the Chinguacousy

Nordic Ski Club, the grade 12 GDHS student placed 44th out of 70 racers in the 15-km classical event and 51st out of 70 in the 10-km freestyle race. Not bad finishes for a skier just two years back in competition.

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"Rocky"

Seventeen-year-old Tim Parker of Limehouse shows off his trophies - one of them a piece of sculptured granite - after claiming first place overall in the Algonquin Marathon, a long-distance nordic (cross-country) ski race held in the park last weekend. Parker will lead the GDHS Rebel nordic ski team into OFSAA competition this week. (Herald photo)

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