

The Lions in Autumn

A PERSONAL THANKSGIVING BY DONNA DANIELLI

The mouth watering smell of roast turkey hung in the air while a dedicated crew of volunteers scrambled in the kitchen, stirring pots, mashing potatoes and making gravy. Typical holiday activities for a holiday that was anything but typical as 114 strangers sat down to break bread and share a dinner together.

Thanksgiving had come to the little town of Dorset nestled in a corner of Ontario. It was a Thanksgiving feast unlike many of the others taking place all over Canada that day. The diners at this meal have more to be grateful for than most.

Lions Camp Dorset is a haven, a getaway spot for those dependant on life saving hemodialysis. Dialysis is a treatment for people whose kidneys have failed. Hemodialysis uses an artificial kidney machine which cleans the blood, removing excess waste and water before returning the clean blood to the bloodstream. Each hemodialysis treatment takes between three and five hours and usually three treatments a week are needed.

Traditionally hemodialysis takes place within a hospital dialysis unit, making it impossible for patients with renal (kidney) failure to travel anywhere a dialysis unit is not within ready access. It is possible to arrange for treatment at other facilities in Canada and worldwide, but these plans need to be made months in advance and patients are responsible for any out of country costs which are not covered by OHIP. Lions Camp Dorset, the only facility of its kind within Ontario, makes a holiday affordable to families of such patients.

"This has been a real godsend for us," says Rockwood's Joyce Duffield, whose husband Wayne is a dialysis patient. "We thought that this (Wayne's diagnosis) was the end of the cottage for us. Coming up here has given him hope that there's more to life than just dialysis. Thanks so much to the Lions clubs that have donated to this camp to make

it possible." Wayne echoes his wife's sentiment, saying "All of the Lions clubs should be congratulated."

A non-profit organization as well as a government recognized Independent Health Facility, Lions Camp Dorset was founded and continues to be supported by the Lions and Lionesses Clubs, both in Ontario and worldwide. From its humble beginnings of 3 cottages in 1978, it has grown to a state of the art hemodialysis treatment centre offering fifteen cottages and 15 efficiency

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units that provide a family getaway in the heart of Ontario's vacation land.

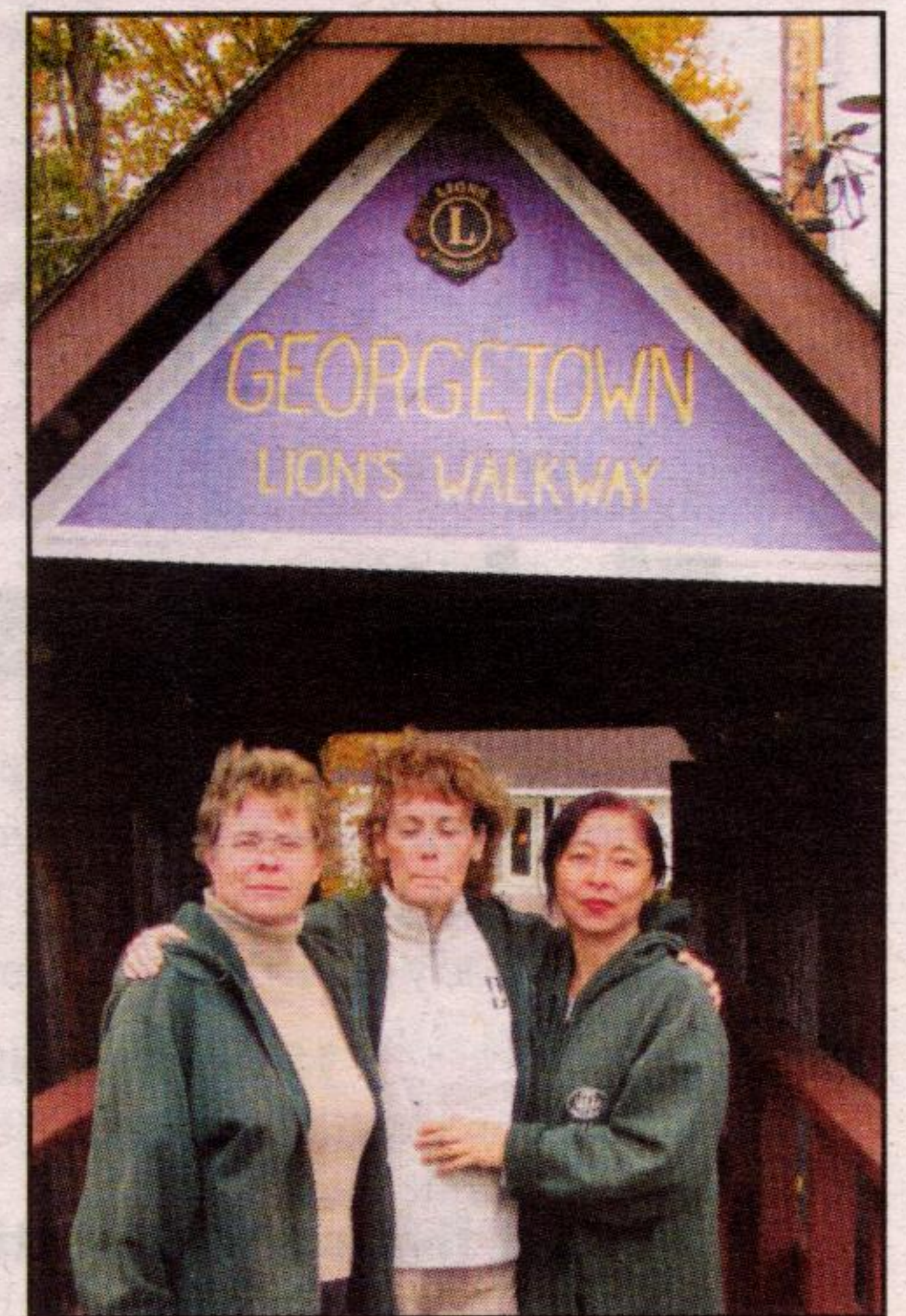
Ontario hospital dialysis units are each assigned one week throughout the summer when their patients are accepted at Lions Camp Dorset. Administration Coordinator Kellie Clarke and husband Evan Turner, who is the Nurse Manager for the unit, noticed that during the eighteen years they have been managing the camp, demand has grown to the point where not all applicants could be accommodated each summer. Evan, for whom the position of Nurse Manager had been created, had been too successful at his job. The unit could accommodate 32 patients per day, but it still wasn't enough to meet the demand, and waiting lists grew longer and longer. Nine years ago, they decided to open the camp for the week previous to Thanksgiving, allowing more patients the opportunity to get away for a vacation. Thanksgiving dinner is a potluck for all of the patients and their families, strangers with one thing in common, the need for life saving treatment. They may all have arrived as strangers, but they left one another at the end of the week with hugs and promises to keep in touch.

"It becomes a big extended family,"

says Kellie, as she sits in her office that is crammed with mementoes and heart felt thank you cards gathered over the years. She is especially grateful to the various donors who help to keep the camp debt and mortgage free. "We receive money each year from the Kidney Foundation and the Lions family of clubs have been wonderfully generous to us," she explains. "These clubs were amazing, from the big to the small, sometimes fundraising for years to but a single machine." Individual contributions are also gratefully received by the Camp, which honours donors of \$100 or more as Honourary Directors on a plaque in the community room. "I'm always amazed at how generous people are," says an awed Kellie.

While Kellie finds a way to pay the bills, it's up to Evan to make the camp experience as fun as possible. He leads the patients daily through the camp theme song, bellowing out at the top of his lungs, "I get knocked down, but I get up again, ain't never going to keep me down." Nurses can be found jitterbugging in the aisles along with the music, much to the amusement of the patients. Anyone not singing along, risks a visit from the wacky hemodialysis nurse's water pistol. "Evan shot me with cold water," laughs Rockwood's Mary Davis. "He was aiming for Rosa, but he got me." For Rosa Marticorena, a hemodialysis nurse from Toronto East General Hospital who has been working part summers at Lions Camp Dorset for the past fourteen years, it is that sense of fun that sets the camp apart from a more traditional unit. "Nursing here is the way we dream it should be," she explains. "We look after the patients but we make sure that they have fun too. It's not like being in the hospital." For Marilyn Bird, a hemodialysis nurse from the Guelph unit who has spent all of her summers at Lions Camp Dorset for the past fourteen years, the chief pleasure comes from watching her patients get into the fun and have a good time during their treatments. "I love it," she says. "I see what it does for patients and their families to get away. You can see them relax. Sometimes it's

more important for the spouses or the children to be here. Illness is stressful for a family, and here at Lions Camp Dorset, everyone benefits." Marilyn is also quick to point out that along with all the donors who support the camp, the hospital units who send their staff to the camp each year should also be acknowledged for their support. "I'm very appreciative that the Grand River Hospital (parent unit for the Guelph dialysis unit) allows me to



PHOTOS BY DONNA DANIELLI

Lions Camp Dorset Administration Coordinator Kellie Clarke poses with hemodialysis nurses Cheryl Keys and Rosa Marticorena on the walkway built with funds donated by the Georgetown Lions Club. Signs like this, acknowledging the various clubs for their support, could be found all over the camp.

take a leave of absence each summer," she says.

For Evan Turner, the man who saw the potential for Lions Camp Dorset and has worked, along with wife Kellie, for the last eighteen years to turn it into the haven it now is, it is all about the patients. He laughs with them, he teases them outrageously and he mourns them when they are gone. He led the Thanksgiving diners in a special prayer to remember all those who had been lost from their dialysis units in the past year with a tear in his eye. "When you go home, call your local Lions Club, call your local Kidney Foundation chapter. Tell them you were here and what it meant to you," he told the 114 strangers who had become one another's extended family for the week. "Thank them from the bottom of your hearts for all of us."

This daughter of a dialysis patient would like to gratefully acknowledge my appreciation for the Lions and Lionesses Clubs of the area and the Kidney Foundation for an unforgettable holiday, for both mother and daughter. We are so grateful. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.



Evan Turner (left), Nurse Manager for Lions Camp Dorset, shares a laugh with wife Kellie Clarke and friend Todd Lawrence. Evan and Todd are dressed as their alter egos "Dr. P.A. Littlemore" and "Dr. Ben Dover". Making his patients laugh and forget their troubles is an important mandate for Evan, who is joined in the frivolity each year by Todd. For Todd giving the dialysis patients a good laugh is an especially poignant experience as he recalls his days as a patient at the camp before his successful transplant.



Rockwood's Joyce and Wayne Duffield share a moment together before Wayne enters the medical centre built with funds raised by the Burlington Lions Club for his hemodialysis treatment.