

A cut above the rest

Georgetown barber carries on family tradition

BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Talk to Patrick Bowman and you'll pretty much figure it was inevitable that he became a barber. Barbering goes back as far as the early 1900s in his family. Patrick, who owns Patrick's Barber Shop and Men's Hairstyling in Georgetown, can rattle off the names of a lot of family members that preceded him in the trade.

In fact, the story of barbering and its connection with Patrick's family winds its way around his family tree like the white

'bandage' on a red barber pole. Aside from his Dad and grandfather, there were two great uncles that answered the call to barbering, Wilson and Hubert Bowman. Prior to the Second World War, they worked together cutting hair at the Granite Club in Toronto. Then there's Patrick's mom, Eleanor, who worked for 30 years as a hairdresser.

David George Bowman Sr., Patrick's great-grandfather, emigrated to Canada in the 1840s. He didn't really have much of a choice. "He was a staunch Orangeman. He married an Irish Catholic. If that's not living a double life than I don't know what is."

Instead of the barbering life it was the clip clop of horses' hooves that drove David George's existence. He and his wife, Agnes, settled in the Kingston area, where David George worked driving a stagecoach between Odessa and Newburg, Ontario. Then it was on to Toronto where he took on work deco-

rating carriages at the York Carriage Company.

It was David George's son, George David Sr., who began making his living with scissors. Born in 1893, Patrick's grandfather apprenticed as a barber sometime between 1910 and 1915. By 1926, he had a barber's chair at the back of a tobacco store on St. Clair Avenue in Toronto. The price of a haircut in those

days was 10 cents, not a bad price from today's perspective.

Patrick would watch his Dad, George David Jr., a veteran of more than 40 years, cutting hair. Spending time with his dad often meant going to the barbershop. A newspaper article, framed and placed on an old barber's chair relates how, as a child, Patrick would play bows and arrows with perm rods and stir sticks.

But the barbering tradition of the Bowmans was almost broken. A virtuoso performer with flashy scissors? Not Patrick. "I had no real desire to be a barber." Instead, after graduating from Bruno's School of Hair Design in Mississauga in the 1990s, Patrick worked in sales. Selling was gruelling work, with more and more demands to generate more and more dollars; Patrick admits he had trouble just getting up in the morning. He called

it quits and followed his family tradition. "It (barbering) just showed up." Patrick opened his own barbershop in Etobicoke. His Dad, who passed away

"NO MORE LATCH KEY KIDS.
NO MORE COMMUTING"



A photo of Patrick Bowman's Dad and grandfather, both barbers, hangs on the wall at his shop. Below their picture is another one of his Dad, George David Bowman Jr., giving a free haircut to the marketing manager for the CNE during opening day.



Patrick Bowman sits atop an old barber chair inside his business located on Guelph Street in Georgetown. Patrick moved to the area over two years ago, and this year he opened his barbershop, Patrick's Barber Shop and Men's Hairstyling at 146 Guelph St.

in 1999, predicted failure within a few months, but he defied his Dad's expectations.

Not long ago, another change occurred in his life - something of the explosive variety. He got fed up with Toronto, especially after a natural gas explosion that took place in Etobicoke, a little too close to home. Seven people died as a result of the accident. "It basically blew my ... mind. Anyhow, we packed up and moved here." Patrick opened his business at 146 Guelph Street, corner of Brucewood Drive and Guelph St in Georgetown, this fall.

Georgetown appealed to him, in part because his sister, Caroline Bowman, who works as a hairdresser at Creative Reflections in Georgetown, liked the place. There were also other advantages. It's friendly here as Patrick notes, unlike Toronto where people "are in your face and no one even cracks a smile." Then there were the advantages for his family, including his wife Caroline and their two daughters, Kelly, 13, and Ashley, 11. "No more latch key kids. No more commuting."

The shop in Georgetown, where Patrick and his family live above the business, is a house, circa 1950s. Renovations began in December of last year and continued into early 2004. The basement was torn up and as Patrick relates, "we threw the debris out the back deck." After reframing, painting, and insulating the house, it looks like a newer home both from

the inside and outside.

But history - and a museum of sorts - can be found inside his barbershop. A children's barbershop set, dating from the 1950s, hangs on one wall and there are old barber's chairs in the room, including a Koken model that Patrick says has been "around for over a 100 years."

Patrick can tell stories about his grandfather, George David Sr., a "well known character in his community," who barbered for a living, but gambled on the side, making frequent trips to Yonkers, a section of New York City where he practised his other passion. That's how he got the nickname Yank. During the Depression, Patrick says his grandfather was known for his generosity. His was one business that didn't suffer with the nosedive in the stock market. As a barber he was able to provide for his own family, but he also gave away groceries and money to people in need.

Patrick likes to help out others as well, but he prefers to do it quietly as his grandfather did. And he would like to continue this tradition in his new home in Georgetown. "He was the type that always gave money. But he didn't like too much attention in his face. I guess you could call it a natural form of humility."

Patrick's Barber Shop is open for business from Tuesday to Friday from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m. and on Saturday from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. To reach the barbershop, call 905-877-1212.



On the walls at Patrick's Barber Shop you'll find everything from a collection of scissors to assorted memorabilia. There are old posters, old photographs and tools of the trade - all relating to the barbering life. Occasionally, you'll also find touches of humour, not necessarily related to getting your haircut. A sign on one wall proclaims, "Please do not sit on the body bags." The shop is also home to a toy dancing hamster. And, for the little ones, Patrick can show off a lump of coal he got from Santa one Christmas.



Patrick's Barber Shop and Men's Hairstyling, corner of Brucewood and Guelph, is the new barbershop in town in Georgetown. Owner Patrick Bowman, who used to own a barbershop in Toronto, can do simple haircuts or specialty cuts. He's cut hair for a lot of people. And, as he told one little boy, even Santa is one of his clients. "He comes for a beard trim just before he delivers his toys."