

# Crash survivor plays thankful tune

She's lucky to be alive.

Seven years ago, Tessa Lewis, then 21, was involved in a head-on collision with a large moving van near Uxbridge.

The impact demolished her pick-up truck and left her with two broken legs, a broken arm and other injuries.

She spent four weeks in Toronto's Sunnybrook hospital followed by more than two years' recovery at home.

"I don't remember much about it," Tessa says. "I do know seat belts saved my life."

Tessa admits she owes much to the skill of physicians and nurses at Sunnybrook for improving her chances of returning to normal life.

"The Sunnybrook staff were wonderful; absolutely amazing," she says.

In the same breath, she praises management and staff at Stouffville's Schell Lumber Ltd., where she works as a customer service advisor.

*She spent four weeks in Toronto's Sunnybrook hospital followed by more than two years' recovery at home.*

"They're excellent people," she states, "after a two-and-a-half year hiatus, they welcomed me back, even re-trained me for a desk position."

Tessa admits, in an instant, her whole life changed.

Prior to the accident, she was entering third year at Trent University in Peterborough. Due to a long recovery period, she was forced to drop out.

But one thing hadn't changed, her love of music, in particular, fiddle music.

Recently, she performed with keyboardist Bill Johnson at a concert at Stouffville United Church.

Tessa comes by her fiddling talents honestly. Her great-grandfather, Stanley Lewis, was equally skilled. So was her grandfather, Harold Lewis.

Tessa's parents, Tom and Theresa Lewis, excel on guitars. They've also sung as a vocal duo on many occasions.

Tessa began taking lessons at age four and later studied under the tutelage of Barrie's Eleanor Townsend, for many years a champion fiddle player at the Shelburne Festival.

"She won the competition so many times, they finally made her a judge," Tessa says with a laugh.

Tessa and husband Chris (Wilkinson), reside in Uxbridge. So do her parents. She has two sisters, Amanda in London and Elaina in



## Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

Zephyr. A brother Tom lives at Sunderland.

Bluegrass music is what Tessa enjoys most, an appeal inherited from her father.

In addition to concerts locally, she participated for a time at the Pine Ridge Bluegrass Club in Oshawa. She also did a short stint with the Good Brothers of Richmond Hill. Her goal is to serve in a studio back-up band and eventually cut a CD.

"I'll see where life leads," she says.

Despite the fact she required seven operations, including several on her left arm, Tessa hasn't allowed these setbacks to curtail her enthusiasm.

Fortunately, the nerve ends on fingers of her left hand were not adversely effected, giving her renewed hope her fiddling days could continue.

"I still suffer a few aches and pains, but nothing I can't handle," she says. For a time, she feared she might lose the use of her left arm completely.

"You deal with what comes your way and keep going," she said. "Because of the accident, I've endured a lot of hurt, but, at the same time, I've enjoyed a lot of good."

The good, she admits, is her return to Schell's and an opportunity to continue her fiddle music.

A native of Uxbridge, Tessa played the baritone in her high school band. But her love of the fiddle persisted, even to instructing others while still in her teens.

Tessa refuses to hide her admiration for Bill and Janet Johnson, describing Bill as a great guy and Janet as wonderful woman.

The concert at Stouffville United is one of only a few times she and Bill have played together.

"I really enjoyed it," she says. So did the audience, according them a standing ovation.

The instrument Tessa uses was purchased at an auction sale for \$50.

At the time, she realized its value, but others didn't.

Since then, she's been offered as much as \$1,500 for it but it's not for sale. New fiddles can cost up to \$15,000, she says.

Still, the age-old question

persists. What's the difference between a fiddle and a violin?

"No difference," Tessa explains. "Only the way it's played."

And that's what Tessa intends to keep doing.

"As long as I'm able, I'll keep on playing," she insists, "it's part of what I am."

Seven years ago, this possibility was in doubt.

But Tessa Lewis would not be denied her dream.



**TESSA LEWIS:** Schell Lumber employee has returned to playing fiddle following accident.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.

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