

Fire forced demolition

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trophes."

Despite the laughter, Mrs. Duly-Lisle is in pain. Before the fire, the couple had just completed installing a zero-clearance fireplace.

"When you're doing it (the insurance company) will not insure your house until the fire department comes and inspects it," she said. "We were hyper vigilant about fires because we knew we had no insurance."

Because the couple had no house insurance, they moved to Welland to live with her father. Mr. Lisle continued commuting to Toronto - he does quality assurance for Expertech, while Mrs. Duly-Lisle travelled to Niagara Falls where she was a heavy equipment operator instructor.

NO HOUSE INSURANCE

The Lisles had no other choice but to the tear down the heavily damaged shell they called home for 20 years.

A civil case is pending.

"Me and the neighbour, we've been friends for 20 years and I have to sue him now," she said.

As a heavy equipment operator, Mrs. Duly-Lisle thought in order to save what little money the couple had, she would rent the equipment and demolish the house herself.

Mrs. Duly-Lisle has experienced her share of chauvinistic behaviour before, but this latest encounter, she said, was one of the worst and dragged on for six months.

"They blocked me every which way to Sunday so they (didn't) have to give me a machine," she said of the heavy equipment rental company she dealt with.

But when the machine finally arrived on May 22, Mrs. Duly-Lisle's toughest job was just about to start.

"It's just horrific. ... I know what I'm supposed to do, I can't do it," she said.

If it were anybody else's home, it would have been leveled in half a day. It took her three.

"I got out of the machine at least 50 to 60 times," she said. "I'm emotionally exhausted. I hardly sleep. ... I'm dying inside."

Like most little girls, Mrs. Duly-Lisle took dance lessons as a child and loved it.

"(My mom) always kept me in little crinolines and stuff. I was a little Barbie doll. But then at eight years old, I went: 'That's enough of that. I'm not wearing that stuff no more.' So I went to bicycles and I'd challenge the boys all the time," she said.

Despite giving up the frills, Mrs. Duly-Lisle continued dancing and even moved to Edmonton at 15 to become a ballroom dance instructor for Arthur Murray studios.

"You're supposed to be 21. I lied. I've been 21 for a lot of years," the 56-year-old said.

In 1985, Mrs. Duly-Lisle decided she'd had enough of ballroom dancing and tinkering with bikes. She wanted a new challenge.

After completing her GED (Mrs. Duly-Lisle left high school in Grade 10), she enrolled in Sheridan College's heavy equipment operations program. She has A, C, Z and M licences.

"It helps to be overqualified if you're a girl," she said. "(I) knocked myself (out) to get that (diploma). All my marks were honours."

"The only thing that got me my jobs was the union," she said. "Because no one else is going to hire you unless they've really got an open mind and when you're talking construction people, it doesn't go far."

She may have been forced upon the other workers, but once she got onto the job site, she was just another labourer, with one rule.

"You never go out with the guys you work with, never," she said.

"The first crew I had when I worked at Con Drain was the best crew I ever had," she said.



STAFF PHOTO/NICK IWANYSHYN

Heavy machine operator Cat Duly-Lisle takes a break from demolishing her own house, her last job before permanent retirement. The Musselman's Lake home was damaged in a fire.

"They were like seven brothers. I was single then, too. When the Christmas party came around for Con Drain, I brought my father because if I would have brought a date those guys would have killed him."

COUPLE PLANS TO TRAVEL

Mrs. Duly-Lisle has worked on projects throughout Ontario including six years constructing Hwy. 407.

In 2007, after 22 years in the field, she turned her attention to training new heavy equipment operators.

"I've had about 200 students," she said. "Honest to God, that school was the best. I

had so much fun."

In June 2009, she retired.

Mrs. Duly-Lisle is now a volunteer dog walker at the Welland and District Humane Society. She also volunteers at a shelter for abused women and with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"It's kids that have been bullied and Lord knows I know about being bullied," she said.

Mrs. Duly-Lisle isn't quite sure what she wants to do now. Once the civil case on the house fire has been settled, the couple will likely buy a motor home and travel North America.

CORRECTION NOTICE



CAPTAIN GEORGE'S FISH & CHIPS

An incorrect time was printed on Captain George's Ad that ran May 29th in the Stouffville Sun-Tribune Readers Choice Section.

Captain George's Fish & Chips is open

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