

COLUMNS

When an obituary hits home like an old song

I've been reading a lot of obituaries lately. And that's with no offence to the multitude of fine reporters and columnists filing award-winning copy to this news organization and others.

In this industry, we know submitted death notices and letters to the editor have always been some of the best-read items printed or posted.

Obituaries are often unfil-tered, fascinating life stories, sometimes revealing informa-tion found nowhere else. They can inspire, entertain and educate.

Perhaps it's a product of my own advanced age and the people I choose to associ-ate with, but the obituary hits home now more than ever.

There's the old joke about people reading death notices in their morning paper just to make sure they're still alive. (Yes, I'm here all week. I hope. Please, tip your servers.)

My father, who died three years ago at the age of 95, would recognize so many names in the death notices, he wondered who would be left to attend his funeral. He needn't have worried.

I flew home to Thunder Bay last week and was reading the obits in the hometown daily when I stumbled upon a name from the past. It jumped off the newsprint like a Raptors' three-pointer.

It was that of a friend from high school and university. Despite promises to the con-trary, we had lost touch fol-lowing a chance meeting in downtown Toronto in the early 1980s.

According to the write-up, he settled in the Peterborough area where he worked, helped raise two girls and performed good deeds in the community. That sounded right.

Until cancer took him, if I'm reading between the lines accurately.

I teared up then broke into a grin, recalling a weekend to



Off The Top
with Jim Mason

remember we shared almost 40 years ago.

Four of us somehow piled into a Toyota Celica for the seven-hour drive into the bright lights of Minneapolis. We did what college kids do.

We ate and drank bad things.

Saw the NHL North Stars play before they moved to Dallas and simply became the Stars.

Caught concerts in intimate theatres by future arena rock-ers Kansas and the magnifi-cent Robert Palmer.

We frequented a former Greyhound bus depot turned nightclub that Twin Cities' favourite son, Prince, would make legendary in the movie *Purple Rain*.

Nothing earth-shattering here.

But maybe a reminder. Hug your kids. Then hug them again.

Call your parents — and not just on mother's and father's days. Better yet, visit them.

Reach out to friends. Make new ones and not just on Facebook.

Robert Palmer died in 2003. He was 54.

You probably already know, Prince died last Thursday. He was 57.

And my old friend Chester is up there with them.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tri-bune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor

Month of music kicking off

W e're Music Town, Ontario. While politi-cians have yet to accord Whitchurch-Stouffville this once-authorized distinction, (but later Country Close to the City), the proof is in the listening. Not a week or a weekend goes by without this self-assumed claim to fame attracting public atten-tion and attendance.

And hopefully the same enthusiasm will apply when Stouffville Cares hosts a community concert this Sunday at 7 p.m., in the auditorium of Stouffville District Secondary School. Adult admission is \$10. Please circle the date.

Young and not-so-young, representing a cross-section of our town, are giving freely of their time and talents in an effort to augment the coffers of the Syrian refugee fund.

The Fandis, a father, mother and four children from Syria via Jordan, are currently benefitting from earlier out-pourings of generosity and a second family is now on the guest list.

While not a member of the original Stouffville Cares committee, my Jimmy-come-lately association has been warmly received. So much so they've allowed me a free hand in organizing Sunday's show. With amaz-ing responses from everyone involved.

"Thanks for the privilege of being a part of so reward-ing a cause," has been a common reply. However, in a town possessing a wealth of musical talent, the proces-sion of participants is only the tip of the iceberg. There are countless others waiting in the wings.

Those taking part Sunday will include: The Stouffville District Secondary School wind symphony under the direction of Diane Marlatt; the school's concert chorus



Roaming Around
with Jim Thomas

directed by Miriam Sellick-Smith; the St. Mark Catholic School choir under the direc-tion of Susan Whitebread; vocal soloists Sydnee Gug-lietti; Susan Ryman; Rosa Alaimo; Lloyd Knight; Vince Parry and Gary Burke; Doris and Lisa Harvey and trump-et player Tim Birtch.

Jim Mason, editor of the Stouffville Sun-Tribune is the concert's emcee. Rev. Joan Masterton, minister of Stouffville's St. James Pres-byterian Church will deliver the invocation and update the audience on the achieve-ments of Stouffville Cares, the host organization.

Due to the charitable for-mat of the concert, the York Region District School Board has kindly waived their regu-lar rental fee.

Q and A at school

Questions flowed and so did answers when WS YOU 177 held a youth/seniors special at Stouffville's Wen-dat Village Public School April 14.

Grade 8 students con-ducted interviews with local residents, some of whom have lived here all their lives.

"We were hoping for a mix of prominent people and ordinary people; work-ing people and retired peo-ple; a range of 'older' ages," explained program director Brian Puppa. "The result was amazing."

Supplied with this infor-mation, the students will now prepare 300-word essays and enter their completed projects in the Whitchurch-Stouffville Lis-ten-to-a-Life Contest.

Month of music

May is definitely Music Month in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

In addition to the com-munity concert Sunday at Stouffville District Secondary School, four additional per-formances are scheduled.

May 5 at 7 p.m., the Stouffville District Secondary School wind symphony will share the spotlight with the SDSS choir 'Spartan Sound' in hosting their spring con-cert.

May 7, the Bach to Blues company will stage two con-certs at Stouffville's Christ Church Anglican, one at 2:30 p.m. and another at 7:30 p.m. The appropriate theme is 'A Salute to Moms'. The barber-shop quartet 'Aristocrats' will share the stage.

May 14, Stouffville's own Men of Note male voice choir will host its annual spring concert at Christ Church Anglican. Time is 7:30 p.m.

May 26, 'Diamond Elvis', (Rob Frank), will take over at Nineteen on the Park for two performances at 3 and 7 p.m. Proceeds will go to the cancer unit, Toronto's Sick Children's Hospital.

June 29, the annual Music Festival held in conjunction with Strawberry Festival Week will take place held at 8 p.m. in Stouffville United Church. The concert will be highlighted by the Men of Note and vocal soloist Susan Ryman. The 2016 Music Town, Ontario award will be presented by last year's recipient, violinist Matthew Eeuwes.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 65 years.