

In My Father's Footsteps

By Trish Cheveldayoff

When you walk through the front door of Marg and Al Lovas' Saskatoon home, you can't help but notice the box of toys sitting on the living room floor. The toys belong to Marg and Al's grandson Innis. He's 14 months old and his clear Grandma and Grandpa play an important role in his life. Innis is spending more time with Marg and Al since their daughter O'Lynda went back to work as a registered nurse in mid-January.

"I've taken on a bit more than just Grandma," says Marg Lovas. He's had quite a few digestive issues. He's doing well now. He's growing. He's thriving so, that's the most important thing."

When Marg isn't spending time with Innis, she can be found in Warman, working as a substitute teacher at the same school she taught at for many years before retiring in 2005. Marg graduated from the University of Saskatchewan's College of Home Economics. Her major was clothing and textiles with a minor in interior design. As a young girl she always enjoyed sewing and over the years has done a lot of custom sewing for people. She still sews today but her new pastime is machine embroidery.

"I specialize in personalizing baby gifts with some embroidery and I do a lot of knitting which I took up after I retired," says Marg. "My mom knit a lot."

Marg's mother Raema Tennent was also a school teacher. She taught in Saskatoon before she and her husband Bob moved to Melfort in 1949. Bob had just graduated from the University of Saskatchewan's College of Engineering when he was offered a job in Melfort as the town engineer. They soon started a family. Bob Junior arrived first; then Marg followed by George, Helen and twin brothers Cam and Dave. The family lived in a two bedroom apartment atop the town's fire hall. They eventually made the move to Saskatoon in 1959. Marg was in Grade 2.

"Dad had a job as a draftsman for the City of Saskatoon," says Marg. "He crept up the ladder and when he retired after 29 years and 11 months, he was Assistant City Engineer. "

In 1977, while working for the city, Bob Tennent was appointed to sit on the Jubilee Residences Inc. Board.

"He was very good friends with Howard Stensrud and Eric Antonini, all of those guys," says Marg. "They were good friends. It was a bit of a natural fit."

Bob proved to be an asset to the board, providing among other things, financial oversight. He served on the JRI Board and later the Jubilee Residences Foundation Board for a total of 30

years. He strongly believed that serving on the board meant more than just attending a few meetings throughout the year. He felt it was important to be visible to the residents of Porteous and Stensrud Lodges. Carving the turkey on Christmas Day at Stensrud Lodge became an annual event.

“We literally didn’t do anything Christmassy,” says Marg. “We’d have breakfast, but no gift opening or no dinner or anything until my Dad came back from Stensrud. Every Christmas he went and carved the turkey there. That was something he always did. We would just wait for him to come home; sometimes we weren’t so patient.”

Ill health eventually forced Bob to step away from his board duties. In 2007, he was named an honorary board member.

“He was getting on in years,” says Marg. “He’d been through a lot. He smashed his shoulder and then he broke his hip and then things went downhill. His mind was still pretty good at that point.”

Bob’s stepping down from the board left a vacancy on the Foundation Board. Heather Anderson was a board member at the time. She approached Marg and asked her if she would consider taking over her father’s position on the board.

“I thought I’m not sure I can bring as much to the table as maybe they think because I didn’t get a lot of engineering osmosis from my Dad,” laughs Marg.

Despite Marg’s insecurities about her abilities, she agreed to sit on the Foundation Board.

“I would go to functions with him all the time and I would drive him but then, once I was on the board and I was going to the meetings, I would come back and sort of fill him in as to what was going on,” says Marg. “I wanted to keep him in the loop and make him feel like he was still part of something.”

In Marg’s 11 years on the Foundation Board she has witnessed firsthand the challenges in providing quality care to the older adults in the community. She recognizes there are many needs and few dollars to go around and believes the work of the Foundation is more important than ever. The Foundation’s Comforts of Home Campaign which involves refurbishing all the resident rooms at Porteous and Stensrud Lodges was something Marg got behind in a big way. The plan is to provide each resident room with a fresh coat of paint, new flooring, window treatments, bedside table, and dresser and visitor chair. Marg was tasked with sourcing and pricing the items for the project and creating an interior design colour board. The project allowed for choice; giving the residents four colour palettes to choose from. Marg’s interior design background came in handy.

“I haven’t used it very much,” says Marg. “It gave me a chance to dabble. I’ve seen a couple of the rooms. The one I saw, it was done in that pale turquoise colour. It looked quite good.”

Marg perhaps doesn’t have an engineering degree like her father Bob did, but what she feels she does bring to the table is her common sense approach to things. She calls herself a regular person who sometimes will challenge the status quo and ask the question, “Can we do things a little bit differently?” Her reason for joining the board may have simply been to carry on the work her father started more than forty years ago but her reason for remaining on the board today has more to do with making a difference in the lives of the residents who call Porteous Lodge and Stensrud Lodge home.

“For me, the knowledge that hopefully we are making something better for people; that’s important to me.”