



Your Voice

MUN Pensioners' Association (MUNPA) Newsletter • Vol. 18, No.5, Dec. 2020

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*Welcome
to our December 2020
publication of Your Voice.*

This year has indeed been a year to remember and great uncertainty awaits us into 2021. We are experiencing a classic state of “hurry up and wait”, though without the humour. That said, the holiday season is approaching, and, while it may be unfamiliar in terms of how we celebrate, let’s not lose sight of the many things we can celebrate.

In this issue of Your Voice, we celebrate stories about our colleagues, including our MUNPA founder, Dr. Alastair Riach, and Dorothy Riach. These stories are engaging and remarkable in unmasking the interesting ways our lives unfold. We invite you all to read these wonderful narratives and think about your own story. Would you like to share?

President's Message

The year 2020 is almost over. Few of us will forget it. 2020 has been the year in which everything has been different -- the year we didn't travel, go out, or chat with friends and neighbours in the way we normally would. Everything, from the mundane to the exotic has been different. Memorial's campuses are ghost towns. Returning to the Works this summer, I started counting cars in lot 3, by the Aquarena. Usually there were three or four, on a busy day, seven. Even the mundane task of shopping has been different. Hand sanitizer is ubiquitous. So are arrows and circles on the floor. Checking out is different: Greeting us are clerks behind barriers, straining to hear voices muffled by masks. Gone is the casual chit chat and kibitzing, the norm in a society separated not by six, but perhaps three or four, degrees of separation.

It's easy to rattle off lists of what didn't or won't happen. A short one includes MUNPA's 35th anniversary commemoration, the Christmas party we just cancelled, and the concerts and parties we won't be attending. But, thinking this way is an exercise in defeat. Paraphrasing Dr. Seuss, let's not be sad about what wasn't, but glad about what has been. Some of us have become masters of Zoom. Using it, we've been able to keep most of our focus and special interest groups going and share programming not only with colleagues in Corner Brook, but as far west as Victoria. Connecting those dots is something we dreamed about a few years ago. It now happens more or less seamlessly. MUNPA is not the only beneficiary: I've seen more of my family in the US than I normally would, and have

ended up in touch with friends with whom I'd lost contact decades ago. Not everyone wants to go on a nostalgia trip, but it has been fun to catch up with old friends and see how much we still had in common.

Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we've been privileged to live in a relatively COVID-free environment, safe enough that we can follow some of our normal routines. Whether this will last is another matter. Even so we have little choice but to roll with it, making the best of it that we can. Doing so, we should not forget that there are others who are worse off. Many face harsh realities in these unpredictable and complex times. Remember to reach out – safely, of course -- to others.

MUNPA's Board of Directors met on November 25th. We normally raise money for the campus food banks at our Christmas socials. That won't happen this year, but it doesn't mean that we can't help in other ways. Unable to spend as we normally would, MUNPA has been accumulating revenues. The Board is exploring ways in which these can be spent. However, our Bylaws and General Policies cap the amount that can be retrained and direct the Board to donate revenues beyond that cap to scholarships or other funds that support students. Anticipating this, the Board voted to donate \$1000.00 to the St. John's Campus Food Bank and \$500.00 to the Grenfell Campus Food Bank. The vote was unanimous. However, food is not the only need: Memorial's new President, Dr. Vianne Timmons, was on the Signal Hill Campus for another meeting and unexpectedly dropped in on ours. On her mind was the desperation that many students, taking courses remotely and not in contact with each other in the way they normally would be, were feeling. Knowing about it doesn't solve it, but being aware is a first step.

The holiday season is almost upon us. Not traveling and not gathering in the numbers that we normally would, ensure that it will be different. Different does not mean that we cannot enjoy it, reach out to others, or make the best of it. Many of us will be celebrating Channukah, Christmas, or other holidays or just relaxing with friends and family. Enjoy and keep safe.

Steve Wolinetz

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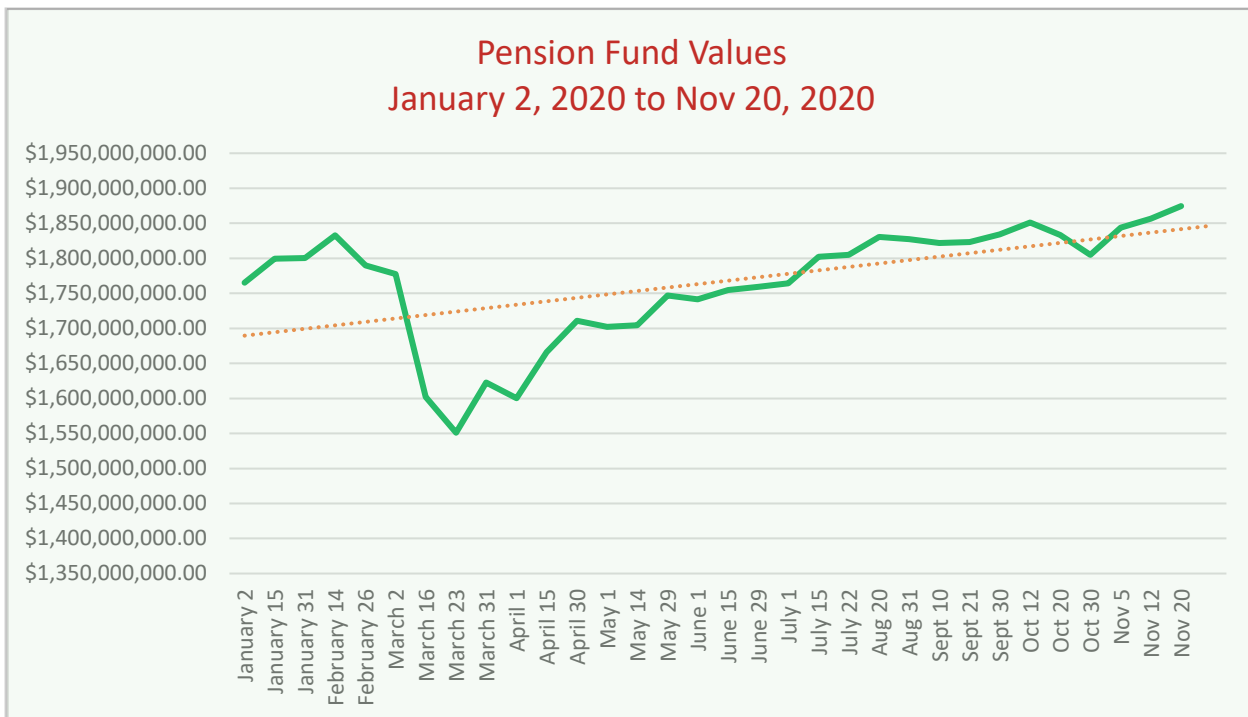
Some Good News

Glen Roberts

Since we last reported on the status of the pension plan, a lot has happened. Pensions have been indexed, markets have rebounded, an actuarial valuation of the pension plan has been completed and the University Pensions Committee has been working on a major asset liability study for the Plan.

In July 2020, 1,849 retirees and principal beneficiaries received an annual pension increase of 1.17%. This represented an overall increase in payments from the pension fund of approximately \$712 thousand per year. Pensions in our plan are increased every July for those who are at least 65 years of age on July 1 and the increase is based upon 60% of the annual change in the cost of living to a maximum pension increase of 1.2%.

2020 has been a year of significant market volatility and our pension fund has experienced its fair share of ups and downs and has, thus far, performed quite well. It has rebounded from the declines experienced in the first quarter of the year and at the time of writing has regained all of the previous losses to move ahead of its opening position at the beginning of the year.



In terms of actual performance, the quarterly results were:

	Returns (%)			
	Quarter	1 Year	5 years	10 years
March 31, 2020	-8.25	-0.65	5.14	8.11
June 30, 2020	10.2	6.72	7.49	9.46
September 30, 2020	3.91	9.12	8.57	9.17

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Growing Up Bi-Lingual

Tony Chadwick

No, not English and French, but Potteries and English. First a little background. My father was born in Stoke-on-Trent and rarely travelled outside the city. However, my mother was born in Barrow-in-Furness, a town in the northern enclave of Lancashire, where she lived until she was about 17. Her father had been born in Ormesby, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, but his parents had married and raised the first three of their children in Huntingdonshire. His father was born in Southampton, where he lived until the age of 19 (I think). All this to indicate the dialect pedigree of my parents: my father, pure Potteries; my mother a hybrid of South and North, overlaid with twenty years' worth of Potteries by the time I was born. In addition, my father was working-class, with no aspirations to rise above that station. My mother, on the other hand, came from a family of trades people – her father had been a french polisher – and she had spent 18 months in London training to be a Salvation Army officer. Her language, as I recall, was plain, embellished by the occasional regional saying: “Well I’ll go to the foot of our stairs!” ; “It’s looking black over Bill’s mother’s”; “That’s

all my eye and Betty Martin”; “He was running like hell in Trentham”, but never a curse word.

My father’s speech was a little difficult to understand at times. He had only three teeth, so dentals were non-existent, and most other consonants indistinct. Not that he spoke a lot, at least not in the house, where he seemed to sleep a lot (I later learned that he was, in all probability, a diabetic), a condition I attributed at the time to work. When he did speak, it was normally to ask when tea was going to be ready, or to indicate that he was going out to the pub, a place where I later discovered he was in his element, playing cribbage or dominoes, occasionally darts, but mostly telling jokes he had picked up that day from his job as a bus conductor. Telling jokes! My father was garrulous! When I first uncovered this talent, I was amazed at how easily language flowed. Oh! Certain consonants were still indistinct, and his Potteries accent was strong, but he was understood by his audience and they appreciated his efforts to enliven their evenings without having to resort to copious amounts of beer.

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Pensions, continued

The University Pension Committee routinely monitors the performance of the pension fund and its various investment managers to ensure that managers are investing as expected and that the investment policy is appropriate for the Plan. To assist with its responsibilities, the Committee has engaged the Plan’s actuary and investment consultant to conduct an asset liability study to quantify risk factors affecting the health and sustainability of the pension plan. Among the objectives will be a long term investment strategy that balances risk with prospective returns in a manner that respects the pension plan’s benefit liability characteristics. It’s expected that this review will result in recommendations to modify the asset allocation strategy for the Plan.

Finally, an actuarial valuation of the pension plan was undertaken during the year and finalized over the summer months. The valuation showed that at December 31, 2019 the Plan’s financial position had improved from the prior year. The unfunded liability had decreased by \$37.4 million, down from \$239.1 million at December 31, 2018 to \$201.7 million at December 31, 2019. The funded ratio consequently improved from 84.6% to 93.2%, based on the market value of assets. Despite the market turmoil experienced early in 2020, its estimated that the plan’s financial position and funded ratio have seen further marginal improvements at the time of writing this article.

Questions related to the pension fund may be directed to myhr@mun.ca.

Glen Roberts is Manager of Benefits, Pensions and Compensation, Human Resources

So growing up in this bilingual setting I slipped easily from one to the other. In school I used my mother's tongue when answering questions or writing an essay. In the playground and with friends in the street, it was all Potteries dialect: accent, vocabulary, and grammar. Playing shotties, there was "no croggin'" allowed; playing football it was "yeddin' the bow", "no croggin'" (again, with a slightly different meaning), "bet thee costna" when challenging for a dare, and so on.

Gradually, my mother's tongue predominated, especially after I passed the 11+ to go to grammar school. Not only did I spend more time at school and, at home, doing homework; I also mixed mainly with middle-class boys. Their parents were professionals, fairly well-to-do, and were hoping their children would soon leave Stoke-on-Trent behind. In addition, elocution lessons were introduced. The headmaster was keen to increase the number of Oxbridge entrants, and thought that a Potteries accent might prove a hinderance. And so it was that Ken Lowe, a young teacher fresh from university, and who had himself grown up in Stoke-on-Trent, tried, for one painful year, to eradicate our largely pure, flat vowels, replacing them with plummy, rounded ones. He tried to make it fun, and so for the Christmas concert that first year, we performed "Wassail, wassail all over the town" in a choral speaking piece. Ken had transformed his Potteries accent into a good

approximation of Oxford English, though occasionally he would slip back.

At the time I did not think it was a matter of cultural eradication, but when I met the same misguided attempts here at Memorial, I was horrified. In Stoke-on-Trent, I did not think we had a culture, and did not think through the ramifications of such attempts to homogenize speech and thought. In Newfoundland, on the other hand, the political lines of such attempts at obliterating cultural distinctness were more clearly drawn. Future teachers were to pronounce their English clearly, without the patina of a bay accent. And as the influence of CBC radio and television grew in the outports, so students from outside St. John's arrived at Memorial with a bland form of English peppered with the slang of American commercial radio via Oz FM et al.

I now have a different opinion of those attempts to make me unilingual. I see it as an attempt to undermine the working-class's confidence in its own self-worth, coupled with the standardisation of the accents I used to hear on radio and television, and the watering down of regional cultural identities. Our local, often pagan folklore, that had survived the church's attempts to make everyone Christian, was to be eroded by "Blue Peter" and "Sooty" for the children, and "Mrs Dale's Diary" for adult women (men were probably seen as a lost cause).

MUN Christmas Hampers 2020

The Campus Food Bank is seeking monetary donations for its annual Christmas Hamper program. Donations are appreciated early December, if possible, and can be made through e-transfers to foodbank@mun.ca. Put a comment in your e-transfer with your home address so we can mail your tax receipt. CanadaHelps also accepts our donations by credit card, and they give the tax receipt to you directly. They charge a small administration fee so we prefer direct gifts to us. Their dedicated donations page for our charity is [here](#). Further details about our hamper program can be found on [our website](#).

Thanks in advance for your support!

The Story of Alastair Riach and Dorothy Riach

Hilary Vavasour

Alastair Riach was born on the 7th of May, 1917, in Elgin, Scotland. In 1934, at the age of 17, he went to Aberdeen University where he graduated MA in 1937, and then went on to post-graduate studies in Divinity. In 1940 he was licensed to the ministry of the Church of Scotland. He joined the Iona Community and was posted to assistantship at the Old Kirk of Edinburgh and worked in Pilton, in a new church-extension area of Edinburgh. This was during World War II. Through this work he met his future wife, Dorothy Gardiner, who was working in youth leadership in Pilton.

Dorothy was born 21st July, 1918, in Edinburgh, Scotland. She had wanted to become a teacher but, due to the Depression, was not able to go to University so trained to become a secretary. She also studied business and commerce, public speaking, current affairs, youth leadership and religious education. One of her lifelong loves was poetry. This skill came to her honestly as she was a descendant of Christopher Wordsworth, brother of the famous poet William Wordsworth. She was named after their sister Dorothy.

Alastair and Dorothy were married in Edinburgh on October 6th, 1942. In 1943 they were charged with the ministry of New St. Bride's Church in Douglas, Lanarkshire. During this time Alastair also worked with the Church of Scotland Huts and Canteens in Belgium and Germany, and attended Jordan Hill Training College in Glasgow where he obtained his teaching Certificate.

In 1947, with two small children in tow, Alastair and Dorothy decided to join the Church of Scotland Missions in Africa. Alastair became a teacher and schools supervisor at the Church of Scotland Mission in Nyasaland (now known as Malawi). They left Malawi in 1951 for a one-year trip back to Scotland where Alastair did further Teacher Training studies through Edinburgh University.

In 1952 Alastair and Dorothy, now with 4 young children, moved to the Church of Scotland



Mission in Kenya. Alastair became principal of the Teacher Training Normal School in Kambui. Unfortunately, about a month after the family arrived in Kenya, the Mau Mau terrorist uprising began, which lasted for 7 years. Kambui was deep in terrorist territory. It was an anxious and dangerous time with a great deal of bloodshed. One of the routes the terrorists took between the Rift Valley and Nairobi went directly below the hill on which the college was situated. For the most part the family and the College remained safe.

During the 10 years Alastair and Dorothy were in Kenya, the Training College moved to Thika Teacher Training College and Thogoto Teacher Training College at Kikuyu (while at Thika the College ceased to be officially run by the Mission Field and was run by a Board of Directors). Dorothy became the College Bursar

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and Secretary to the Board of Governors. She also taught various subjects, including drama. She was a Governor of the Kenya School for the Blind, and a member of the Capricorn Africa Society Bill of Rights Committee, which prepared the bill of rights in preparation for Kenya independence. She worked in youth programmes and became a member of the Board of Governors of the YWCA, as well as the President of the East African Women's League.

In 1962 Uhuru (independence) was coming to Kenya and it was felt unsafe to have 3 young adult daughters (potential wives to the locals), living out in the country, so the decision was made to leave Kenya and Africa. After that time Alastair started to work in Newfoundland. The family stayed in Scotland, which was a short flight from Newfoundland.

In 1962 Alastair began teaching in the Department of Education at Memorial University, as an assistant, then associate and, finally, as a full professor. He continued at MUN until retirement in 1982. While at MUN he studied at the University of Kansas and graduated with an M.A. in 1967. He researched the dialect of Galloway in southern Scotland in 1971/72 and produced a lexicon that was published as the "Galloway Glossary". In 1978 he graduated with Ph.D. from Edinburgh University.

His volunteer work in St. John's included the John Howard Society, the Social Welfare Council, the Memorial and Funeral Planning Society, several church committees at Presbytery, conference, and congregational level in the United Church. He was a member of the Newfoundland Folk Arts Council and a member of Amnesty International. He contributed articles to education, dialect, and religious publications. In addition to all this, over many years he preached and conducted Bible study at St. James United Church in St. John's.

In 1962, when Alastair first moved to St. John's, Dorothy remained in Edinburgh to look after their family who were attending school, and two of whom were starting into their careers. She became the Editor of the *Scottish Primary Quarterly*, as well as starting a university career in her mid 40s. Dorothy completed her M.A. and

Dip.Ed. in the teaching of English Literature at Edinburgh University. She did this in 3 years, which was quite a feat. In 1966, with the two younger family members, she joined Alastair in St. John's. She first taught for one year at the United Junior High School, then in 1967 she accepted a post with the English Department at MUN. She was esteemed as a teacher in the first-year programme and taught at all levels in the undergraduate programme. She worked on the creation of new offerings such as the English Foundation Programme that was introduced in 1968, and in 1978/79 she worked with colleagues to prepare a two-semester programme in English for an Institute of Native teachers in Labrador. She also acquired a second M.A. in English from MUN. From 1966-1969 she prepared CBC School Broadcasts in Geography for Grades 1-7. Dorothy retired from MUN in 1982.

Dorothy's life, both before and after she retired from MUN, continued unabated. Her community involvements included: The Community Services Council, Volunteer Centre Advisory Committee, Youth Plus Intergenerational Committee, the City of St. John's Mayor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Persons with a Disability, the Seniors Outreach Programme, the Newfoundland Safety Council, and the Provincial Task Force on Health Care.

She was an enthusiastic longtime member of the St. John's Choir, an active member of the NDP in Newfoundland, an active member of the St. John's Club of the Canadian Federation of University Women for over three decades, and an active member of the YWCA. She had been a member of the YWCA since her early days in Edinburgh, continuing through her time in Kenya, and serving on the Board of Directors in St. John's. She was involved in the difficult process of amalgamating the YMCA with the YWCA in the late 1970s - then working to have it grow to become the viable and cohesive community agency known today. In 1994 Dorothy was one of the first three Women of Distinction honoured by the YMCA-YWCA in St. John's. One of Dorothy's contributions in her later years was highlighted through her leadership role in developing outreach services for older adults, resulting in programming and services for the 50+ age group.

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My First Day at School

Marilyn Porter

The airstrip could only be identified as such by a tattered windssock blowing in the hot desert wind. The bush plane touched down, bumpily. The rather too cheery South African (white) pilot unloaded our bags, plonked them on the ground and departed. The only landmarks we could see were two pointy hills a few hundred feet high, which, we later learned were called Mma and Rra Swaneng (mother and father Swaneng). Otherwise the sandy bush seemed to stretch interminably, as it did all the way to the true desert, the Kalahari. We lugged our bags and 6 month old baby to the minimal shade of one of the few trees and sat down to await developments. This, you will realise, was well before cell phones, in 1968.

Eventually a battered truck swirled out of its privately created sandstorm and its shady looking driver confirmed that it was our ride. We

The Riach Story, conclusion

Dorothy and Alastair threw themselves into whatever they were involved with and gave their utmost. They were always sincere and genuinely dedicated to their causes, yet were quiet, unassuming people. She and Alastair were always gracious host and hostess, warm and welcoming at both their homes in St. John's and Avondale. They valued their family, especially their seven grandchildren. They were avid gardeners and turned the rough slope at Avondale into a beautiful garden. They travelled the world through SAGA and Elder Hostel (now Road Scholar), organizations that arranged travel that incorporated hands-on learning with adventure. They enjoyed the Newfoundland Symphony, enjoyed art, were lifelong learners, and very sociable people who loved their life in Newfoundland.

Sadly, Dorothy passed away on June 3rd, 1999, followed three months later by her life partner, Alastair, on September 4th, 1999.

Hilary Vavasour is the daughter of Alastair and Dorothy Riach.



The Swaneng Hills

/Swaneng School Website

had arrived as newly minted volunteer teachers at Swaneng Hill School – the only secondary school in Botswana. At least, my husband was the teacher; I was just “a wife.” Progressiveness only goes so far.

And in many respects, Swaneng Hill School was progressive. Founded by a rebellious Afrikaaner called Patrick van Rensburg, and modelled on the ideas of Nyrere, who was revolutionising Tanzania according to socialist principles just north of Botswana. ([History of Swaneng Hill School.](#))

My ex-husband had been recruited to teach English. I was relegated to the Primary School, which mostly served the children of the academic and non-academic staff of SHS. I had a degree in History and a newly minted Oxford Dip. Ed, because my tutor at Trinity had said “Well if you are going to marry you’ll only be able to teach, so you’d better get a teaching qualification.” I was not a particularly good primary school teacher and soon managed to sneak my way into the Development Studies programme in the Secondary school. This taught Nyrere socialism and tended towards sweeping and a-historical generalisations about both economics and sociology. At the time there was scarcely anything written about Botswana apart

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from the anthropologically interesting Bushmen. However trying to find something relevant to teach the students introduced me to a range of literature on development and social issues and set me on the path to Sociology.

More relevantly, it provided me with field experience. I have written about this (briefly) in *Creating a University*. The US Consulate in Gaborone had decided that they needed to find out about the largely unknown country in which they were based, and so were arranging to conduct an economic and social survey of the country – or at least the bits that were reachable. As Serowe was by far the largest community in the country they decided to focus there. Hence the 40 black, sturdy and infinitely desirable bicycles that were entrusted to care of myself and an American colleague called Carl Thayer.

Part of the study involved a socio-economic survey to be administered to a representative sample of the population. We soon ran into difficulties. The Batswana people did not live in one place. Families tended to have a compound in Serowe but members, especially women and young children were to be found on their “lands” – where they had rights to grow crops and graze animals. These were anywhere from 5 to 20 miles from Serowe. Women and children would commute between Serowe and these lands, sometimes staying some weeks there. Then there were the “cattle posts,” collections of shacks way out in the bush that provided centres of sorts for the men and boys who drove the cattle from one meagre piece of grazing to the next. All of this semi nomadic commuting depended on the seasons, especially the erratic and unfaithful “rainy season.” Tracking down respondents for our survey and figuring out their social relationships and economic lives was fascinating, although I don’t think it really helped the Americans to either understand or help Botswana.

When the erratic rains did arrive there would be great jubilation and everyone abandoned the school to make the most of it. It was also the season when the snakes were more numerous. There were few rules for children at Swaneng but one was that they should never

attempt to pick up a snake. They were also forbidden to pick up stones, for fear of the black scorpions that hid under them or go near the dam, which provided such water as we had in the school.

Apart from the regular teaching, students and staff alike were supposed to spend Saturdays doing “voluntary work.” Mostly this was unskilled manual work – digging foundations for future buildings, planting out vegetables and the like. Some volunteers had actual real-life skills and had been recruited to set up courses in woodwork, metal work and weaving. Patrick van Rensburg’s dream was that graduates of these programmes would strike out on their own and set up “settlements” that would be productively self sustaining. This idea became reality in the Foundation for Education and Production, although it had greater success north of Botswana in Zambia.

The great works project during my time was the construction of the School Hall. Its walls of amateur-made clay bricks wobbled upwards and while it was not roofed in my time, it did provide a space for school events. The challenge was the tower or spire that was supposed to top the edifice. Several amateur architects gave this a go, and the drawings were impressive. Unfortunately the execution was not up to the task and the half built tower regularly fell down during the rains.

To my regret, we only spent one year at Swaneng and I returned to the UK pregnant with my second child. I like to think that perhaps that his time in the womb in Botswana contributed to his sunny outlook and resistance to heat. Swaneng Hill School prospered and while it is no longer dependent on amateur volunteers it continues to serve the young people of what is still one of the poorest countries in Africa.



The slopes of Signal Hill: A path less followed

/Mark Graesser

MUNPA's Outing Club: The only game in town?

Three weeks ago, the Outing Club met at the Geo Centre and walked on Signal Hill, not on known paths like the Burma Road, but rather hidden trails none of us had been on. Leading us was Linda Longerich, who lives nearby. A dog-walker, Linda enjoys variety and hates returning the way she came. Linda led on trails that none of us, habitual walkers and long-time residents of St. John's and in some instances, born and bred Newfoundlanders, knew existed.

Joining us was a younger man, Al, probably in his thirties. Hearing that St. John's was a fun place to live, he had moved here from Toronto and moved into the Battery. Wanting to connect with others, Al had googled "outing club." The only thing that he found was . . . you guessed it: us. Al got in touch and Ann Ryan invited him along.

Finding himself with a group of seniors didn't faze him. Walking those hidden trails, we chatted with him, usually in ones and twos. Individually and collectively, we introduced him to life in St. John's, including "need to know" things that are listed nowhere, e.g. that in normal times, a lot of things happened at the LSPU Hall, known to most people as "The Hall." But, if you wanted to know what was on, you searched "Resource Centre for the Arts." Al was also interested in the East Coast Trail. It wasn't hard to give him information on it. Up ahead was Adrian Tanner. Adrian told Al not only about the trail, but how he and others got it going and made it what it is.

Al did a fantastic job of lowering our average ages. Last week's walk was rained out but we expect him to join us the next time we meet.

Steve Wolinetz