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Your Voice

MUN Pensioners' Association (MUNPA) Newsletter • Vol. 18, No. 4, Oct. 2020
Co-editors: Bernadette Power, Ann Ryan • Design and layout: Mark Graesser

Tribute to MUNPA founder Alastair Riach

By Bernadette Power

Welcome to MUNPA's 35th year! In November of 1985, Dr. Alastair Riach founded the Pensioners' Association of Memorial University of Newfoundland. He was particularly concerned to secure continued full access to the Library for retirees. We are all very grateful that he identified the need for pensioners to be recognized as an independent group to address issues of concern to us. I thought it would be nice to share another story of Alastair Riach that tells of another gift he gave us. I hope you enjoy this story, written by Maureen Riche in the December 2000 **MUN Gazette**.

In the middle of the library courtyard, tucked into a cozy copse of evergreens, is an unassuming little bench with a rather touching little history. It is the Alistair and Dorothy Riach Memorial Bench, and it was formally dedicated on Nov. 27 in a short ceremony officiated by university librarian Richard Ellis.

The bench's namesakes, the late Alistair and Dorothy (MA '79) Riach, were both professors at Memorial from the 1960s through to their retirement in the 1980s. He was a member of the education faculty, she a professor with the department of English. When Alistair passed away in August of 1999 (predeceased by Dorothy in June of the same year), he left a special bequest in his will for the funding and construction of the courtyard seat.

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An old meeting place becomes a new gift

Meet me at the library bench



Hilary Vavsour and Richard Ellis officially dedicated the Riachs' bench

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President's Message

Many of you have probably heard the saying, "May you live in interesting times." It's not an ancient Chinese curse, but rather an expression that gained currency after being used by a British politician, Sir Austen Chamberlain in 1936 and Robert Kennedy in 1960. There is little doubt that we do. Here I refer not to events around us but rather the ways in which the COVID-19 has changed our lives. Although restrictions have eased, most of us have been adjusting to a new normal: not going to films or concerts and thinking twice about what we do and with whom we socialize. Travel plans, if we had any, are on hold. Absent a vaccine, it's hard to know when that will be safe. Low rates of COVID-19 and the relative safety of an Atlantic bubble have allowed life in Newfoundland to proceed more normally, but rising rates of infection in Ontario and Quebec, where new lockdowns are beginning, remind us that the risk is still there.

Adjusting has been easier for some than others. Zoom and other online platforms have made it possible for some of us to connect with friends and family, and for MUNPA, to continue operating. Although we needed help the first time we did it, the Board of Directors has been meeting online since March, operating just as effectively as we would have if we had been meeting on Signal Hill. That same technology enabled several of our focus and special interest groups to continue meeting. One – the Memoir group – has been meeting twice rather than once a month. You'll be seeing some of the results of their endeavors not only in this but also subse-

quent issues of **Your Voice**. We've also learned that we can webcast programming to MUNPA members wherever they are. Nor are we the only ones who made that discovery. Yesterday, I participated in the online Annual General Meeting of CURAC – the College and Universities Association of Canada. Member associations are not only putting programs online but want to make them available to retirees across the country. You'll be hearing more about that soon.

The ease with which many of us have moved into webcasting is startling -- it was not that long ago that people joked about the picture telephones and the potential embarrassment of picking up the phone while dressing – but meeting online is not the same meeting in person. Missing are chance meetings with friends or former colleagues that made attending fun. Nor do all of our members use computers or have the same access that many of us do. The principal means by which we keep in touch with members is electronic. If you know of MUNPA members who are not in the loop and would like to be, please let us know and we will see if we can find ways to keep them up-to-date about what is happening.

Please keep safe and reach out to others when you can.

Steve Wolinetz

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UPCOMING SHUTTERBUG CLUB EVENT

"The Eye of the Beholder", a photographic slideshow presented by Mike Wilkshire and Gene Herzberg of our own MUNPA Shutterbug Club. The event is 2:00-3:15pm, Monday, November 23rd, online only, via Zoom. Registrants will be sent the link. **Signup by Saturday November 21st.** Some of the most beautiful images you will ever see!

Register

It is the story behind the seat that makes his gesture particularly poignant. During their time at Memorial, Alistair and Dorothy Riach would often end their workday in the same way. They would leave their respective offices and meet in front of the (then) brand new QE II Library so they could go home together. As the story goes, they often spoke of how nice it would be to have a place to sit and wait for the other to arrive.

More than 15 years after his retirement from Memorial, and mere days before his passing, Alistair never forgot the idea of the bench.

He left specific instructions in his will that a “nice, simple, sturdy” bench was to be erected in the library “courtyard in memory of the times he and Dorothy had met there. And it was to be built in view of the library entrance so that “you wouldn’t miss someone you were waiting for,” explained the Riachs’ daughter, Hilary Vavasour, who also spoke at the bench dedication. “It’s a usable memorial” Ms Vavasour said, “something that would actually be of benefit to people. That was very significant to my parents. They were very social, all for doing things for other people.

“My parents were gatekeepers, a term given to those who adopt the role of welcoming people to a community. Even though they had come from away, they took it upon themselves that, whenever anybody new came to Memorial, they would keep in contact with them and make sure they were invited places.”

It was because of that strong sense of community, said Ms. Vavasour, that the library bench is such a fitting tribute to her late parents. Educators and missionaries by trade, the Riachs devoted a great deal of time to community service. They both sat on numerous boards and organizations. He was a founder of the Memorial Pensioners’ Association. She was active in WAMUN and the CFUW.

They were very much a part of the university community,” said Ms. Vavasour, “and that’s how they’re known.” The Monday morning dedication

From the Co-editors

MUNPA’s newsletter, **Your Voice**, provides an avenue for all of us to share stories, concerns, memories and photos. Our sincere gratitude to those who have submitted articles that appear in this issue and others to come. We invite your feedback!

Our aim is to provide an informative and entertaining newsletter that you look forward to receiving. If we work together this can happen. Do you know we currently offer a communication package that includes [Your Voice](#), a website www.mun.ca/munpa, a [Facebook Group](#), and email? You may want to review these and participate in all or some. Communication is always important, maybe now more than ever since we are currently in a world of constraints.

It is your voice we need to hear so please, tell us what is or isn’t working. We are listening!

Bernadette Power and Ann Ryan

was a fitting realization of Alistair’s vision, as well as fitting remembrance of the Riachs’ life at Memorial.

“It included friends and colleagues and it was very succinct,” Ms. Vavasour commented, “and that’s very much what my Dad would have liked. It marked the occasion very nicely. He would have been proud of the day. I could feel him say, “I liked that.”

After reading this story, I sought out the bench. It was mid-week and the campus was quiet with the exception of an occasional passerby. It was so unlike the hustle and bustle that was the norm in pre-covid days. As instructed by Dr. Riach, the bench is nestled in trees in front of the main entry to the QEII Library. I had a coffee with Alastair and Dorothy while recalling my gratitude for MUNPA and, Alastair and Dorothy’s graciousness to act as Memorial’s “gatekeepers”. It was lovely. I hope one day you will meet someone at this beautiful library bench!

Folklore Musings

Lupins

By Philip Hiscock

Every June month I see lupins (or lupines if you want) blooming and there is a cascade of folkloric and personal memories in my mind. Folklore is one of the lenses I see the world through.

First thing, the lupins take me back about sixty years. My father had a fling with lupins in the late 1950s and early '60s – he grew them at our country-place (on Kenmount Road) and he would tie ribbons around the stems so he could save the seeds from the coloured flowers he liked best. Each fall and winter, our basement would have makeshift shelves of lupin stalks with seeds drying out, and many paper bags of seeds, all labelled with their flowers' colours. We were taught how to carefully open the pods and pour the seeds into his bags.

Dad had worked in the 1920s at the big plant nursery in the West End of St John's, McNeil's. Among his co-workers was Tom Horan who also had a love affair with lupins. He grew them in a disused meadow up the hill from his house on the Southside Road. In 1967 he famously made a red maple leaf on the hillside, fashioned out of blooming flowers, among them lupins. (A decade or so later, I married Tom's granddaughter.)

But it was no help from either Dad or Tom Horan that the local lupin population exploded in the late 1960s. The folklore about them holds that Joe Smallwood had also fallen in love with them and he dreamt that the new Trans-Canada Highway would be lined with them.

So, the story goes, in 1964 he bought up the world's entire supply of lupin seeds and had them scattered along the new highway in time for them to be in bloom when he "finished the drive in '65." But, that folklore continues, Smallwood didn't know that they are poisonous to sheep.

Oops.

I don't know that all that is true, or any part of it. But that's what people used to say fifty years



ago. (Smallwood had been a farmer – I bet he knew what he needed to know about their sometime toxicity: they are not actually very toxic.)

I like lupins too. There's a fair range of them, white, pink, blue, red..., on the Priest's Road, where I took this picture, above the downtown Arterial Road. I think they are descended from Tom Horan's flowers.



Home Remedies

By Jo Sawyer

"It's good for you."

"It will take the pain away."

"The worse it tastes, the better for you."

"It will feel better in the morning."

We were raised on home remedies. The first response to illness was, "No need to call the doctor." (Of course, this was pre Medicare – parents had to pay for medical services). When we were growing up, my mother did not call the doctor to come to our house, although he would have come as he made house calls in our rural community. "He's a busy man" seemed to downgrade the seriousness of our sickness at once, not so bad that we needed a Doctor.

If we had a cold and it had "settled in the chest," my mother made a mustard plaster. This was a paste of mustard powder and flour. It was spread on a clean rag (old sheets/towels) and placed on the chest until it was too hot for comfort. It was supposed "to loosen" your chest.

My father suffered from sinus congestion. I remember my mother wringing a cloth in a basin of hot water set on the corner of the wood stove and placing it across his sinus area. This was repeated many times for twenty minutes or so to afford some comfort and relief.

We lived on a fruit and vegetable farm. Bees, wasps, hornets (listed here in the increasing degree of the pain of their sting) were everywhere in August and September. They loved the ripe fruit, especially the rotting windfalls lying on the ground. We children chose to "go barefoot" all summer. That was asking for trouble. So – we were stung. Frequently. The first action was to look for and remove the stinger. Then, a quick dab of baking soda was soothing. Rubbing with a nasturtium leaf helped too. If the sting caused

unusual swelling, then my mother fetched her bluing bag from the washing machine and rubbed the location of the swelling.

We children occasionally stepped on thorns in addition to the fruit wasps. These thorns, from various fruit bushes, thistles, and weeds, were sometimes large and dug deep into the flesh. Then a bread poultice was applied "to make the thorn rise to the surface." Then it would be plucked out with a darning needle which had been sterilized by the steam of a boiling kettle. Boils were left to burst. Blisters were left to pop.



There was a fear of blood poisoning. Some years ago, our neighbour's son had died of such – stepped on a rusty nail – at age fourteen. But, still – our mother let us go barefoot.

Mercurochrome was the cure-all for minor cuts and scratches. We children thought that iodine stung too much. Ear aches and toothaches were given a hot water bottle, the warmth to soothe.

A bottle of cod liver oil pills graced the breakfast table during the winter months. Stewed prunes for constipation.

A cold was treated with rest and fluids, perhaps a treat of ginger ale.

A wobbly stomach required gentle foods. On such occasions, I loved to be given eggnog. This was made by stirring a whole raw egg into a cup of milk, then a splash of vanilla and a shake of nutmeg. Toast, and broth, and, if you were lucky, ice cream, were all on the invalid menu. There was a drug store in our village. The shop was very white and clean. Mr Begg was the druggist. He dressed in a white tunic and seemed a very kind and gentle man. Everything in the store was arranged neatly on shelves which lined the walls. The drug store had a drug

Continued on next page

Covid-19

By Roberta Buchanan

Enforced isolation. Time to read! Michael Enright on CBC Radio vowed to read the whole of Shakespeare, but confessed that he only got to Hamlet Act 1, scene 2. Now was my opportunity with boundless leisure to read the third novel of Hilary Mantel's trilogy about Thomas Cromwell – a major work of literary art, according to the Times Literary Supplement. Luckily I had bought *The Mirror and the Light* before Covid-19 closed all the bookstores.

Cromwell was a total swine, in my view, and used torture to extort "confessions" from his victims, yet Mantel seems to have fallen in love with him and made him into a sensitive Renaissance hero. The son of a blacksmith, he achieved the highest position in Henry VIII's court: Lord Chancellor of England. So how would she deal with his downfall and beheading? I had

Home Remedies, continued

store smell: chemicals in bottles and salves and ointments in brightly coloured tin boxes. (I still swear by Mecca ointment for a range of skin cuts, irritations, etc.) There were a few penny candies in a special glass show case. These were a treat for an impatient child waiting for its mother while she consulted Mr Begg about first aid supplies. There were rolls of adhesive tape and rolls of cotton swabbing and rolls of gauze. And bandaids.

None of us broke any bones or had appendicitis. But one of my brothers had pneumonia. For this, the doctor was summoned. He treated my brother at home with the new and experimental penicillin. It worked. A new era of treatment had begun.

Does Jo's article bring to mind any "home remedies" in your life? Click to send us a short email message for inclusion in the next issue of Your Voice.

[Comment](#)

plenty of time to read through the 875 pages of *The Mirror and the Light* to find out. Cromwell's end is rather hastily summarized in the last 75 pages, as if Mantel was reluctant to part with her hero. The best thing about reading historical fiction is it makes you wonder how accurate it is. Cromwell always presented himself in the novel as totally loyal to Cardinal Wolsey, another victim of Henry VIII's vindictiveness. So it was a shock when Wolsey's daughter turns on Cromwell and accuses him of betraying her father. Cromwell is very upset by this accusation. Did he in fact hasten Wolsey's fall? Luckily I had a copy of *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, written by George Cavendish, Wolsey's "gentleman usher," in 1557, and so an eyewitness account. Cavendish does not mention Wolsey's children, or mistresses; as a priest he was supposed to be celibate. But he gives a positive account of Cromwell, one of Wolsey's household, and describes him interceding with the king after Henry confiscates his wealth and palace. I'd like to read more about Wolsey but will have to wait until Covid allows libraries to open again.

I have a pretty good library myself, but all my books are in disarray and one benefit of Covid is that I've started putting them in order again. I began with autobiography, diaries and letters, my favourite reading material. In the process I discovered some Newfoundland autobiographies I had forgotten about: Paul O'Neill's *Something about Me*, and Leslie Harris's *Growing Up with Verse: A Child's Life at Gallows Harbour*. I knew Harris only as a member of the Administration, as dean and later president of the university. His autobiography is very funny, which I didn't expect from so serious a man. The Harris boys had variant versions of common nursery rhymes, for example, "Mary had a little lamb":

Mary had a little sheep
She took to bed and went to sleep
The sheep turned out to be a ram
Mary had a little lamb.

Continued on next page

I finished arranging my Autobiography section to my great satisfaction. But then I went downstairs and was looking at another bookcase when I found another pile of autobiographies These I had to carry upstairs; I had to rearrange all the bookshelves again. At this point I gave up in disgust. The wretched books remained in piles on the floor.

Something very exciting happened last week. I had two appointments with real human beings, I mean meeting people face to face rather than on email. I drove to the Avalon Mall to take my income tax papers to Cathy, at H & R Block. I hadn't been to the Mall since the Covid lockdown. I parked by Winners, but oh what a difference! Everything was closed and all the long corridors were empty. All the people who work in those shops – what a disaster! No pay coming in, and many of them are part-timers with no job security and no benefits. I hoped that the chocolate shop might be open because it serves beverages but no such luck. I delivered my tax papers keeping appropriate Covid distance and went home. The next day I had an appointment at the bank. This time it was a consultation with my adviser, and we actually sat on opposite sides of the desk with Perspex between us and talked.

I miss going to Tim's at Churchill Square and having a cappuccino and a muffin and reading the paper, with all the lively bustle of people coming in and out. Or having a meal at Smitty's next door. I miss having my hair cut at the Hair Factory. Thank goodness Tim's is still open. I can still get my cappuccino and muffin but must take them to my car. All the chairs have been removed. My new Covid afternoon routine: go to Tim's, take coffee to car and drive to Pippy Park. I park by the Fluvarium and look at Long Pond while drinking it. There is a beautiful stand of Scotch pines down the hill to your left, just below the children's playground, which I had never noticed before. On Thursday I walked almost to the end of Long Pond. Met a very pretty young squirrel, a pair of ducks sitting in the grass, and, on my way back a rabbit dashed in front of me, not more than 2 Covids away. I watched it go into the trees and wondered if there were some rabbit holes there.

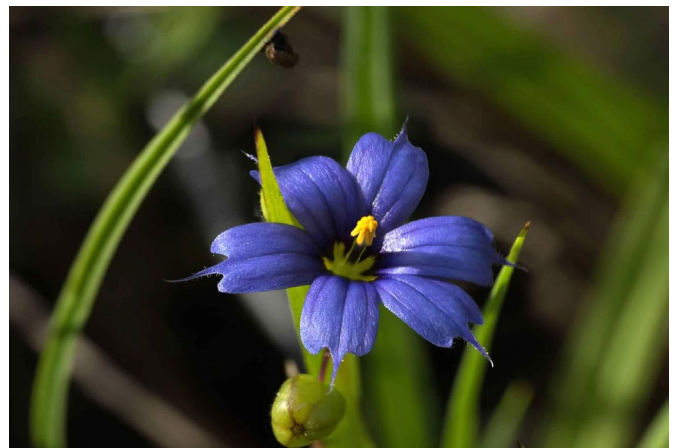
On Friday I went to Dominion to get my groceries. There were people hanging around outside; I wondered if they were tourists. When I tried to go an officious man stopped me. I must wait in the queue and am not allowed to bring my own bag into the store. I felt very bad-tempered and drove immediately to Sobeys. There was another queue! Damn Covid! Enough already!

It reminded me of England after the second World War: 1948 when we moved from Africa. Everything was rationed, and you had to queue outside the grocery store to collect your rations. One day I was coming home from school when I saw a notice in the window of the grocery store: POWDERED EGG AVAILABLE. We were only allowed one egg per week each, so this would be a great treat. How pleased my mother would be! I queued up for what seemed like hours and eventually got to the counter and asked for powdered egg. "Only for pregnant women," the grocer said, as if I should have known that all along.

By the way, I finished rearranging my Autobiography section. It looks great!

MUNPA Facebook Group

The newly created [MUNPA Facebook Group](#) now has 191 members and growing. There are a number of good reasons for joining. Find lost colleagues on FB who worked at MUN years back. Connect with MUNPA members by exchanging photos and messages. Interesting articles and information of interest to MUN retirees are regularly posted.



Gene Herzberg, "Blue-eyed grass"

Shutterbug Gallery

*“Grass” was a recent theme.
It elicited a wide variety of images.*



Brian Power, Clovelly hay bales



Mike Wilkshire, A blade of lawn grass up close



Grant Gardner, On Signal Hill



Nick Summers , Ripe seedheads

MUNPA INTEREST GROUPS: FALL PLANS

Our MUNPA St. John’s interest groups have made varied decisions about their Fall 2020 activities, depending on various factors particular to each group.

The Games and Outing groups have resumed their in-person activities.

The Health and Aging, Memoir, and Shutterbug groups are all meeting on Zoom for fall.

The Crafts and Woodcarving groups are hoping to return to in-person meetings for fall, but are still working on arranging an on-campus room. Crafts is meeting on Zoom in the interim, while Woodcarving is on hold.

The Bowling and Music groups have deferred their activities until at least January 2021, at which time they will review their status for winter.