

I came for the “job”

There are many people who come to The Pas and never leave. Others come and get involved at many levels, eventually moving away for a number of reasons. Our community grows stronger each time we attract people who are community contributors. Many come to The Pas for a “job”.

The job is what brought Elaine Bollman here over 44 years ago. Elaine grew up on a farm in the Moline district. She told me if I googled Moline, MB, I would find no information as it was that small. It was known for its Co-op store and little else. (I did google it and lo and behold, Moline Co-op Store came up with its history). Moline did have a small church, a school and a few homes. At its largest population, there were 38 residents in the Moline village.

Growing up on the farm, Elaine made her own fun which often involved the dog, cats or her bike which she rode to her cousin’s place on the neighbouring farm. There was a piano in the house and by age 6 she could pick out the notes to a few tunes. Her mother decided that her daughter needed piano lessons and so, at age 7, Elaine began studying piano at the Brandon Conservatory. The family car was booked for one day a week to get Elaine to her lessons. The rest of the week was then open for her brother’s hockey games and her father’s meetings.

Elaine thanks her mother for encouraging her to advance in her piano studies which later involved taking classes in music theory as well. At the end of high school, she went to Brandon University to study a Bachelor of Arts (with some music mixed in) and, later, a Bachelor of Education. Her teaching career began with her teaching primary classes for three years. Knowing how to teach the basics of reading and math came in handy later when her schedule included “remedial math” for small groups. Prior to coming to The Pas, she taught music in Portage la Prairie in three schools. Their facilities lacked resources, in general. The instruments, few and far between, included homemade items. The rooms were often cramped and not designed for a musical experience. There was no budget for music materials so Elaine went hunting. She saw an ad for Kelsey School Division. After looking up the location of this division, she went for an interview in Winnipeg with the outgoing superintendent, Harold Grundy. She was offered the job and upon accepting it, she began a 30 year career of teaching music at Mary Duncan Elementary School.

Elaine told me the story of arriving in town in July 1976 as she needed to find a place to live. She was toured through the school by the principal, Vaughn Wadelius, and the new superintendent, Al Yaskiw. She was shown the music room and she was elated. There was enough room for 100 students on the risers for a choir! Certainly there was room for movement to music, for instruments and for a circle on the floor for kindergarten and primary singing games! The fact that this was also the lunch room did not concern her. Upon leaving, she was asked if there was anything that they could order for her to have ready for classes in September. Wow! There was a music budget too! Elaine could relate many stories of her music classes and concerts and later music drama but that would become a book. Needless to say, she contributed to the music education of many young people.

Outside of school, she became involved in other aspects of music in the community. Within the first month, Bea Betts involved her in committee work for The Pas Music Festival. Not only did Elaine enter classrooms in many of the classes in the Festival, but she helped in the organizing of the event. For a

number of years (pre-computer), she set out who performed when and how long the adjudicator had to work with the students. Later, she became president of the Festival, at which time, the position of Directors was set up to allow one person per discipline to be in charge. This arrangement relieved the pressure on the president. Also in town was The Pas Music Club led by Mary Williamson, in those years. The year prior to her arrival, this club had successfully raised funds for the Petrof Grand Piano that many will recall was in use at MBCI for a long time. The Music Club, in the 1970s and early 1980s, would sponsor a touring performer. Their other focus was supporting the private piano and vocal teachers as well as organizing student recitals. Elaine soon added private piano instruction to her day's schedule, obviously after school. She was able to fit in 12 students a week. Also, on her weekly schedule was singing in the Community Choir and curling, her one activity that did not involve music.

In 1985, she decided to attend a meeting of The Pas Arts Council. When she left the meeting, she was vice president! In 1986, she became president and continued in this position for 28 years. She directed the meeting so that topics were covered, sometimes individuals were directed to gather more information, focus did not stray from the topic at hand, and the meeting concluded its tasks in approximately one hour. She told me that when she would attend other meetings, she would often take along papers to mark if the meeting was dragging and not keeping her interest. In her words, "I am task oriented and want to get things done. If you cannot do it, let it go." What a way to live your life! When she stepped down from the president's role, she took on the job of setting up the website with the tutoring of Marion Jenkins (Henry Budd Centre). This fall, Elaine began a second retirement, leaving the Arts Council in the capable hands of other community volunteers.

Going back to 1987, Elaine came home from school and did laundry on a Friday night. She thought that there had to be more to do on a Friday night than laundry! She checked around and found options of karate - not for her, mixed curling - needed a male partner, and square dancing - no need for a partner. The square dance club was led by Mary and Robin Carpenter. She learned the various calls quickly and advanced up the levels and, after a number of years, she found herself going out of town for instruction in advanced square dancing. At a national convention in Montreal, Elaine met a caller who first became a regular partner at special square dances and then melded into being a cruising and travel friend. They recently spend more time learning the steps in round dancing. This dancing takes the basic steps of waltz, foxtrot, rumba and cha cha plus others and adds fancy moves which the cuer instructs the dancers to do. It takes practice to smoothly get that foot in the right place at the right time. Her travels with Bryan Henry have taken them around the world. They often have booked back-to-back cruises in order to avoid many weeks of cold Canadian winter. In March 2020, they were returning from circumnavigating South America when port closures due to the COVID -19 pandemic caused their ship to divert for eight days until they could reach Miami and fly home from there.

Again going back in time, it was in 1979 when she joined Arlene Wilson in making plans for a trip to England and Scotland. They were both teachers who could travel in the summer. This trip led to annual forays overseas, into the USA and across Canada. However, to list all the destinations and their experiences would fill a book. Asked to name her favourite place to visit, she answered that it would be Australia as everything there is so completely different. The north side of the buildings and of the country is hot, the lingo is different and animals in this country cannot be found anywhere else.

When Elaine retired from teaching in 2006, she started a square dance group which recently had been meeting at St. Paul's Residence which also served as weekly entertainment for the residents and weekly

lessons for the dancers. Although the group is small and always looking for more interested dancers, they are a committed group who plan to continue dancing even after Elaine leaves town. She has shared her resources with Dave Montgomery and Kathy McKay who will become the new leaders. They are waiting for post-COVID-19 when this activity can resume.

Over the years, Elaine has made friends in the arts community and in teacher groups. A number of retired teachers often gather at Clearwater Lake's lovely Pioneer Bay with lawn chairs and snacks, ready for a cool dip in the lake before they buy their ice cream cones! They gather for other events as well – parades, rodeo, etc.

Elaine is presently packing up her memories and heading south to Brandon to begin the next segment of her life. She is excited about the move but will always remember the good times and wonderful life in The Pas. She knows the highway runs both directions and plans to return sometime in the future for a visit and ice cream at the lake!

We wish you well in Brandon and thank you for sharing your inspiring story of making life work in the North! You will be missed.

Have a wonderful "second retirement"! I am sure that music will continue to bring you joy and lead you to make new friendships.

Make Shift Happen

Submitted by Denise Duncan