

A Cup of Coffee... with Diane Roblin-Lee by Roger Varley

Starting life over at 60 is a daunting task, but Diane Roblin-Lee has risen to the challenge. And just as she has a story to tell, she believes we all do, which has led her to start *My Life Legacy Journals*, a way for people to pass their knowledge and wisdom on to their young. We asked her to join us for a cup of coffee to talk about the legacy books.

I understand you are relatively new to Uxbridge.

I was actually born here, I moved back to town about a year ago. Never thought I would be living in Uxbridge again. When my mother was expecting me during the war and my dad was a padre overseas, she came to live with an uncle in the area, Elmer Irwin. I actually had three uncles in the area. Some people might remember Harvey and Jessie Hogan and Ted and Edith Hall. Edith was a fairly well-known artist in the area. I was born at Mother Walker's nursing home and lived here for about 12 minutes and then moved across Canada, here and there.

So, in effect, you were an army brat?
Air force! So we never stayed anywhere longer than four years. But it made me very adaptable and gave me lots of experiences and opportunities to meet interesting people along the way.

But do you regret that you don't have what we might call roots?

That's a funny thing, because I always used to feel that my roots were in Uxbridge because we had the greatest concentration of family in Uxbridge. I had tons of cousins and three sets of aunts and uncles, but now my aunts and uncles are all gone and my cousins are scattered to the wind. And here I am in Uxbridge all by myself.

What brought you back?

I got divorced in 2006 and moved to Port Perry and basically had to start my life all over. I went back to school and developed my business, byDesign Media. I do graphic design and custom publishing and writing. It's a mish-mash of things, but everything pulls together nicely and complements each other.

So you're a latter day version of Mary Tyler Moore's character, Mary Richards, making it on your own.

I'd been married for 38 years and this all happened when I was 60. So with all that happened, I was left with nothing and I knew no one would hire me at that age so I went back to school. I'm so grateful I was able to put something together and not be at someone else's mercy and to be in control of my life. It's been an adventure. It's been a challenge, it's been difficult, but it's been amazingly rewarding, too.

So is your business doing well?

It's doing surprisingly well. The doors that have opened have been amazing. I can't take credit for it all because I feel that God has had a purpose in all of this. For instance, I have two friends that I pray with regularly and we were praying one afternoon because I had no income and I went home and there was a message on my answering machine from the editor at Crossroads. He knew I had been doing graphic design, but he hadn't seen my work. He said he needed someone to produce the magazine and would I be interested. So for two years I designed and produced a 16-page magazine and did the whole thing from my little home office.

Did you have a background in publishing?

Well, I wrote my first book in 1980, but never intended to be a writer. In 1980, I had a big transformation in my life and became a Christian and I was so excited that I told all my friends. But no-one wanted to hear about it so I decided the only way I could cope with this was to write it all down, because no one could understand the width and height and depth of what had happened. But I needed a hook, so I took the fact that my father had been a minister and did a research study on ministers and their families. Why do some ministers' kids grow up on the straight and narrow and others, like me, become very rebellious? There are about 90 pages of autobiography in it. I asked David Mainse at 100 Huntley Street to do the forward and once he read the book he was so thrilled with it he wanted to publish it. So it was published and sold 12,000 copies in Canada. So that catapulted me into the publishing realm. Many people wanted me to do a follow up to *My Father's Child*, so I wrote another book and that was published and then people started coming to me with their books and asking how to get them published. I realized there were many people with wonderful messages who perhaps were simply not writers or didn't have the connections that I had had, but had really worthwhile messages to communicate. So I started to help them get their books out. I've done over 20 books now. About six or seven are my own. One was about Dr. Oswald Smith of the People's Church, a remarkable man. I did all the research, the writing, the layout and design. Because (evangelist) Billy Graham had been a friend of Dr. Smith, I asked Dr. Graham whether he'd consider doing the forward to the book and he did. That was one of my most exciting moments, getting a positive response.

You talk about the books you've helped produce and the fact that many were "message" books. Is that where the idea for the legacy journals came from?

It really started when I was a child and the teacher was telling us how the Inuit people, when an elderly person would get past their time of productivity, would put them in a boat and row them out to an ice floe and that's where they were left. As a child I was horrified. I couldn't



imagine leaving a parent out on an ice floe. A number of years ago I wrote a story about an Inuit woman who was being rowed out. That was the first part of the story. The second part of the story was about a woman on the other side of the world who was so honoured in Japanese society that her daughter was sitting at her knee asking for her wisdom. It wraps up with me walking between blossoms and ice floes, wondering how I'm going to deal with my aging parents. My mother lived with me for 13 years, five of which I had to settle her in a nursing home, but as soon as I could I brought her home and she died at home. But in that five years, I became well acquainted with the nursing/retirement home environment. While many of the staff were wonderful, there were issues that really bothered me. Many of the residents were brighter and more lucid than I am and had had rich experiences in life, but I noticed when the families came in the visits would often be strained and the teenagers would be fidgeting, wanting to get out of there. Grandma and grandpa were no longer part of their realm, so it was difficult to engage them in conversation. I saw some of these elderly people having breakfast and then sitting and waiting for lunch and they would wait to be put to bed and wait to die, day after day. Now we're living in such an age-segregated society where grandma and grandpa are in a retirement home, mom and dad are in a work environment and the kids are in age-segregated schools, so everyone is missing out on the benefit of all generations. My desire

has been to somehow stir up and facilitate communication between the generations. One day the grid is going to go down and who knows how to cope without the grid better than grandma and grandpa. The time is going to come when they need that wisdom. So there needs to be a bridge.

But your legacy journals take two directions. One where seniors like me write down their experiences to leave to their family, but also having students going to seniors and writing down their experiences.

It's an outgrowth of the original legacy work. Originally I designed the books for people to work on individually. Then I thought that schools have a program now where everyone has to do 40 hours of community service in order to graduate and what better community service could there be than for a teenager to hook up with a senior and go through a co-mentoring process where they absorb the wisdom and insight of the seniors as they help them go through the workbook. At the same time they could help the seniors on how to do simple e-mails and Facebook so they'd be better equipped to communicate in this wired world. The whole thing is designed to bring families closer together, so there won't be as much isolation of the seniors.

So are these legacy books selling?

Castle Quay Books published it in 2007 and there was very warm response. It's in stores now. Personally, I haven't been able to promote the legacy work as much as

I should because I've been busy developing byDesign Media. It's just been the last couple of months that I've sat back and taken a look and realize legacy is where I want to go. I've started to do workshops in retirement homes. I did one at Butternut last Friday. I spoke to Uxbridge Secondary School and they have approved it for one of their community volunteer services, so that's a wonderful thing. The churches in Uxbridge have been very supportive of this, particularly the Baptist church. I'm in the process of marketing it right across North America.

Have you had any feedback from anyone who has completed one of these legacy books?

I haven't seen a completed one, but I have had feedback from people whose parents are gone, saying "I wish my mom had had this". But I do know people who are in the process of doing this. When I originally developed the book, they were for people to fill out by hand. This year, I recognized the importance of having something for computer savvy people so I digitized the whole thing and put it on CD. There are two editions, a faith-based version and a generic version. *Can they be purchased in Uxbridge?* Blue Heron Books carry them. Shelley has been very kind. You can also get it through www.mylegacylinks.com

Thank you, Diane.

Thank you.

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