

In Memory of Clarence Pugsley

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Many people retire and quite a few people not only retire from work, they retire from active life, taking a well earned rest. Not Clarence Pugsley. If I think of Pug (as most of us know him as), I can picture him with a pipe firmly stuck between his teeth, usually under a no-smoking sign, talking about the next camp project. The problem was that he seldom let that pipe go so what came out of his mouth was kind of teeth clenched mumble, flavoured by a maritime accent. I sometimes had to ask him two or three times to explain what he meant. And I can almost hear his eyes roll upward as he patiently repeated what he had, in his own mind, said so clearly just moments before.

Pug was a long time volunteer for the Camp and for many years chair of our property committee. As I look around the camp, every direction I turn, no matter which way I look, north, south east, west, up, down, there is something Pug built, renovated, improved, tore down or chain sawed down. More than once he almost found himself under the wrong side of a falling tree. Pug spent an astounding number of hours at the camp. Often he'd come with a whole troop of friends in tow. I'm not sure if they always came willingly or if he forced them. But I do know as I am sure many of you know as well, that Pug could be very persuasive.

Rudy explained to me that after the first few years of living in the tiny Director's house at the Camp with his family, it was Pug who insisted that the space be expanded. He promptly added an addition onto the house, despite the extra cost the camp could barely afford at the time, believing that Rudy and his family needed proper accommodation. It was Pug and his crew that out of the shell of an attic above our storage facility, created two beautiful classrooms used by thousands of students and campers. It was Pug who designed, harassed the building inspector and constructed our modern washroom facilities. He moved and renovated our historic log cabin (kindly donated by the Skates family). He upgraded our kitchen. In fact I can still see him up to his arm pits in a hole under rotten floor boards, cheerfully hacking away. He was happiest when he was busy building something. No doubt that Pug had a talent for building. And he had an equal talent for cajoling, convincing and persuading contractors, suppliers and businesses to get what he wanted at the price he wanted. There are many other projects Pug was involved in and as I think about this, I am bowled over by the sheer amount of sweat, determination, hard work and heart he gave to the camp.

Pug and Minnie never had children, so I guess in a way, the Camp became a child. And like a good parent he nurtured, he took time, he fussed and on occasion got frustrated and used the kind of language he needed to in order to convey the depth and breadth of his frustration. Rudy told me that more than once Pug stormed off, cursing and saying that was it. But he'd always come back the next day, tools in hand, ready as Rudy puts it "to play again," to do what ever else needed doing.

The older I get, the more I realize how precious each and every moment is that has been given to us. And we all have a choice on how to spend it. Pug chose to spend a goodly chunk of his time with an organization he cared deeply about, Camp Kawartha. I believe that in everything we do, everyone we touch and every act we undertake, we leave a footprint, a mark. Our efforts, even in smallest of ways, can and does change the world. There is no doubt that Clarence Pugsley left an indelible mark on the Camp that will be felt for generations. And while not every camper, student and visitor who walks through the camp, may know Pug by name, they will bear witness to the spirit of an unbelievably generous and good hearted volunteer. Pug made the camp a better place and so many children are all the better for it. Thanks Pug for everything you did for Camp Kawartha. Your dedication is something we won't easily forget.