

Student meets ‘biodad’ for the first time

By Sonya Dronsfield

When I was four years old, I remember feeling like the luckiest kid in the world because I got to be my mother's flower girl at her wedding. It never occurred to me that I could be the accidental child of an unlikely bachelor.

I can't remember any other father than my stepfather, but I always knew he wasn't my 'real dad'. As a child, and for the next ten years, I never thought much of it. I was never close with my step father, in fact, I actually hated him for a very long time. We were too different, but too similar in our bad habits, which made us disagree on everything and anything. As I got older, I started to wonder what life would've been like if I grew up with my biological father.

The first time I asked my mother about my 'biodad', as we called him, was the most terrifying experience of my life. She had never spoken about him before and I had no idea what to expect. I assumed he must have been horrible if she had never bothered to mention him and I wasn't sure if I was ready to be disappointed. I remember I cried before I even got the words out of my mouth, and I'm pretty sure my mother had no idea why I was so upset.

After that first emotionally awkward conversation, a spark of curiosity burst into the tiniest flame of interest that drove me to cautiously and subtly find out who this mystery father was. When I was 17, my mother came across my biological fathers phone number and asked me if I wanted to talk to him. I panicked. I told her to give me a couple days to think it over. A week later I decided I couldn't do it. I kept telling myself I wasn't ready to be disappointed.

On Oct. 12, 2013, I spoke with my father on the phone for the first time. The conversation was awkward but short, I told him my name and asked if he was my father, and when he said yes, I told him I was going to stop by in a couple days with a camera and he said okay, see you then. Five days later I dragged my boyfriend on a four hour trek from my college to Brantford to meet my father and his wife. During the car ride I was getting very nervous and kept going over what questions I wanted to ask and what I wanted to tell him about myself. I sat in quiet turmoil until the GPS told me I had reached my destination.

I squirmed in the driver's seat of my car, knuckles white on the steering wheel, staring at the house of my biological father. It was small, neat looking with a tidy garden in a nice neighbourhood; your stereotypical middle class home. My boy-



Photo by Christoph Blaschke

Fred and Tom Englefield stand beside long lost daughter/granddaughter Sonya Dronsfield. The last time Tom (right) saw his daughter, was almost 20 years ago when she was three months old.

friend turned to me in the silence and put a hand on my shoulder and asked if I was ready.

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

The truth in that statement gave me the courage I needed to step out of the car and walk to the door, which opened for me before I could even knock.

Initially I was greeted with warm smiles and hugs, followed by offers of food and drinks. “Make yourself at home!” called the cheery voice of Carole, my fathers overly-polite wife. We sat on couches facing each other across the room. It felt very awkward and too formal.

Tom, my father, started in the worst way I thought he could have possibly started.

“The last time I saw you, you were just starting to speak. And I was stand-

ing over you and you just kept saying ‘Daddy, daddy, daddy!’ and then you were gone...”

Being the already over-emotional and now extremely distraught, bawling my eyes out, unlikely child of this strange man, made for a very awkward start to our family reunion. After pulling myself back together into some level of ‘okay’, Tom resumed to tell me about his life with Carole, their children and their marriage. Oddly, they spoke about football and the Hamilton Tiger Cats for at least an hour. I waited patiently for them to ask about me, to be curious of the last 20 years that passed and the interesting stories I had. That didn’t happen though. Their lack of interest killed my spirits entirely.

I asked if they wanted to go for lunch

and also if I could meet my grandfather who I had briefly contacted a few days earlier. They agreed and we went to a chic sports bar up the road.

I have never seen anyone as happy to see me as my grandfather. Although he was very kind and very interesting, what I took away from him was that he told me I’m going to be a traveller, “It’s in my blood!”, and that he will talk until he falls asleep mid-sentence.

We returned to Tom and Carole’s house briefly for a quick tour where I was shown all the home projects and excessive luxuries of their small home. We decided to trade contact information and both said we would keep in touch, and then we left, starting a long drive home.

After about 30 seconds of driving, I had to pull over into an empty parking

lot and call my mother and cry. It was so overwhelming, and the worst part was that I just didn’t know how to feel. I was angry that they hadn’t asked about me, but relieved they were nice enough people, and extremely discouraged because I didn’t feel like I had accomplished anything. I guess I was hoping that meeting my father would make me feel good about knowing a bit more of where I came from and just knowing who my father was in general, but I just felt mixed up, and a little lost.

In the end, I’m glad I connected with my father, but I don’t feel like I was ready. When I think about it though, I don’t think I would ever have been ready and what I learned is that you can never prepare for meeting a parent for the first time.

Historic Belleville church celebrates its 198th anniversary Sunday

By James Wood

With birthday cake, guest speakers, and egg-salad sandwiches, one of Belleville’s oldest citizens celebrated its 198th this past Sunday. The congregation at Bridge Street United Church gathered together in their meeting hall to celebrate, with a lunch prepared by Inn From the Cold volunteers.

The church has long been a fixture on Church Street, ever since its beginnings as a small wooden meeting house erected by local Methodist congregation members

in 1815. Since those humble days, the church has expanded dramatically, and today stands as a proud member of the Belleville skyline.

However, Bridge Street United is not without its issues. Many traditional churches in Belleville now face a problem with diminishing, aging congregations. Some older churches in Belleville no longer stand, such as the imposing structure of Tabernacle United. It was demolished in 1995 and its members split to other United church congregations throughout

the Quinte area. Although Bridge Street may not face the issue of demolition this year, the congregation may have to make some difficult decisions in the future.

David Mundy is the new lead minister at Bridge Street Church, and led the festivities Sunday. Newly arrived since May of 2013, he said he has been enjoying his time in Belleville with the new congregation. However, he said he also realizes the realities of the situation that the church now finds itself in.

“Because of the average age of the congregation, people are seeing the writing

on the wall,” said Mundy.

There are two key issues facing the church. On one hand, as the congregation dwindles and donations fall, the church is left with fewer financial resources as the maintenance budget increases.

“Here we are in this wonderful, beautiful, holy space, but it is costing us a fortune to maintain,” Mundy said. “Those are hard questions to ask.”

The forecast, however, is not all doom and gloom. Other church buildings across Canada have been repurposed to suit

other purposes, rather than outright demolition. Sydenham United in Kingston, although it has a very small congregation, has been used by numerous community groups in the city. Each group pays the church congregation for the privilege.

However, the church’s future is impossible to predict. The congregations 225th birthday may be radically different then events this past Sunday. Whatever happens, however, the stone facades and stained-glass windows of Bridge Street United will continue to stand for the foreseeable future.

Cheerleading squad does fundraisers to support their team

By Melyssa Gloude

On a crisp Monday night, some hungry people came to eat at Boston Pizza – most of them without expecting anything but their dinner. However, this Monday was a special night for the Nicholson Crusaders.

At no charge, Boston Pizza allowed the team to reap 10 per cent of the night’s sales to go towards the various costs associated with the competitive cheerleading team.

“It’s a great opportunity,” said Maureen Bates, the fundraising co-ordinator for the team. “It really is a win-win situation for both us and the restaurant itself.”

From 5 to 8 p.m., 10 per cent of all food and drink bought went to the school’s cheerleading team.

“We bring in guests for them – the girls’ parents, friends, everyone. They get business,” said Bates, “and so do we.”

Although most restaurants are open for team sponsorship in the area, Boston Pizza is one of the only establishments that offers this kind of opportunity and has done so for years, she said. School, church, sports groups and other organizations have used Boston Pizza as an outlet for their fundraising. All it requires is a phone call to book the event in advance and has a promise of profit for everyone.

Bates, who heard of the opportunity via word of mouth, said she believes that Boston Pizza is doing something great to support the community.

“The cost of school sports is high – competition fees and busing are huge ones. We hope to be able to offset some of the cost so these kids can do what they love.”

The cheerleading team isn’t funded by the school, unlike other club teams.

‘All of it is completely privately paid, from uniforms to shoes to transportation.’

Coch Angie Braun

“All of it is completely privately paid, from uniforms to shoes to transportation,” said Angie Braun, the team’s coach. Braun has been coaching for over 10 years in this full-time volunteer position.

“A lot of the competitions are overnight which really adds to the cost as well.”

Currently, the cost per student who is on the cheerleading team adds up to about \$1,200 for a beginner, said Braun. If the student is a returning cheerleader from the previous year, the cost is still a whopping \$1,000.

“It’s a shame, really,” said Bates. “That’s how we lose great girls on the team. They come to practice and leave with a bill that keeps them from coming back.”

“With the help of our fundraising, we’re able to cut down that cost,” said Braun.

“Last year we were able to take over \$200 off of the cost because of events like this.”

In the 2012-2013 season, the team raised \$3,000. Like every year however, they want to bring that number up. The Boston Pizza event is just one of many fundraising efforts that the Crusaders organize. From raffles to spaghetti dinners, the whole team works hard to make something they love much more affordable to participate in.

“It’s worth it,” said Braun, in regards to her long hours of volunteering and coaching for her team. “And every little bit helps.”



Photo by Melyssa Gloude

The Nicholson Catholic School cheerleading team, The Crusaders, had a fundraising event hosted by Boston Pizza on Monday. Natalie Bailie, 16, Clarissa Bates, 15 and Kim Blaind, 17, pose from left for a photo.

Bake sale raises money and awareness

By Dawn Barger

Second-year students from the social service worker course held a bake sale to raise money and awareness for the Three Oaks women’s shelter Nov. 25, for a community development class.

According to Statistics Canada, almost 30,000 women and dependent children were admitted to Ontario shelters between April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2004. Fifty-three per cent of Ontario women escaping abuse were admitted with their children; 65 per cent of the children were under the age of 10.

The students held the event as part of their community class. They had lots of goodies there, including cookies, cupcakes and other sweets. The items were a hit with the students.

“We are here to raise funding and awareness for domestic violence,” said Tabitha Grandmond, a second-year social service worker student.

“We are hoping to raise as much as we can in support of the Three Oaks women’s shelter.”

A volunteer from the Three Oaks shelter was there to answer questions and offer information to anyone interested in finding out exactly what abuse is.

Jennifer Loaners the training and education coordinator at Three Oaks, said abuse doesn’t have to include hitting.

“Abuse isn’t always physical, it can also be verbal, emotional and psychological. This can be just as bad as physical abuse, if not worse. We want to make sure everyone is educated and know there is help out there.”

Three Oaks provides temporary shelter to women and children, providing non-judgmental, supportive counselling, advocate on behalf of women and children and educate the public about violence against women and children.

Three Oaks is trying to raise money for their new second-stage housing that is being built at the corner of Evans and North Front streets in Belleville. The city currently doesn’t have second-stage housing, making it a priority need for the past decade.