

Seniors' Spotlight

Life Through the Lens

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Reprinted from Haliburton Highlands County Life, February 4, 2016

Haliburton's Fred Phipps turns the pages to his photo album like flipping through the history of his life.

Every page elicits a story from the retired photographer about the circumstances before and after every photo was taken. One of those shots is of hockey icon and commentator, Foster Hewitt.

A photographer takes a lot of photos. There are always a few that stand out.

Growing up, Phipps listened to Hewitt call the Toronto Maple Leafs' games on CBC radio. When he became a photographer he wanted to take a photo of Hewitt saying the famous sentence, "He shoots. He scores!" at Maple Leaf Gardens.

From a vantage point about 200 feet, perched in the building's girders, he used a borrowed long zoom lens (2,000 mm – a standard lens is 50 mm) from Nikon and synced a flash with his camera by a cord. Four goals were scored. Two of them he turned the wrong way. From the other two, Phipps got the shot he wanted and could imagine Hewitt's call, "He shoots. He scores!" was for him.

Later, he noticed his photo appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, depicting Hewitt with his image.

"The caption said it was him sitting in front of his favourite picture and it was my picture, hanging in the background. He didn't tell me that," he said.

Phipps worked 10 years as a freelance photographer after his 35 years with the CBC, primarily as the publicity photographer for CBC television. Through his work he travelled from coast-to-coast of Canada and halfway around the world where he not only photographed a who's who of people from the era, but also anybody with an interesting face that would sit for him.



After a lifetime of photography and too many photos to count, his idea of a great portrait photo is in the narrative that exists in the face of the person.

He appreciated the interaction and trust he and his subject built on a shoot. If it was possible, he really wanted it to be him and his subject. That one-on-one connection was important for a strong portrait photo.

This wasn't just exclusive to the famous. It applied to everyone he photographed, even after he retired from his profession. Among his favourite is Haliburton's late Barry Stromberg, who became the first in his series of portraits, The Elders of Haliburton County for the Senior Life, a magazine produced by the Haliburton County Echo newspaper back in 2002.

Several years after his photo series, Phipps showcased more in a local exhibition of his work Celebrity Portraits at the Agnes Jamieson Gallery in Minden in 2010.

The list of celebrities and artists he photographed is extensive. It includes Wayne and Shuster, Anne Murray, Adrienne Clarkson, Gordon Sinclair, Barbara Frum, David Suzuki, Rich Little, Farley Mowatt, Robertson Davies, John Candy, Grace Kelly, David Niven, Mr. Dressup, Tommy Hunter, Boxcar Willie, Glenn Gould and Arthur Miller.

Yousuf Karsh, a celebrated portrait photographer, stands out for Phipps because he respected and admired his skills. Karsh was a landed immigrant from Armenia and photographed celebrities and artists.

Renowned Canadian painter Alex Colville is also top of the mind.

He will never forget the anxiety he felt when preparing for Colville, who had said "photographers take pictures while artists make pictures."

Now 80, Phipps lives with his wife, four cats, two dogs and an assortment of wild animals that regularly visit his Highlands home, which sits on a small lake.

Growing up in Windsor, he cannot imagine what his life would have been working in the many factories related to the automotive industry.

"In high school we used to have tours of the plants. I figure if I got in there – I'm half nuts now – I'd go all the way. I couldn't do the repetition," he said.

His interest in photography started as a child in elementary school. With his Kodak Brownie box camera, Phipps joined a camera club started by a member of church.

After a brief stint as a truck driver for the Canadian Pacific Express, he applied and got into the Ryerson Institute of Technology Photo Arts School. Halfway through his second year he ran out of money and got a job at the CBC's film department. It started his career, which included work in the lab, co-ordinating the hiring of photographers and organizing submissions, and work in the field taking photos. He never returned to school and doesn't regret his decision.

"I can't knock it. It was a lucky break for me," he said.

From the promotional material for his Celebrity Portraits show, Phipps said, “Life has been an interesting experience. Travel has opened my eyes and broadened my mind. It has taught me to see beauty in the land and in most of its people. I have met people that have made a contribution to the betterment of the world in varying degrees. I consider myself very fortunate.

The Senior Spotlight feature recognizes local seniors who are nominated by CARP’s local chapter in Haliburton.