



Henry Perelette and friends during season festivities at Sheridan Villa.

The good life is one foot in front of the other

Three Christmases ago, Old Henry said life was still sweet as long as you could put "one foot in front of the other."

Henry Perelette will be bringing in this New Year, his 95th showing off his recently regained walking ability at Sheridan Villa, where he has been living since May, 1974.

Unlike the 70-odd Christmases and New Year's days he has spent alone in his Clarkson flat, Henry is surrounded by this year friends at the Villa, all participating in the various holiday celebrations.

Henry, who has many friends in Clarkson and the rest of Mississauga, came to Sheridan Villa on Truscott Dr. following a hip operation that left him immobile for months.

"They told me I'd never walk again, but they just don't know ole' Henry. I sure fooled them all, you just watch," he says as his leathery black face breaks into an excited smile.

Before you can bat an eye, Henry gets behind his wheelchair, which he affectionately terms his "old Cadillac" places his hands on the handles and moves off down the wide corridor into a limping, but confident run.

By Nancy Enright

The operation left Henry with a steel plate in his hip, but he says he feels little pain now.

"I'm feeling 100 per cent better than when I first came here," he beams. Henry has spent the past few months in therapy sessions, resulting in his progress from crutches to a wheelchair to his now-frequent walks, surprising the doctors, nurses and Villa staff with his determination.

"Even though I can't swim, I really enjoyed that swimming pool. They'd lower me down in some contraption into the water and I'd just lay back and enjoy it. That was real nice."

Henry has nothing but praise for the accommodation, food and staff at the Villa.

He enjoys his apartment, complete with a television a friend sent him, although he says he can't understand why some of the residents don't spend more time in the lounges like he does.

"We get three meals a day here and I'll tell you, if I'd been a horse, I'd weigh a ton with all that I eat."

"They're so good to me here. The nurses, the waiters, the boss, everyone — it's first class."

Despite Henry's satisfaction with Sheridan Villa, he says he still hasn't decided if he wants to stay.

"Once I really get walking around, I'd like to get back to my old place and friends and job as a gardener," he explains.

Until his hip trouble, Henry supplemented his pension cheque working as a gardener during the summer at several Clarkson estates.

He had worked since the time he left his family in Manitoba as a teenager to wander the prairies, arriving in Toronto more than 60 years ago.

Details of those years are hazy for Henry, and although it's difficult to ascertain which memories are factual or imagined, Henry's story-telling is done with innocent sincerity.

One escapade, he recalls, happened over 30 years ago when Old Henry was employed as a bulldozer operator at Clarkson Loam and Fill. One night he was awakened by the noise of rocks being thrown at his roof.

He went outside to find three boys in sheets "calin' me nigger" and when he yelled at them to go away, they wouldn't. Henry succeeded in scaring them off by shooting some buckshot at them.

It turned out the would-be "Klu Klux Klans" with the most buckshot in him was wanted by the police. "So I got 'im for the police," Henry says, his face breaking into a toothless smile.

While several members of the community have substantiated Henry's buckshot report, no one is certain of his contention that he was the first man ever operated on for tic tac de la rue.

The disease, most prevalent in Negroes, causes sudden severe headaches. Although Henry was told he might die during the operation, he decided to go ahead with it, "since dyin' was better than the pain."

Henry points to the area on the left side of his head where bone pieces were removed to relieve the pressure on his brain as he describes the operation.

"When the doctor went to give me the needle to put me out, I told him 'I wouldn't go under, but he wouldn't believe me."

"But when I started to come to right durin' the operation, he sure believed me. He yelled for the ether and that finally put me out."

"The same thing happened when I had my hip done and both those doctors told me I had the strongest constitution in the world."

On that count, Henry can't be doubted. At 95 or more years of age (He says he may even be older), Henry glows with the spirit of Christmas every day of his life.

Between walking sessions, he's content to smoke his cigars, chat with Villa residents and staff, or just sit in the lounge, humming happily to himself.

"They can have all the heaven they want, but there ain't no better 'n this place," Old Henry says. With that much contentment, who needs New Year's resolutions.

Special programs set for handicapped children

Starting in January Mississauga Recreation and Parks Department will offer a variety of special programs for handicapped children, which are geared to assist them with body co-ordination.

Included are gymnastics, skating and swimming programs. The fine-motor program will help develop fine-muscle co-ordination through crafts and exercises.

The 12-week program will be held at two locations from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Classes will be held at A.A. Martin Senior Public School

at 1390 Ogden Ave. on Mondays from Jan. 6 to March 31, and at Ellengale Public School, 3480 Ellengale Dr., on Wednesdays from Jan. 8 to April 2. Cost is \$12 per person.

The gymnastics program is designed to help with the physical and social problems of elementary-school children.

Specifically, this program is aimed at improving student co-ordination, balance, agility, flexibility and strength.

A number of high school students will work with the children on a one-to-one

basis under supervision of a qualified instructor.

Classes for children aged 5 to 9 will be held Tuesdays from Jan. 7 to April 1 at Woodlands School, Erindale Station Rd., from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m., and at Port Credit Secondary School, 70 Mincola Rd. E., from 6:45 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.

Classes for children aged 9 to 13 will be held at Woodlands School Tuesdays, starting Jan. 7, from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

There are classes for children aged 5 to 13 on Thursdays, from Jan. 9 to April 3, at Streetsville

Secondary School, Joymar Dr., from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Fee is \$12 per child.

The skating program is open to all children. They can learn under the guidance of Myrna Sharp, a professional figure-skater. The children work with volunteers and at the end of the program are tested on badges awarded by the Canadian Figure Skating Association.

Skating classes will be held at Malton Arena, Derry Rd. E., on Saturdays from Jan. 4 to March 22, 11 a.m. to noon. Fee is \$14 per child. In addition to working on a

one-to-one basis with a volunteer high school student, the child will also be under the supervision of a qualified instructor in the swimming program.

In the Glenforest and Westwood programs, children will learn how to swim and then work towards badges offered by the Canadian Red Cross Society.

Hopefully, children will also improve in overall strength and co-ordination. In the Huron program, the emphasis is on improving skills which the child wishes to learn, with no testing or badges.

Classes at Glenforest Pool, 3575 Fieldgate Dr., are on Thursdays, Jan. 2 to March 20, from 7:30 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. Huron Park Pool, 2460 Stavebank Rd., will have lessons Saturdays, Jan. 4 to March 22, from 9 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. Westwood Pool, 3545 Morningstar Dr., Malton, has its program Thursdays, Jan. 2 to March 20, from 6:45 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Cost is \$12 per child.

Although the programs are designed primarily for children aged 5 to 13, children older or younger may be considered. For more information, phone 279-7600.

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