

Eulogy for John Gallop

Written by Gordon Graham, John's son-in-law

John Gallop was born on July 23, 1940 in Thessalon's former hospital on Water Street, two houses down from where Angie and Gordon live today. His mother grew up on a farm back of Bruce Mines and the family spent their summers in the area.

For his first nine years, John lived in Hornpayne where both his parents were schoolteachers. While his parents worked, one or another nearby mother with her own small children looked after him. But he must have been quite a handful. By the time he was four, no one would take him anymore!

So until he started Grade One, John's parents used to pack him outside, lock the door, go to school, and not let him back in until they came home for lunch. One reason they locked him out was because he'd developed a habit of playing with matches. Since their house was heated with wood, there were always matches around. And wherever his parents hid them, John would find them.

That didn't always work out well. One fall day when he was 6, John and a friend built what he called a "little controlled fire" at the edge of a farmer's field. But his friend wanted more, so he lit a piece of straw on fire and released it into the wind.

John recalls that moment like a slow-motion scene from a movie. He was yelling, "Noooooo!" and diving for the stalk. But when he

missed it, the stalk landed in some tall grass so dry it exploded in his face. The whole field was quickly ablaze.

The boys ran back into town yelling, “Fire! Fire!” The Hornpayne Volunteer Fire Department came promptly and did their best. But it took a bulldozer to build up a fire break to stop the flames from burning down the whole town.

Those matches were locked up even tighter after that!

When John was nine, his parents got teaching jobs in the larger town of South Porcupine, where his father went on to become a principal.

And John spent a 1950s adolescence filled with cars and boats.

When he was a young man in the 1960s, the Baby Boom was exploding, the school system was expanding, and John said they were “pulling people off the street” to be teachers. At the age of 19, he followed in his parents’ footsteps to become a second-generation teacher.

That wasn’t an easy job. John said that from 1960 to 1968 he “worked like stink.” He’d be up at 5 AM, into school by 7, dealing with a class of 42 kids and an inspector who wanted every kid’s work checked and signed off by the end of every day. If he was lucky, John left school around 5 PM to grab some dinner and prepare for the next day. The pressure was unrelenting. He had a demanding supervisor who would sometimes fire a young teacher on the spot.

At least he got summers off, right? Nope. In the summer, he went south to complete his teacher training at the University of Toronto.

Eventually he earned his Master of Education degree, an essential credential that helped him move up in his field.

By 1967, John was rooming with several other guys in an apartment on Pine Street in the Soo when he heard about “this beautiful girl from Tweed.” She was a nurse from Belleville, new in town. So he made sure she got invited to a big party they were having.

Sure enough, she came. And around midnight, John worked up the nerve to ask her to dance. John always said, “the party was so crowded that my poor dancing skills were disguised.”

That beautiful girl from Tweed, Kathy Coulter, says, “Not!” She could tell from the beginning that John was not a slick dancer.

John said, “We hit it off, I asked her out again, and the rest is history.” Kathy introduced John to square dancing and the two were seen at events all over town. His dancing must have improved some, because they were married August 17, 1968. That’s more than 55 years ago.

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John never really liked the big city. He much preferred our northern woods and waters.

He was an avid outdoorsman who loved to go on canoe-camping-fishing trips. He hunted pheasants, deer, and moose. In the winter, he would take his snow machine to go ice fishing. He often went with his lifelong friend Paul Rowe. In a memoir he wrote in his final year,

John remembers how Paul steered their canoe so close to a moose that John felt he was right between its front legs.

On these adventures, far from the stress of the classroom, he could truly unwind.

But his summer school in Toronto paid off as John worked his way up. Starting as a teacher in Spanish, Ontario, he became a Phys Ed teacher for the Algoma District School Board, visiting different schools. He remembers a cheer would go up in the hallways when the kids saw him coming. “Yay! Gym classes today!”

He eventually taught every subject from math to art.

He had no confidence in his art skill, so he studied lessons created by fellow teacher Gordon MacKenzie and “borrowed” projects that he saw his daughter Angie doing at home. Those lessons were so good that one parent came in to learn painting techniques from him.

Eventually John became a vice-principal of Mountainview School in Goulais River and then principal of Searchmont’s school.

One spring there was a big flood in Searchmont, so bad the highway was under a couple feet of water. John and his Grade 8 teacher Walter Senko decided to paddle a canoe in to check on the school. The picture on your memorial cards is from that trip.

John remembered it as an exciting paddle, with white water in spots along the streets.

As he and Walter passed houses where they saw any students outside puddling in their yards, they'd pull up the canoe and yell, "C'mon! It's time for school!"

After serving as principal of S. F Howe, John retired when he 55.

For many years after retirement, he was recognized by former students. One time, he and Angie were having lunch during a ski day at Searchmont when an imposing biker-looking dude strode up to their table. Both John and Angie looked up at him with concern before his face broke out in a big smile and he said, "Hi Mr. Gallop!"

John's response at the end of their conversation?

"Well, Thank God I was good to you!"

John was able to enjoy almost 30 years of retirement on a handsome teacher's pension. During that time, he enjoyed playing golf and hockey until well into his 70s. He also went to cards and took part in a rollicking book club with Angie, Gordon, Carla Slomke, Kevin and Tanya Allen, Tina Johncox, Heather Blois, and Maribeth Smith.

John was known to everyone who met him as a gentleman with a kind heart, a quick smile, and an amusing story to share. He was proud of his daughter Angie and the fact that she returned to this area after her adventures in the south. And he had a quiet love for his grand-daughters Cassidy and Lily.

John, we honour your roles as an educator, husband, father, grandfather, and friend. We commend your spirit and promise to carry forward the wisdom you shared with us.