

Life is a never-ending adventure for gardener Dierdre Tomlinson

By Brock Weir

There are those who go through certain trauma and come through the other side without complaint. Then there are those who are adventurous, promiscuous, chatty enough to take up all the air space around them yet have nothing to say. Some others display aggression against their neighbours.

A slice of ordinary human existence? Perhaps. But, this is how Dierdre Tomlinson sees her garden.

Ms. Tomlinson who, with her husband David, opened the doors to their Merlin's Hollow garden 35 years ago, freely admits she sees the world a little bit differently. Opening their Centre Crescent gates for the first time in this 35th season this Saturday, she gives back to the community not only by sharing her garden with nature lovers from around Ontario, but as a tireless volunteer for organizations including the Aurora Food Pantry.

‘I have always felt if you're lucky you should make things lucky for others,’ she says. ‘It is hard to be poor in a place like Aurora. It is an affluent town now, but there are some people who work really hard but just have so little money. There was once a couple from Afghanistan who came in with their two young children. I talked to them as I took them around, asking what sort of work they did. She said she pumped gas until the previous week when she was laid off for no reason. Her husband worked in a coffee maker factory for \$10 an hour.

‘In Afghanistan, he was an engineer and she was a lawyer. They have been cherry-picked to come to Canada and are unable to work at their own level. I have had some very interesting conversations with people going around, so I go there to help out. I think if you're lucky, you should make things lucky for other people.’

The Tomlinsons have seen both sides of lady luck. Both hailing from the United Kingdom, they came to Canada in the early 1970s. Although they were not particularly affluent in their home country, the lean times really hit when they arrived on our shores. The two occasionally struggled to get work while raising their two daughters, but they made do and David continues to carve a remarkable career for himself as a landscape architect.

‘Life can be so interesting and it has been so good to David and I,’ says Mrs. Tomlinson, 74. ‘We both started off very poor working class. We didn't think we were because everyone around us was too. We came here and David had the opportunity to be a landscape architect for 40 years and I worked in a mental health clinic. I found that fascinating.’

As she walks around her garden pondering the personalities of the flowers she has come to love and intently observe, she freely admits to seeing the world just a little bit differently.

In her eighth decade, her artistic roots have spread well beyond the confines of Merlin's Hollow to encompass the written word ? fiction and poetry ? which she now regularly performs in various outlets, including open mike nights around York Region.

Curiously, when she sets pen to paper, she often finds herself writing from the perspective of a man. This surprised her, as she says with a laugh that she had never before considered what was on the other side of the gender divide. Yet, this was the voice looking to get out and ‘sometimes it is a lazy teen or a grumpy old man.’

Reading a piece from her garden gazebo, Dierdre reads in the voice of a man named Sid ? probably someone who is closer to the grumpy old man column than the lazy teen ? writing to his friend Brian. Sid and Brian both hailed from Aurora and Sid is writing to his childhood pal about how much the area has changed from their salad days.

‘The fields we used to tromp over looking at birds, we'd have a hard job finding a blade of grass on now,’ writes ‘Sid’. ‘Hey, the old tree we loved at the edge of the slope we tobogganed past, all its branches have fallen off and it is just like a monument to what was, but it has still got our initials carved in. They grew bigger as we grew older. Working class people have been vacuumed out of the

Town, superseded by colonizers who golf all day and eat at high-priced restaurants at night. Kids are driven to school now. Imagine that, Brian. If we had been driven we couldn't have gotten up to half the tricks we did.

?Whatever happened to that lean, strong carpenter I was back in the dark ages who repaired people's windows and fortified their rooves and basements three wives ago? Where does the time go? My sister eyed my paunch the other day and asked if I was expecting twins or triplets. Women! How are you doing? It has been decades since this and your last letter. How are you doing in the love market? I am staying away from dames now. It's safer. Three counts and you're out, eh??

Rest assured, there are plenty of innings left for this ?dame? and she is looking forward to tackling each one of them. Merlin's Hollow is located at 181 Centre Crescent, just west of Industrial Parkway North off Centre Street. It opens this Saturday, May 14 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free.