

Note to Self honours heroes and "beautiful weirdos"



By Brock Weir

If you're anywhere close to 91, you might be forgiven for getting into a bit of a routine.

But 91-year-old Carl Bedal, a veteran of the Second World War who served in the Royal Canadian Navy, is a firm believer that it's never too late to try something new.

He was recently asked by local photographer Angela Durante Dukat to think back to those days in the 1940s when he weighed the options before him before taking the plunge for King and Country. It was a new experience, and he had a lot to say when the fruits of this collaboration were unveiled for all to see Thursday night at the Aurora Public Library.

"When I heard about this project, I was excited for a couple of reasons," said Mr. Bedal. "I am not as young as I used to be. I am only 91 now, and there is something about a youthful group that it is good to be associated with at this age! Secondly, it is an exciting project and something new. When you get to the age I am at, I sure like trying something new, even if it is downright dangerous!"

The Note to Self project is a collective of 101 portraits from people from around the Aurora community and the Greater Toronto area, who were tasked with writing words of advice, or imparting pearls of wisdom to their younger selves, who are also pictured. 10 of the 101 portraits are now on display through February at the Aurora Public Library with the full set available to purchase in book form – either in hard copy or as an e-book.

Enlisting in the Canadian Navy at the height of the Second World War indicates Mr. Bedal has always had a penchant for walking a bit on the wild side, but his Note to Self reveals a slightly different perspective.

"How could you be so stupid after high school to join Canada's wartime navy?" he berates himself. "Guess you didn't know you'd be seasick every day you were on the high seas? Strange, you were born the son of parents whose families for generations had never served in any conflict – exempt from service because they farmed. Yet, you volunteered.

"You may not have realised it when you donned a natty naval uniform but at that moment you achieved complete emancipation – release from family, escape from farming and freedom from school. It probably felt great until?"

Mr. Bedal leaves the reader hanging, but he was joined at the opening last week by one Aurora resident who could fill in the blank better than anyone: 103-year-old Royal Navy veteran Allen Griffiths. The two men were engrossed in conversation as many of the portrait subjects assembled to read theirs to a packed crowd in the Library Living room, from local youth and artists, to Toronto bloggers, and even famed fashion designer Linda Lundstrom.

?It is so humbling that a little project that started in a coffee shop culminated in this: all these wonderful, inspiring people sitting in a circle together and sharing art and sharing words of reflection,? said Ms. Durante Dukat, introducing fellow photographers Melanie Hillock, Averill Bell, Ronen Grunberg, Rhodri Ford, Holly Thomas, Alex Krupa and Renata Pollock. ?These photographers saved me from the depths of despair when I was on portrait 36 wondering how on earth we are going to finish this project. We did commit ourselves to doing 100, so we really wanted to get there. . This is where people really get to dig into their own life experience and decide what it is they would like to share with you, what they have learned in their lives.

?This is the part of the project I am most proud of because it is not an easy thing to do and I so appreciate not only that you sat in front of the camera, that you let us look into your eyes, and you also put pen to paper, and really gave us something of yourself. I really believe as a portrait photographer we can take all the portraits we want, but it really is all about what the person who is sitting there gives you. If they don't give you anything then you have nothing. It is really all about what you give. You gave twice and we are all grateful for that.?

For more on the Note to Self project and to buy a copy of the book, visit dukatphotos.com/the-note-to-self-project.