

Unlikely bonds of friendship formed around the hockey rink for local writer



By Brock Weir

Unless you're a die-hard hockey fan, sitting around a cold rink watching young hockey players learn the ropes of Canada's game is probably not your idea of the ideal date night.

It wasn't Julia Lucas' idea of a great date night either, but we do strange things for love.

She's glad she did, however, as, 40 years on, she is still married to her date and, watching his two sons practice on the ice, she formed a rather unlikely bond that sustains her to this day.

An Aurora woman with long-held ambitions of becoming a published author, she shares her story in the recently published *Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Spirit of Canada*.

Co-authored by Amy Newmark and Aurora's Janet Matthews, it is a collection of '101 Stories of love and gratitude' centred on the Canadian spirit.

'Like every *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book, when you start you're actually not crystal clear,' says Ms. Matthews on developing her fourth Canadian-themed *Chicken Soup* book looking for these elusive Canadian stories, having pitched ideas to her database of writers ranging from 'How do you celebrate Canada Day?' to 'Have you been inspired by some of our greatest heroes?'

'Then, you just wait for stuff to come in and it is always an unexpected surprise,' she says. 'You know what is coming, but you don't really know what form it will be. What came through was love and gratitude. These stories are about love and gratitude for this county. Whether it is a new immigrant who has found a new life here, or freedom or the first time, they are so grateful.'

Ms. Lucas' story is a different spin on the theme.

Back in the 1970s, in the throes of early romance, her then-boyfriend Dave used to stop by the rink to watch his two sons from his previous marriage practice on the ice before going out for dinner-for-two.

Ms. Lucas says she did not grow up in a hockey family, but everyone on Dave's end of the deal was 'hockey mad,' so she went along for the ride.

One day, Dave was taking part in a fathers-and-sons game with his eldest and bored watching by herself in the parents' room, she decided to go sit in the bleachers close to the action.

Soon, she spotted a woman coming towards her. Realising she had seen the woman with Dave's sons, she surmised she was their mother.

'Hi, I'm Mary Lou,' said the woman, Julia recalls. 'The boys tell me lovely things about you.'

'We started having such a friendly, open conversation,' she shares, 'and Dave skated by the boards, saw me, said 'hi,' realised who I was talking to and did the classic double take and skidded down the ice on his skates, banging into another father. Mary Lou and I burst out laughing and then got on with our conversations.'

'We became best friends. Dave and I have been together for 40 years now. We have two grandchildren, we all get together at Christmas and family events, and I have never forgotten Mary Lou's simple, honest kindness.'

When Ms. Matthews read the story she just knew it was a perfect fit for 'The Spirit of Canada' and it was not just the hockey hook,

but also the themes of family, kindness, forgiveness, acceptance and healing.

‘And there’s also a bit of humour,’ says Ms. Matthews. ‘It’s a modern family!’

Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Spirit of Canada brings together these individual stories from coast to coast, from these strong bonds of unlikely friendship forming in the shadow of a sport so proudly Canadian, to stories of resilience and communities coming together in the wake of the Fort McMurray fire, to Syrian refugee families experiencing a Canadian welcome for the first time.

‘The goal of every Chicken Soup story is to touch the heart of the reader and inspire them in some way, cause them to gasp or have a moment of realness or inspiration they may not have had before,’ says Ms. Matthews. ‘Maybe have some hope where they didn’t have hope before. I know the stories in this book pretty well and even now when I go back and read the stories I can find myself really feeling the emotion and the intensity of what’s in it.’

On sale now, Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Spirit of Canada launches locally next Saturday, June 24 at Chapters Newmarket (17440 Yonge Street) from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., featuring several contributing authors eager to share their stories and sign your books.