

William O'Brien: 100 years and still going strong



By Kristena Schutt-Moore

Born in the post First World War era, William 'Bill' O'Brien was born on May 6, 1921, and this year he celebrates 100 years of what he calls 'living a very normal life. I have worked hard, spent my money wisely, taken care of my health, not abused my body, enjoyed my leisure time, made and kept good friends, and I have raised children who I am very proud of.'

O'Brien was born and raised on the O'Brien Farm on Lower Faraday Road near Coe Hill. He also raised his family there. He and his wife, Ruth (Ramage) had four children, Gilbert, Dan, Jackalin and Bill Junior. These days he enjoys keeping in touch with his grandkids and great-grandkids 'I would say they are number one citizens of the country.'

O'Brien has been an outdoors man all his life. When he wasn't out on the farm working, O'Brien could be found in the bush, hunting, fishing or trapping. 'I had been trapping since I was in public school, and I did it up until a year ago,' O'Brien explains. His favourite hunting memory was when he was a young lad out hunting with his dad and uncle. They had gone out to get some venison to store over the winter months, but what the dogs brought to them was something entirely different. At first, they couldn't figure out what the young O'Brien had shot. Turns out it was a moose. 'We had never seen one before! This was when they first started coming to this area.' The moose was cleaned up and put into storage and it guaranteed that the families had a good supply of meat that winter.

O'Brien got into politics in 1952 because, 'The other councillors had been there a long time and I thought we needed some new people.' He didn't win a seat on council, but he did well as many people did vote for him. So, he decided to run again the following year. Unfortunately, other young lads saw that he had done well and decided to run as well.

Some of them didn't follow through with the election process once they started, but they all divided the vote to the point that none of them got in, including O'Brien.

He decided to try it one more time in 1954 and won his seat on Wollaston council. He served on council for many years and was the

reeve for five years. He continued to serve his township for many years, up until he was 97 by still serving on the township's minor variance committee.

He also serves his community through the St. Andrew's United Church in Coe Hill, and he is part of the Masonic Lodge and is one of the founding members of the Algonquin Shrine Club. The club works to support sick kids' hospitals around the country. He has also dabbled in a bit of real estate, for both himself and others, roughly close to 3,000 acres. That is how he came to purchase a gravel pit, which to this day he still runs, although with the help of a manager.

?I've had testing done on the quarry and the 40 acres goes down some 30-some feet to bedrock. But half way down you hit water,? says O'Brien. ?Years ago, when I got the license, the quarry was already below water level so I was permitted to keep taking gravel down to bedrock. Now you have to stop at water level. Eventually, after I am gone, it will all fill with water and there will be a lake there.?

O'Brien moved into the Riverstone Residence last year, but he hasn't slowed down much. Currently he competes in the weekly euchre tournament at the residence as well as plays bingo three times a week.

Back when he was 97-years-old, his family asked him to write a book about his life and how things have changed in the area over the years. The book he created is called My Life on the Lower Faraday Road. He still has several copies for sale and anyone interested in purchasing it can contact O'Brien on his cell phone at 613-334-0852.

A drive-by birthday party was planned for May 6 to celebrate O'Brien's 100 years. However, with the current lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions it has been postponed until it is possible.