



Steve Grahame, above in the field near his childhood home, says his grandfather's many gifts changed his brother's life. To watch a video on Stephen's story go to the YouTube icon on the sdcf.ca main page.

Your donation can change lives; Giving Challenge Week Nov. 13 – 19

The annual Giving Challenge Week is just around the corner and Selkirk & District Community Foundation Chair Shauna Curtin is hoping the community will have the same response it has every year – over the top.

“Every year the community comes out in support of the Foundation and our donors give generously and from the heart,” Curtin says.

“Our donors really are terrific and they keep us in mind at all times. During Giving Week we host a day at the Gaynor Family Regional Library so we can have a visit with them, a coffee and conversation, and really just say thank you for their incredible, undying spirit. We'll do that again this year.”

Indeed, the one-day event at the library – this year Nov. 18 – is like a meeting of old friends.

The week itself is important to the Foundation, and to donors and local organizations, because donations during that week are stretched with funds from the Winnipeg Foundation and the Provincial Government.

And donors are the heartbeat of the Foundation, enabling it to support non-profits that are doing good work in the community.

Donations really can change lives and a donation by the grandfather of a local educator years ago demonstrates beautifully the power of endowment and the power of love.

Steve Grahame is the Director of the Lord Selkirk Education Centre. His grandfather, Wesley McGill, didn't donate to a foundation, but his gifts to Steve's brother had the same kind of life-altering affects that SDCF funds do today.

Mr. McGill's story goes back to the 1930's, when he was a school principal working in Red Lake, Ont., and began saving for a future he at that time knew nothing about.

"My grandfather was a smart, smart man and very forward thinking, a little bit ahead of his time. Just in his view of how society outta work, and how...we're all in this together and those are important things. We have to take care of everybody and everybody rises up," Stephen says.

"He was a real true believer in that."

Red Lake had a gold mine, and that factored into Mr. McGill's savings.

"Part of his paycheque at the time at the end of the school year he took home in gold. It was the '30s and banks were insolvent, and all sorts of things were going on and people were worried about putting their money in banks so he took the payment home in gold."

The lack of faith in banks prompted Mr. McGill to hold onto his gold.

"He didn't put it in safety deposit boxes, he had it stored under the front porch of his house. He had a strong box that he could access from the basement and he pushed it under with a stick and he had a very small little piece of fishing line or something that he could pull the box out and get it. No one would know it was there," he said.

Fast forward to the '70s and McGill is retired and he's cashed in his gold – which was worth about \$35 an ounce in the 1930s and substantially more in the '70s – and invested it.

At that time, Stephen's family was living in Crestview in Winnipeg, near his grandfather whose home was in Woodhaven. Stephen's brother John had autism and they went against the societal norm of institutionalized living and John lived at home.

Mr. McGill's first gift was time.

“My grandfather came to our house every single day and took my brother for a walk between 4 and 5 o’clock so that my mother could get dinner ready,” Stephen says.

“When you think about a commitment to every day, day after day, month after month, and this went on for years, from 1970 until the time my brother moved out in the mid-’80s, 15 years. That’s a lot of walking.”

His next gift allowed John to live an independent adult life.

Stephen says his grandfather realized his investments, his endowment, were needed most by John.

“He could see that his other grandchildren, myself and my three cousins, were all on the road to get university educations and we would be able to provide for ourselves,” he said.

“His thinking was that my brother wouldn’t have those opportunities and wouldn’t be able to make his own money and fend for himself. My grandfather believed in being in the community and so he left part of his estate to my mother and my aunt, but also a large part to my brother so that things could smooth that over, there would be money to do some things, to help him along.

“The idea of building this endowment for my brother is really an act of love. It’s foresight that this would help him long term.”

And it did. John lived independently and at the time of his passing in the late ‘90s he was the oldest person in Manitoba with autism who had never been in an institution.

Mr. McGill’s endowment looks a little different than today’s, but it served the same purpose.

“It’s a neat story about keeping it under the front porch in the strong box because that’s what you did,” Stephen says.

“When I think about those things now, and we have the Selkirk & District Community Foundation, you don’t have to keep it under your porch and that’s a good thing.”

To make a donation during the Giving Challenge, you can do so online at endowMB.org (click ‘Make a donation to my foundation’ to find SDCF; drop off a cheque at the City of Selkirk office at 200 Eaton Ave., in the outdoor drop box; call the Foundation at 204-785-9755 and a staff member will assist you; or visit the Foundation team at the Gaynor Family Regional Library on Nov. 18 between 10am and 1pm, make a donation and enjoy a cup of tea.

To watch a video on Stephen’s story go to the Foundation’s YouTube channel, SDCF TV, or click the YouTube icon on the sdcf.ca main page.



SDCF board and staff at last year's Giving Challenge at Gaynor Family Regional Library.