

The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)

She's always on the go; Energetic and caring | Though she knows she'll have to slow down some day, until that time comes Nancy Chessie is happy to do all she can for everyone in her life

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Page: C1

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It's one of those rare moments when Nancy (Kitchen) Chessie is sitting still.

As she lounges on her living room sofa, she admits she has trouble doing nothing. She has always been busy. As a kid she ran through the fields at her family's home in Kingsclear.

When her brother needed to have back surgery, after a fall which caused spine damage, her parents decided to move the family to Montreal to be closer to the Shriners Children's Hospital where he was receiving treatment.

When she was five, she started school there. It wasn't a happy experience for the little girl. She never wanted to leave her home.

"I used to come home every summer and stay with my grandparents at Kingsclear."

Summers there she recalls were filled with carefree fun where she would ride a little horse on their farm.

She stayed in school until Grade 10. Even back then, she says, she had trouble sitting still for long. It was unbearable to have to sit at a desk in class all day long.

When she was 15 she started learning to become a hairdresser at Walker's Beauty Salon in Fredericton. By the time she was 16 she started working full time at the shop. She stayed there until she received an offer from another salon.

"I was making \$15 a week and a lady offered me \$30 to go to a different shop. Then Mrs. Walker offered me \$45 to come back. That was a lot of money back in 1959."

When she wasn't working, she says, she would go to dances in New Market with her aunts. There Lewis Chessie caught her eye.

"He was real cute. He had nice, dark curly hair and big blue eyes."

One night he asked if he could drive her home from one of those dances. They dated two years. Then, when she was 18 and he was 21, they married on June 20, 1959. This couple often teases one another over who proposed.

"I knew he was going to get me my diamond. So I said to him one time 'Well you know after we're

married ...' And he said 'Oh, are we going to be married?' And I said 'Yeah, we are going to be married.' So I guess I did propose to him!"

Their first home was a one-room schoolhouse she bought at an auction for \$125 in New Maryland and moved it to a property they bought on the Hanwell Road. Their's was a rustic residence. In the beginning they didn't have running water. They made it a homey, comfortable place as they had the money to make improvements to the building.

She laughs as she talks about laying hardwood flooring while she was almost due to give birth. Their first baby, Beth, was born in 1960, Bill was born in 1962, and in 1964, Brenda arrived.

This home was where the family stayed for 25 years. Chessie has always been unafraid of hard work. While she was raising her three children she ran a beauty shop. She hired a live-in housekeeper to help out at home while both she and her husband worked full time.

For 13 years Lewis Chessie worked on the road as a heavy equipment sales associate. In many ways she was like a single mother through the work week.

The years passed quickly. Their children grew up and started families of their own. In 1979, at age 37, she became a grandmother for the first time. Now at age 65, she is a grandmother to six.

Photos of all of the grandkids are framed and on the living room wall. Spending time with them, she says, is wonderful.

"They're all good kids."

Now she is looking forward to playing with great grandchildren if and when they arrive.

In 1985, the couple decided to move to Yoho Lake to their cottage. They winterized the building and have added to it.

Now it is a lovely, comfortable place on the lake shore.

"I love it. It's nice to get up in the morning and look at the water."

Each morning she is up at 6:30. Before she can eat she has to feed all of her pets.

"I love animals. They love you."

There are five cats and a dog here which demand her attention. After they're fed she makes brown bag lunches for her and her husband to take to work. After a quick breakfast she goes to work at her salon Elegant Touch.

Although her doctor has told her she should no longer be working, due to rheumatoid arthritis and she has undergone a shoulder joint replacement and is waiting for surgery on her elbow, she insists on continuing.

"I don't have anybody to take over the shop and I don't want to close it. I'd like to work maybe a couple of days."

She can't imagine saying goodbye to her loyal customers who've been coming to her since she started in this business 49 years ago.

She does hair for seniors at a special care home every Friday as well and she doesn't want to disappoint them either.

By next year, she says, she'd like to only work part time. But she says she never plans to quit completely.

She'd like to continue to cut and style hair for as long as her body will let her.

"I don't know anything else to do. What else would I do?"

While she is standing behind her salon chair she hears about what's happening in her clients' lives.

Rather than giving advice, she says, she provides a friendly ear and a shoulder if it's needed. There are many problems solved in her salon.

"It's not all gossip! We hear a lot of it but we also hear a lot of good things too. I would miss those people so much. I just can't imagine sitting home and wondering what they're doing and who's doing their hair."

But this lady can find lots of things to do to keep busy. When she isn't working she is constantly puttering around the house.

Everything in her home is neat and tidy. It stays this way, she says, because she can't stand to sit still and see things out of place.

"I seem to always have to be cleaning. I get mad at myself because I think 'Why can't I sit down?' "

The bottom half of an artificial Christmas tree is sitting in the corner of the living room. She's just started to set it up. This is the first year the family won't have a real tree. She thought she wanted it but now she isn't sure.

There's something about a real tree, she says, no artificial can compare to. She thinks she may have to

get a fresh tree and decorate it too.

But this lady also knows how to have a good time. She loves to laugh and have fun with friends.

She used to bowl but has had to give it up in the last year because of her arthritis.

When they have time together she and her husband both enjoy driving their all terrain vehicles near their home.

When she's home she likes to prepare healthy homecooked meals.

"I usually come home and cook supper because my husband can't cook. I only cook because I have to, not because I like to."

On tonight's menu there is pork chops, potatoes and broccoli. At 5 p.m. her husband comes home. Supper hasn't been started because she's been talking about their life together. She runs her hand through his now snow-white hair.

It's clear after 47 years of marriage their feelings for one another run deep.

If she could do everything over again she says she would have stayed in school. While some would have said she was too young to marry at 18, she says, she would do it all over again.

"I have no regrets about that."

When she isn't working or taking care of things at home, she says, she loves to read. Danielle Steel books are some of her favourite romance novels.

She tries to watch what she eats and never drinks alcohol or smokes. Does she have any vices?

"I swear. Don't write that! But everybody knows it so it doesn't matter," she says as she laughs.

This woman knows how to laugh at herself.

She is often teased but she says she can give as good as she gets. People will always know what she is thinking, she says, because she doesn't mince words.

This woman is a cervical cancer survivor. She was diagnosed at age 28. After surgery she was back to work within two months. Her only concern, she recalls, was wondering what would happen to her children if she hadn't survived.

Life has had many ups and downs. Some of the best things in life come through struggle.

When she looks back at her life, she says, she is happy.

The secret to a happy, fulfilled life? She says: "Not everything comes easy. You have to work at everything. Your marriage, your children. You have to work at it all."

