

## Family's history on Christmas cards

# Grandma Clarkson

## just can't stop

by PAT ZAMPERIN

Betty Clarkson wants to make one thing clear about her collection of homemade Christmas cards currently on display at Port Credit Library.

"They're not art, they're not meant to be art. They're a pictorial family history."

Clarkson, the mother of two grown daughters, has been making the Christmas cards since she got married in 1941.

She didn't begin out of economic necessity, but rather for the sheer enjoyment of chronicling in a most unusual way, her family's life. So she stashed away the Polaroid and began stoking her creativity.

"My sister's the real artist," Clarkson says. "She used to make cards when we were both young and I'd just put the finishing touches on them. Then we'd sell them for five cents a piece."

Today, the senior citizen says she wouldn't dream of selling her cards. She has a tough enough time keeping up with the demands of friends and neighbors who've started their own collection of Clarkson's Christmas cards sent over the years. Each year she mails nearly 200 homemade greetings.

"It was a real surprise when we found out, just recently, that our friends have been saving all these cards," Clarkson says. "I guess they sort of become memorabilia."

**The card** The

The cards are more than memorabilia, however, for their creator.

### SPECIAL

To Clarkson and her husband, they represent special, treasured moments from each previous year. Back in 1941, the first year the Lorne Park resident made a Christmas card, she depicted herself and her husband wooshing down snow-covered slopes on a winter vacation. Clambering alongside is the first of four dogs who'll go down in Clarkson history on Christmas cards.

By 1943, a baby carriage has appeared on the front of the Clarkson's Christmas cards, celebrating the arrival of their first daughter.

By 1948, a reasonable facsimile of their first house in Washington, D.C. graced the greeting cards.

As the family grew, the scenes changed. In 1949 the children and their dog and are depicted singing

Christmas carols; the following year, the two girls are taking ballet lessons; the next year, the family is shown tobogganing.

"They're just normal, everyday things we did as a family," Clarkson says. "Things we like to recall around Christmas."

By 1956, it was costing her five cents per card, including the cost of the envelope, to mail 200 greetings.

In 1958, Clarkson switched from stencilling her drawings to making silkprint designs for her cards.

"I just read a few books and picked up how to do it. It's much faster. In one morning, I can do 200 cards."

### SIMPLE

She keeps her drawings simple. Her husband is always the "man who's balding on top," and all the human figures are almost stick-like, blocked out with no pretensions to correct proportioning or artistic merit.

"I never have trouble finding ideas for my cards," Clarkson says. My ideas are way ahead of my cards. There's always something new."

Like the year they spent in Tehran with Canadian Executive Services Overseas.

"One day my husband just said 'let's get on a carpet and get out of here.' The phrase stick, so that year, I drew my husband on a flying carpet with some background scenery from Tehran, and that was our Christmas card."

This year, the Clarksons' Christmas card depicts their four grandchildren. Next year, who knows?"

"I just know I'll keep on doing it, Clarkson says. "I can't stop now."



Remember when? Betty Clarkson has no trouble recalling fond memories of bygone years. Since 1941, the Lorne Park resident has made her own Christmas cards depicting special occasions in her family's life. This month, her collection is on display at Port Credit library. (Staff photo by Michael Stuparyk)