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a v.i.p. and me

(very interesting person)

By KATHLEEN A. HICKS

“There is something great about working with youngsters. When you get up into the administration of an organization, you know you are doing it for the kids, and you want to make improvements for their sake, but you lose the personal contact — I miss that a lot. We are in hockey because we love the sport; we are not in it for prestige or money; it is strictly a volunteer service to our community.”

AL HICKS:

Chairman — Mississauga Sabres Ball Club
Past President — Mississauga Hockey League
Grandfather — Tracy Collin
and my husband.

ME: Recently you were re-elected as the Chairman of the Mississauga Sabres Ball Club. What brought about the establishment of this senior ball team and your association with it?

AL: It all started last spring when I was asked by a couple of friends to organize a meeting to see how many people were interested. I've always felt there has been a definite need for a senior ball club here in Mississauga, so I agreed. Consequently, we had a good turnout and somehow I got conned into being chairman.

ME: Just what duties and responsibilities does the executive carry out on behalf of the Club?

AL: This year, we started from scratch, and along with myself we only had two other directors, Steve Zak and Robin Lee. Then I asked a long time friend, Jack Gorrill, if he would look after the treasury duties. The first thing we had to do was scrape up enough funds to get started. This mainly became my responsibility along with player rep, Gary Nickerson, whose brain-child the Sabre team is. He and I worked hard to get together enough sponsors to get the Sabres on the road. I felt that the four of us on the executive worked very well as a team, and as I knew he would, Jack did more than just handle the financing; he was my right hand throughout the season and nothing was too much trouble for him.

ME: What accomplishments and what problems have been most prominent in getting the Club off the ground?

AL: One drawback was that we wanted this to be mainly a Mississauga team, but starting out the first year, we had to have a few experienced players, and so we had several imports from Toronto and Oakville. But with the nucleus of some fine Mississauga ball players and these imports, we ended up having a fairly strong contender. There were a few

problems in the beginning with lining up a manager and coaching staff, because it is a time consuming job and strictly volunteer, and although we had a very productive season and played over 500 ball, the executive still feels it doesn't have the right men running the team. We're certainly going to try and find a good manager and coach living within the boundaries of Mississauga for next year. There was some dissension throughout the season, but we could always sit down like gentlemen and iron these differences out. Throughout my playing and coaching days of baseball, I don't think I have ever been associated with a finer bunch of young, dedicated men. Personally, I feel several of them didn't get a fair chance to show what they were really capable of doing, but they at least have the first season under their belts. And I am quite confident we will have at least 70 per cent of our team in tack next spring.

ME: You started your coaching involvement back in the early '50s. Tell me how this came about?

AL: Back in '52 or '53, we were living on Kenmuir Avenue and we frequented the corner variety store, which was owned by Ed Boehmert. He was involved with the Lakeshore Bruins Junior "B" hockey team, and he asked me to come down to the Lakeshore Arena. So I started my coaching career with the Lakeshore Bruins in the old Toronto Hockey League and worked from Bantam to Midget. Even back then, working with a pro-sponsored organization there was too much emphasis put on win at any cost, and too much interference from higher ups telling you who you should or shouldn't play, and it took the fun out of coaching. So I came up and took a peewee team with the Lyndwood organization in the Toronto Township Hockey League (now M.H.L.), and found it more satisfying. While growing up I played a lot of hockey and baseball, and often felt if given the same opportunity boys today, I could have perhaps went further and made a career of it, more so in baseball — that has always been my first love next to my wife. When our son, Marty turned 10 in '64, I quit playing myself and got him playing baseball for Applewood. They were short a coach and so I took on the team. That was the start of coaching baseball, and we went

on to win the championship in 1969. That was the last year he played and I coached.

ME: In 1964, you became a representative of the Cooksville Hockey Association. What is expected of you in this rep capacity?

AL: The duty of a rep is to attend monthly League meetings and take any pertinent information back to his own association meeting, as well as fulfilling obligations on various committees within the League. Another function on a rep's part is to spend one or two nights a month on rink duty.

ME: Just how were you approached to go on the Board of Directors for the M.H.L. in 1966?

AL: The directors are made up from area reps within the League, mainly from people who were not area reps in name only, but from people who fulfilled their duties and obligations conscientiously. I guess I fit into this category. I was asked to become a director by Mike Masewich who was then Vice President. Being chosen to be a director was a feeling of real accomplishment.

ME: During your years on the Board, you served on several committees. Tell me what they were and a little about fulfilling your duties on each.

AL: One of the first committees I chaired was series convening, and this entailed sitting with a committee and placing teams into proper categories to give better competition throughout the League. With the exception of this year, I have sat on the discipline committee since I have been on the Board of Directors, and I chaired it in '70-'71. Sitting on this committee involves a lot of Sunday afternoons and week day evenings, because discipline matters have to be dealt with immediately. Everyone who works up to be President should have handled this committee for at least one season. You really get to see all the problems being involved in that capacity of hockey. I have also chaired playoffs, Minor Midget Day at Maple Leaf Gardens and Hockey Week, and been in charge of the referees, the ticket-takers, cashiers and time-keepers.

I'm a small town boy at heart'

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ME: After serving as Vice President to Jack Harris, you were voted in as President for the 1971-'72 season. Enlighten me on a few highlights of your year in office.

AL: After being involved on the hockey board for so long, becoming President has to be the first highlight. The opening of Cawthra Arena has to be another because we badly needed the extra ice surfaces. To top that year off would have to be the first President's Ball, which is now an annual affair. This I have to admit was my wife's idea and she worked very hard to make it a success. When I was Vic President, receiving a certificate of recognition from the Town signed by my good friend, the late Mayor Bob Speck, was certainly the highlight of that year. It will always be a cherished possession.

ME: Having been involved in baseball and hockey for so many years, is there any one incident that remains with you over all your experiences?

AL: The one incident that stands out in my mind over anything else is one that happened the year I was Discipline Chairman. We had to suspend a Minor Midget team just before the playoffs, and I spent a whole sleepless night wishing I'd never heard of the M.H.L. But like anything else time heals; and if I had to deal with the same type of problem again, I would most likely make the same decision.

ME: What has all this sports involvement done for you?

AL: There is something great about working with youngsters. When you get up into the administration of an organization, you know you are doing it for the kids, and you want to make improvements for their sake, but you lose the personal contact — I miss that a lot. We are in hockey because we love the sport; we are not in it for prestige or money; it is strictly a volunteer service to our community. We want recreational hockey for the boys, and we are not interested in whether they are good hockey players or not so good — just that they play. Through the years, we have planned doing various things for the betterment of the League in general, and while I have been on the Board, I have seen Sunday Night hockey, the Triple "A" Series and all teams going to full ice come into effect, just to mention a few. Carrying these out and seeing something from beginning to end, persevering with it, can add much to someone's life. It helps you to gain confidence in your ability to do things and in yourself. We have some terrific men on the Board now — capable, dedicated workers. I have very positive feelings that the next few years will be in good hands, and it's been my pleasure to be associated with them.

ME: What makes a man give up so much of his sparetime to his community?

AL: First of all, I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't enjoy it, and for every irate parent or fan you run into there are 100 good appreciative ones. There have been many times when I felt like getting out of it, especially when you lose such close friends as Warren Marshall, Jack Darling, Jack Bryce and Morley Peeling. There is a lot of emotional involvement that probably contributed a lot to ruining their health. But you know if they were still alive they would be in it giving it their all, so you stay in it, too, despite the risks.

ME: Before you started with Wyant and Company, you were a driver-salesman for Cooksville Jersey Dairy for thirteen years. What is prominent in your memory of those days when milk delivery was the in-thing?

AL: I have a lot of fond memories of those days, being a milkman, people were so great they treated you like one of the family. And Jim Newman was a boss you only come across once in a lifetime. I think the worse mishap I had — and I had plenty as you well know — but this one stays with me the most. I was driving down Haig Boulevard in the middle of winter. We'd just had a big snowfall and the roads were really slippery. Haig has a lot of trees and hedges. So, I was driving along, cautiously, thank God, and all of a sudden a toboggan with two kids in it shot out of a driveway in front of me. My reflexes were sure in good shape, because I just swung that truck for the ditch, and I missed the kids. I was thrown out, but the load shifted forward — out the doors and through the front window — not a bottle of milk or one egg was whole. I telephoned Jim Newman, and he came down and he never said a reproachful word about the damage, just praised me for saving the lives of those two little kids. He was a terrific guy to work for, and I miss the dairy a lot and all the people I was associated with.

ME: You recently ran for Councillor in the Municipal Election. What did you gain from this experience?

AL: I found it to be a very beneficial experience. I met a lot of nice people I would otherwise have not met. I was very disillusioned though by the fact that the many nice people I met didn't find the time to get out and vote. I find to win in any kind of election, no matter how big or small, you have to have one of two things, a lot of money or a lot of volunteers to work for you, unfortunately I didn't have an abundance of either. But I must say, the people who did help me, really outdid themselves. Today we have little time for socializing and getting together with our friends, but you really know what true friendship is when you call on someone you haven't seen for ages and they rally to help you, and even complete strangers offer their help; it's really something. The one conclusion I have come to from having gone through the campaign is from the poor turn out at the polls, people can't be too damned dissatisfied with living conditions in Mississauga. My hat is off to people like Bruce McLaughlin and Harold Shipp, who have made Mississauga the city it is today. I am a small town boy at heart, but if we hadn't made the progress we have these past few years, Toronto would have swallowed us up long ago.

ME: What would you say is your most pride filled moments with our two children, Kathy (22) and Marty (19)?

AL: Our two, as they were growing up were involved in numerous activities that have brought us extreme pleasure: Kathy was in dancing school for ten years. She was able to attend many functions in this capacity; recitals, parades, shows and Tiny Talent Time on TV. But I think where Kathy is concerned, the most exciting accomplishment that has swelled my pride, and longer lasting, too, is our granddaughter, Tracy, who is now two and a half. And Marty — everything he attempts, he does well at. He's sports oriented, which for a sports-minded father is very satisfying. He followed in my footsteps for catcher in baseball. He was forward in hockey, my position, and then decided to go in goal. Our biggest moment for his goal tending was Minor Midget Day at Maple Leaf Gardens. He almost had a shut-out for Dixie against Applewood, with his favorite Leaf player, Davy Keon, joking on. In the last minute of play, his baseball buddy, Steve Barrett, scored on him. And Marty's remark was, "Well, if I couldn't get a shut-out in the Gardens, at least Steve got a goal." When kids make remarks like that, you feel you're doing something right. Now they are both married and they have made our family complete by giving us in-law children that we like our own.