

# The power of story and community

by Marjorie Simmins

TORONTO: Sometimes people have to travel far from their place of origin, to know what they've been given.

For award-winning journalist and author Linden MacIntyre, who has lived most of his adult in Ontario, Cape Breton Island remains an inspiration in his work and life.

"I grew up knowing the power of storytelling," says MacIntyre, 75, who was raised in Port Hastings, and has a summer home in Judique. "I saw that people were respected for telling stories well. It made ordinary people extraordinary."

MacIntyre has told a few captivating stories himself. Most notably, he was co-host of *The fifth Estate* from 1990 to 2014, producing almost 25 years of hard-hitting investigative journalism.

He is also the author of two non-fiction books, one of which, *Causeway* (2006), is a memoir, set at the time the Canso Causeway was built. He has written five novels, including the Giller-Prize-winning *The Bishop's Man* (2009).

One of three children of Dan Rory MacIntyre, an itinerant hard-rock miner, and Alice Elizabeth Donahue, a teacher, MacIntyre was born in St. Lawrence, Newfoundland. He came to Cape Breton as a two-year-old. He attended a two-room school in Port Hastings where his mother taught all grades.

"One year I was the only Grade 9 student," he says. "I'd listen as my mum taught all the younger grades, and then later, at our kitchen table at home, she'd teach me."

He finished Grades 11 and 12 in Judique, went on to St. Francis Xavier University, then starting working as a journalist in Ottawa.

He returned to Cape Breton in 1970, when his father died. He worked there for the next six years. Then came the CBC television years, from which he retired in 2014. Writing continues to absorb him.

"My new book is non-fiction," says MacIntyre. "It's set in 1929 to '79, and focuses on an earthquake in Newfoundland, and the environmental disaster that followed."

The 7.2 (M7.2) "Grand Banks Earthquake," as it is sometimes called, actually occurred approximately 250 kilometres south of Newfoundland under the Atlantic Ocean. People felt it as far away as New York and Montreal.



Linden MacIntyre

On Cape Breton, chimneys tumbled down and roads were blocked by minor landslides. Considerable damage occurred in the Atlantic Ocean, where the earthquake triggered an immense underwater slump, severing 12 transatlantic cables and generating a tsunami.

"The tsunami wiped out the fishery," says MacIntyre.

Soon after, an American company came in and started a fluorspar mine in St. Lawrence.

"My father worked there as a hard-rock miner. He was maybe 23 years old, and the underground captain for the mine."

Calling himself "obsessively curious about human nature," MacIntyre again links his Maritime raising to this trait.

"It's a survival mechanism to listen well," he says. "In a small place, you need each other. You don't want to risk giving offense to your neighbours and families because you depend on each other in times of need. So you're respectful, even if it's for self-interest. There's a civility in our communities, and a desire to keep things running smoothly."

In June 2017, MacIntyre's mother died, in her 101st year. MacIntyre, who is married to journalist and author Carol Off, and has five adult children from two earlier marriages, says he and his family of origin felt greatly supported.

"Bereavement and loss, there's still a genuine response to it," says MacIntyre. "Our mother was well-known and respected. That appreciation was shown to us."

Caring as he does for his home region and town, MacIntyre wishes that "the clouds of uncertainty would disappear. Stability, both economic and social – I wish that would come here."

MacIntyre credits Cape Breton with giving him "a solid sense of identity."

This knowledge came to him from his environment, his parents, and preceding generations.

"My grandparents would come down MacIntyre's Mountain to Port Hawkesbury, and once there, never spoke Gaelic. They thought they might be mocked." The fact that almost everyone else "had the Gaelic" too, didn't change their minds. They spoke English "in town," and Gaelic at home. Linden's father and uncle were also fluent.

"My mother didn't speak it. I learned fragments, could understand quite a bit, but as was customary, was not encouraged to join adult conversations – in any language. So I never achieved fluency beyond pleasantries."

The "solid sense of identity" he received from Cape Breton has been a lifelong blessing, he says.

"When I moved away from Nova Scotia to work, I had no doubt about who and what I was. I didn't realize for many years how rare that was. You have an advantage over other people."

And if you are more fortunate yet, as MacIntyre knows he is, you return home each year, to reconnect once again, with the people and land that shaped you.



## Còig at Shannon Studio February 17

PORT HAWKESBURY: *Còig*, one of Atlantic Canada's premiere traditional groups, is an ensemble of East Coast musicians originally forming to promote the Celtic Colours International Festival.

In one explosive coming together, what was once solo acts on stage has amalgamated into one electrifying super group, picked as *Penguin Eggs* magazine's top international new discovery. With the fiery Celtic style as its musical core, *Còig* easily shifts between century old tunes of past generations to original and contemporary compositions, featuring the band's range of over a dozen instruments (vocals, fiddles, piano, guitar, banjo, mandolin, viola, bouzouki, whistles, and more). With driving tunes, haunting songs, and infectious energy, *Còig* is an unparalleled musical force.

Fiddler Chrissy Crowley, from Margaree has an impressive list of awards, nominations, and international appearances. Crowley embraces her Celtic roots and makes them her own, through original compositions coupled with contemporary arrangements of traditional tunes.

Darren McMullen, from Hardwood Lands is a highly sought after multi-instrumentalist. Easily switching between guitar, mandolin, whistle and banjo with *Còig*, this

"Swiss-army knife" keeps the rhythm sound diverse, and is sure to impress with his lead playing of his various "on-stage weapons."

Rachel Davis from Baddeck spends her time switching from international festival stages to small local dances at home. In a genre that sees many performers pushing the envelope and testing new waters, her style of playing traditional tunes in a traditional way is a refreshing reminder of why the Cape Breton fiddle style drives so hard, and is so sought after.

Jason Roach from Chéticamp is an impressive piano player. With a style all his own, and an unparalleled intensity on the keys, audiences will have to remind themselves that there are other players on the stage.

With a combined total of over 30 nominations and awards, each of *Còig's* talented musicians have released their own successful solo albums, and have toured both at home and abroad before coming together as this exciting super group.

*Còig* will be performing at the Shannon Studio on February 17 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets may be purchased at the Civic Centre, online at: [www.phcivic.com](http://www.phcivic.com) or by calling 902-625-2591. The concert is supported by *1015 The Hawk*, *The Reporter* and *Maritime Inns*.



**Contributed photo**  
Mary Johnston, coordinator of the Port Hawkesbury Food Bank, accepts a cheque from J. Franklin Wright Art Gallery chair Shirley Hartery and member Sharon Ryan. All proceeds from the "Colour Port Hawkesbury Past and Present Colouring Book" created by the gallery were donated to the food bank.

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