

All in the family

(Editor's note: The following comes our way courtesy of Jeff Bennett, Canadian Ski Patroller 726, and the former national Nordic and written exam coordinator. Jeff can be contacted at: gill-jeff-bennett@hotmail.com. Thanks, Jeff.)

Skiing has always been a family affair for the Bennetts. My parents, Tom and Mim Bennett, skied their entire life and pulled us as infants in toboggans in Labrador. We alpine skied in Orillia, Ontario and London, Ontario in the late 1960s and switched to Nordic skiing when the RCMP transferred the family to Whitehorse, Yukon in 1970. Those were the days of wooden skis and three-pin bindings. Back in Ontario by 1974, my brothers and I raced at the high school level and became ski instructors.

I was only at home for Mom and Dad's first year of patrolling in 1977 with the Kawartha Nordic Ski Club, before I headed off to university. When I was home I was subjected to first aid-speak at dinner. What interested me in joining the patrol was the camaraderie among the patrollers they spoke of so often. They also talked about the fun they had. As Nordic patrollers, the first aid side was almost secondary, but the service aspect was huge - I liked that. It seemed like a neat group of people, so when I finished university and ended up in Prince George, B.C., it took one season to get into the Nordic ski club, and then in my second season I started a patrol myself at the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club.

It took about five years before my patrol had grown enough to really be called a patrol. We have varied between three and six patrollers most of the time since then. The Caledonia Nordic Ski Club hosted the Canadian National Championships in 2005 and my wife and children have skied out of the club for many years.

My older brother Bruce and his wife Kathy Deyo were also patrollers for a while, in Peterborough, Ontario and in Prince George around 1990 to 94. So for awhile the Bennetts were the largest patrolling family in the CSPS with five members in the system.



The Bennett family – Jeff, Tom, Mim and Bruce – in Peterborough, in 1990. Photo supplied by Jeff Bennett.

There have been many special moments in the 17 years my parents patrolled and in my 24 years as a patroller. Dad was awarded Canadian Ski Patroller Award 501 in 1985 and I was awarded CSP 726 in 1999. In 1988 both of my parents provided athlete care at the Calgary Olympics. In 2010 I will be providing athlete care at the Vancouver Olympics and Paralympics.

My family has also played a role in a series of three historic paintings used to fundraise and illustrate members of the CSPA working, and helping others, in a number of different settings and circumstances.

The first painting, by Neil Broadfoot, a Kawartha Nordic Patroller, depicted a trail from Highway 28 to the main north-south trail, the Kawartha Trail. The bridge over Eel's Creek has to be built in the fall and removed in the spring as Eel's Creek is actually a navigable river in the spring. Thanksgiving Weekend was often spent as a family installing that bridge. The patroller on the bridge was modeled after my dad. The yellow stripe shown on his leg was placed there to honour his service as an RCMP officer rather than a part of a patroller's uniform.



Neil Broadfoot's painting of Eel's Creek. Photo courtesy of Brian Low.

The CSPA has been a big part of my life in Prince George and it was a big part of my parents' lives in Peterborough. Dad passed away this August and many of my memories of Dad involved skiing. Many of the people I have met through the patrol, both in Prince George and across the country, have become life-long friends. It is a great feeling to be part of an organization with the goals of safety and service to others. We should all be proud to wear the colours and crest whenever we are providing our services.

Remembering Tom Bennett

(Editor's note: The following comes our way courtesy of Keith Buchanan, Canadian Ski Patroller 751, and the former Kawartha Nordic and Education coordinator. Keith can be contacted at: kbuchanan@personainternet.com. Thanks, Keith.)

I first remember Tom as an energetic dynamo on skis at the Kawartha Nordic Ski Tours in the early seventies. He was out in the fall blazing new trails, widening them, shoring up the more dangerous parts of the trails, urging work crews to do more. At that time there were no motorized vehicles available to us and all the crews walked the total length of the trails. He was one of the founding members of the Kawartha Nordic Ski Club and helped to create the Nordic ski patrol that has been associated with the club since its beginnings. His concern for safety led the club to build a series of cabins on our trails to act as destination points for warmth and comfort and as emergency shelters if needed. All were stocked with first aid supplies for the use of skiers and to make a shorter distance to a waiting point for extraction by machines. The first such cabin built was named after him – Bennett Cabin – at the most northern tip of our trails.

He joined the Canadian Ski patrol in 1977 through the influence of Don MacKenzie. He, Don MacKenzie, Ross Penton and Tom Sears along with their wives, Mim, Joyce, Barb and Doreen formed a close friendship in and out of ski patrol and socialized through the summer and winter as the "Canuskis", canoe tripping in the summer and skiing in the winter.

He became a first aid instructor for the patrol and then a Nordic on snow instructor and examiner in both aspects of patrolling. I remember the Division Nordic weekends that were held at the Frost Centre in Dorset with the instructors of many survival skills coming for the weekend to share their expertise. Tom and Mim were always part of the leadership of those weekends and we came away better equipped to handle on trail emergencies. Who could forget building and sleeping in Quincees or carrying our 80 L backpacks crammed with ropes, toboggan building equipment and splints as well as blankets, water and food? As more Nordic resorts developed the emphasis on looped trails rather than wilderness trails our training incorporated the changes so that extraction with machines became part of our training as well as skiing and toboggan handling. The backpacks shrunk as well.

Tom looked beyond our borders as well. He patrolled with the NSPS at international loppets in the west and at the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. That year Kawartha Nordic Patrol was well represented there as Tom and Mim, Don and Joyce MacKenzie, Ross Penton and Tom Sears volunteered there. Over his time as a patroller, Tom earned many awards and recognitions from the CSPA, particularly the National Appreciation Award #535 and then, in 1985, the Canadian Ski Patrol Award, #501. It seems hardly possible that Tom was actually in the patrol for only 17 years, retiring in 1994. He certainly managed a lot in such a short time.

Tom passed away on August 30, 2009 at the age of 81. He is missed by all patrollers who knew or worked with him over the years. Tom is survived by his wife, Mim, his sons Jeff, Gary and Bruce, and their families.