

Teaching from the heart, and from the outdoors

From time to time *Ottawa Outdoors* runs autobiographical accounts by outstanding local contributors to the outdoor scene. Here's Dominique Larocque, the leader of Creative Wheel Consulting.

By Dominique Larocque

My passion for nature and physical activity grew stronger after my mother died from breast cancer. Escaping solo into the wilderness of northern Ontario to find comfort occupied most of my leisure time as a child. I couldn't imagine then that my career would be that of a recreation therapist and mental training coach with a nature-based consultancy.

My first summer job was being my father's medical secretary, and I started by abolishing smoking in the waiting room.

In my work I was appalled at the number of drug prescriptions he called in to the pharmacy at the end of each day and I didn't understand why so many anxiety and sleeping pills were needed. Some patients had to have them, but my father and I

both knew that a healthy diet, daily exercise and decent self-regard were the building blocks of a disease- and drug-free life.

Watching these patients reinforced my idea that health starts with the imagination. Having a clear picture of what you want is the first step, and what I call creative visualization is a huge part of my work. It was important for me to greet each patient with compassion and positive attitude, reminding each that the power to heal was in their mind, body and heart and that the doctor was simply an accessory to that healing.

Outdoor leisure remained important during my university years. I began to notice that the duration and intensity of each workout seemed to produce different mental states. Studies in neuroscience at the

time clearly indicated a link between exercise and endorphin production and I started to understand the connection between mind, body and emotions.

I wanted to educate people about prevention because I believed that illness was a by-product of ill-managed emotions, and that the way people spent their free time often determined their health.

After graduation from the recreation program at the University of Ottawa, I returned to Sturgeon Falls to work for five years as a recreation therapist for seniors and adults with mental disabilities. As head coach for Ontario's Special Olympics and working in palliative care, I've seen small miracles.

I managed my own stress by exercising outdoors. The workouts

got longer and more intense and when I moved to Ottawa in the late '80s a friend said I should start competing. So at age 28, I rode in my first mountain bike race. For seven years after that I competed in many sports – I was hooked, but equally important, I took the time to deepen my meditation practice. I concluded that nature, movement and the creative arts were mandatory for good health.

By the late '90s, I was convinced that outdoor exercise combined with counselling was an alternative or complement to drugs used to combat obesity, addiction, depression, ADHD, anxiety or spiritual crises. I founded Creative Wheel Consulting and returned to school. After 15 years, with a master's degree in human kinetics, a certificate in gestalt psychotherapy and training in eco-psychology, shamanism and intuitive healing, I work with everyone from children to seniors, mostly one-on-one as a stress management consultant.

In 2003 I bought 43 hectares of land to build a new centre in Val-des-Monts, 35 minutes north of Ottawa. This little hub in the forest with its 15 kilometres of trails is where I and other health practitioners, artists and coaches share a philosophy of preventative health care.

I find joy in facilitating two-day retreats or one-day workshops on this land and in our studio. It's amazing how one or two days in the woods spent reflecting on life can re-focus people on goals, dreams and aspirations.

People are not overweight because they eat or drink too much. They're in trouble because they don't manage stress and patterns of unhappy living. Self-discipline, self-love and self-motivation are about breaking patterns and finding courage and compassion within to de-construct these patterns and build healthier ones. We all know what we must do, the question is why aren't we doing it?



LAROCQUE'S OTHER ACTIVITIES

She operates the mountain bike school LaRoccaXC, saying she loves taking care of kids and teens the moment they are out of school. She offers them: "the school of nature and the school of life, keeping them plugged to the natural world and to their imagination." During the school year, she brings her teachings to elementary and high school students as a Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethic Educator – www.leavenotrace.ca.

This winter in partnership with Fresh Air Experience, Creative Wheel is teaching skate-skiing and long blade skating on the canal. For more information or to register, call 819-457-2058 or email creativewheel@bell.net or visit her website at www.creativewheel.ca.

As well, let Dominique help with Natureobics™ MARATHON LONG BLADE SKATING / TRANSITION BLADES (Clip-on Nordic skate iceblades)

She also skates with others on the canal every Saturday morning from 8:45-10:30am (technique) and Sunday morning from 8:45-10:30am (practice).

Cost: \$150 + GST for 4 weeks (2x per wk).

Social trip: International Big Rideau Lake Speed Skating in Portland on January, 26, 2013 To know more:

www.portlandoutdoors.com

PRIVATE/GROUP INSTRUCTION ALSO AVAILABLE.

