

## Kindness Begets Kindness

*Couple leaves a gift in their will  
to the Perley Rideau Foundation*

*By Peter McKinnon*

**Madeleine** and Ronnie Hicks aren't comfortable in the spotlight; they don't consider their lives—or their decision to donate a sizable portion of their estate to the Perley Rideau Veterans' Health Centre Foundation—to be that remarkable. Take a closer look, though, and it's clear to see just how exceptional they are and why their decision makes perfect sense.

Born and raised in Ottawa South in the late 1920s, Ronnie and Madeleine first met as children. She attended St. Margaret Mary Catholic School; Ronnie went to Hopewell Public School. When the girls walked to school, Ronnie and his gang of pranksters would sometimes bombard them with snowballs (or horse-balls—a mixture that included some of the manure often found on the streets in those days).

Mischief has always been a part of Ronnie's life; as a soldier, he insisted on wearing pyjamas to bed even though he risked being charged with a uniform violation. Madeleine was sometimes an unwitting participant in Ronnie's pranks. Among the guests at a reception the couple once attended was Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. Ronnie walked up to the Prime Minister and boldly said: "I want you to have the pleasure of meeting my wife." Without missing a beat, the Prime Minister extended his hand to Madeleine and said: "Very delighted to meet you."

Deemed too young to serve in World War II, Ronnie enlisted in the Canadian Army and fought in the Korean War as a member of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. His battalion experienced some of the conflict's fiercest fighting, including the battles for Hill 355 and Kapyong Valley. At one point, Ronnie saw his best friend Alan killed by enemy fire. He would later name a son after his fallen comrade in arms.

After the war, Ronnie and Madeleine reconnected and eventually married, which raised more than a few eyebrows, as inter-faith marriages were relatively rare at the time. They both worked outside the home—Ronnie at Canada Post for more than 30 years, while Madeleine held a variety of jobs at Bell Telephone and the National Research

Council. They raised five children and served the community in many ways. Ronnie was a baseball coach and umpire for many years in Ottawa East; Madeleine washed the uniforms to ensure the team looked its best. She also got the baseball association to open up the annual end-of-season banquet to mothers—for years, it had been for fathers and sons only—and convinced Ottawa Rough Rider all-star Bob Simpson to be the guest speaker at the first mixed-gender event.

In 1991, Ronnie and Madeleine travelled to Korea on one of Veterans Affairs' annual junkets for former soldiers. It was an incredibly emotional trip for both of them: Ronnie overcome by memories of fallen friends; Madeleine by the incredible respect and gratitude expressed by every Korean—regardless of age—they encountered.

"At one point, the bus we were on drove past a school," Madeleine recalls. "Every child had lined up outside with their heads bowed to show how thankful they were to the Canadians who had fought on their behalf."

Now in their late 80s, Ronnie and Madeleine have seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. In 2008, Ronnie's needs began to exceed Madeleine's ability to care for him, and he moved to the Perley Rideau Veterans' Health Centre.

"We were quite familiar with the place," says Madeleine. "We'd known a few of the residents here over the years."

Despite that familiarity, however, both were pleasantly surprised by the remarkable quality of care Ronnie has received.

"I'll never forget the time Ronnie's nurse came in on her day off to check up on him," recalls Madeleine. "You just don't get that kind of personal dedication in other residences."

Ronnie speaks to his wife on the phone every night before going to sleep. No longer able to dial the number properly, he gets a nurse to place the nightly telephone call. And he always reassures his wife: "Don't worry dear, the Perley is taking great care of me."

The couple chose to repay these acts of kindness when they updated their will recently. After taking careful stock of their long



**Madeleine and Ronnie Hicks.**

marriage, loving family and full lives, Ronnie and Madeleine chose to honour what meant the most to them: family, of course, and the Perley Rideau.

"For us, it's a way of paying it forward—of helping to ensure that future residents of this place can enjoy a quality of life similar to what Ronnie has experienced in recent years," says Madeleine. "We've given to the Perley Rideau annually for many years, so including the Foundation in our will was a natural decision. We've always given back to the community, and we're certainly not going to stop now."

Finding it increasingly difficult to live on her own, Madeleine is now determined to join her husband at the Perley Rideau, although in one of the new, independent assisted-living seniors apartments rather than in the long-term care centre. This will make it easier for the couple to see each other every day and for Madeleine to experience the Perley Rideau's exceptional quality of care.

The Perley Rideau is home to 450 residents, 250 of whom are war veterans

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