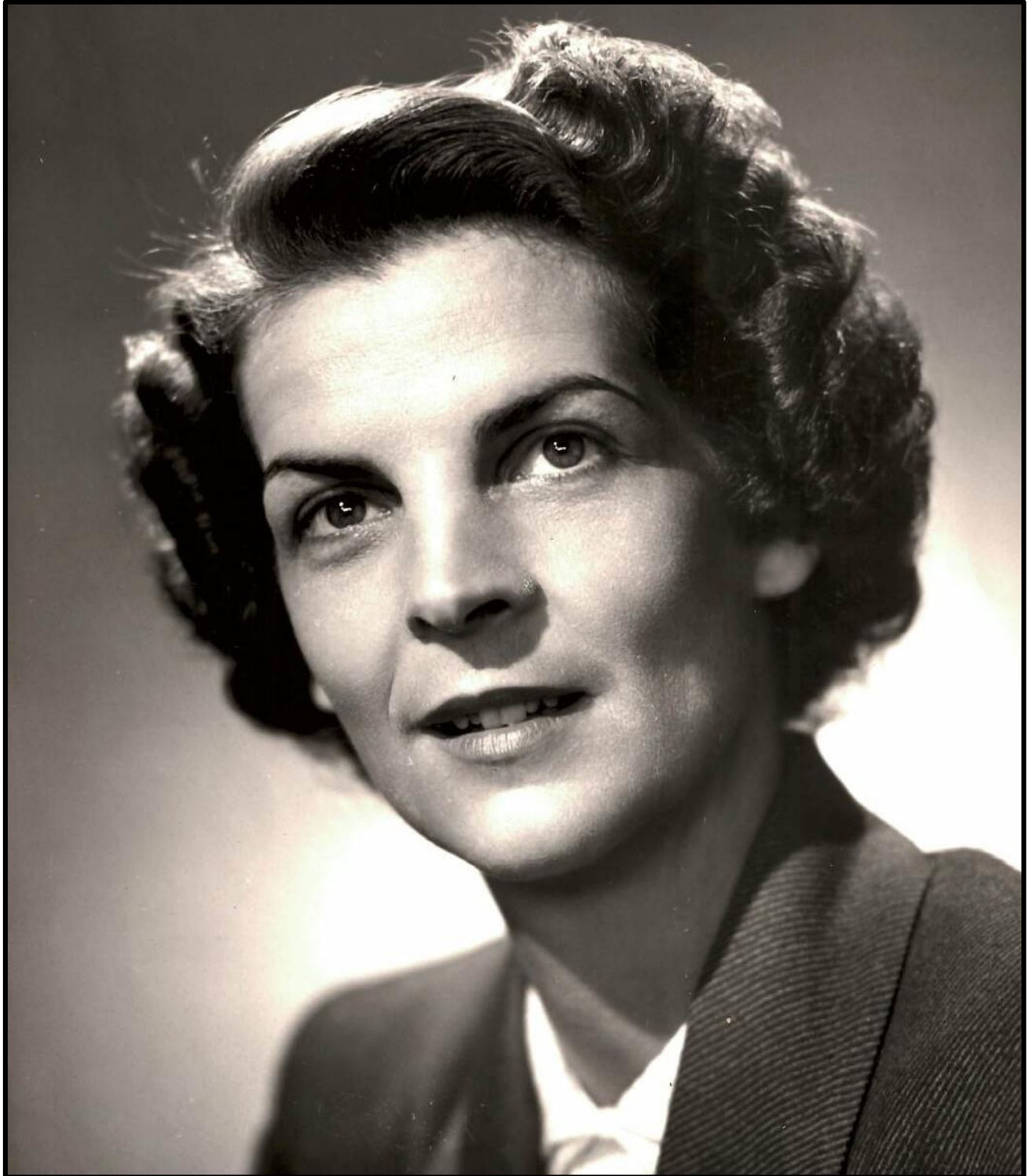




THE
OCONTO

ECHO

A tribute to June Kennedy Labbett



The View from the Bung

An event we all knew was coming.

The death of Mom, June, Mrs. Labbett. In fact, I know several people came to the 90th reunion with the thought of saying to Mom (Mrs. Labbett) their thanks and warm memories, because they felt her time was coming to an end. I am glad they did. May 25th, 2018 was the end of her life on earth, but her wisdom and life lessons live on in hundreds of people. Thank you to everyone who sent cards, emails, and/or donated money to her favorite charities; her church, Central United in Unionville, Markham Stouffville Hospital – birthing unit – where she volunteered for years, and the Oconto Campership Fund. Your words of kindness and sympathy were appreciated, and continue to be. Several alumnae came to the funeral or visitation. Your support was very appreciated. Thank you. I know lots of other people were there in spirit.

We decided to put this Echo together as a tribute to June. Below is the eulogy I delivered at the funeral.

Mom

Wow! It is so heart warming to see so many people here to honour our Mom, grandmother, great grandmother, your June, Mrs. L. or Mrs. Labbett

Thank you for being here, and thank you for the many very kind words sent to us, by so many of you.

I think we should change the rules for funerals and visitations.

That is, I think a funeral should be held before the person dies!

Mom would be over-whelmed to see all of you here

Thank you

I can hear her saying,

Lisa, what are all these people doing here?

She was so humble, and as hard as so many of us tried, she never really understood the overwhelming positive influence she had on so many people. I know many of you here today, use the life skills she taught you by example in your every day of your life. I am reminded of that often.

Thank you also for wearing some pink, or something colourful. As you know, she believed wearing something pink to a funeral of a person, who had lived a long and meaningful life, was a good idea. She would say, they lived a long and good life, it is a celebration!

I have often wondered how I can possibly summarize 98 years of a wonderful and meaningful life.

Thank fully, we have had time with Mom the last several years, knowing that her time on this earth was limited. We shared plenty of stories and memories, and continued to have many wonderful experiences up until her last days.

I think you would like to know, that a week ago yesterday, we took her to the cottage. She loves that cottage, Misty Cove. Several family members were able to come for dinner on Monday night. On Tuesday, Scott and I took her around camp. She really loved having that opportunity. Camp was coming to life for the Summer. Thanks to the hard work of so many. She loved that trip.

The lessons Mom taught me, or at least tried. There are many. They were taught by her actions, not her words. The first one,



To be honest, as many of you know – I nailed that one.

To be kind,

to think of the other person before myself –

Wow, she had that one down to a fault, she was the last one considered in every decision she made – trust me

To be gentle,

to treat everyone with respect

My actions are more important than my words

I know I will never truly, lose my Mom, she is going to live on in me, and everyone that knew her

I have often thought,

and will continue to think in different difficult situations

How would Mom handle this?

Her wisdom guides me

Mom always looked at situations from the other person's shoes. When Mom was perplexed with the actions of others, she would go off in her mind and think and literally move herself in her head to their perspective. Mom would then say, well you know if I was so and so, I can see how they would think that, and on she would go trying to figure out why the person was doing what they were doing. Then try to think how she could effectively help the situation to resolve.

Mom has always been a giver, not so good at taking – unless of course it was love, she was good at taking love

Recently, Mom has been living at the Amica retirement residence, she would do her best to share a smile or a greeting with everyone that she saw. Mom would go down most evenings and fold towels or napkins with other residents because she wanted to contribute, to help. Mom also spent a lot of her time helping other residents who were confused with where they were going, or in her mind, just needed some love and attention.

Giving, giving, giving. She always did what she could.

My Mom's life lessons will live on in her family, friends, friends families, people at Amica, organizations where she

volunteered, or that have received money she has given, and of course, camp.

Camp Oconto, where she influenced literally thousands of young girls, and continues to influence some that are not so young any more.

I want to bring you some other messages that truly represent her
If it is not fun, forget it!

Sports, Mom loved her sports. She participated when she could, finally hung up her skis at 80, was still going out for a paddle – I think the last time was during the Summer of 2016, because last Summer, she broke her leg –twice – badly, once in July, then again in September, so we could not get her in



a canoe. But, she was in a canoe two years ago – not just sitting there, she paddled!

Mom loved to swim, especially skinny with my Dad☺

Mom's room at Amica for a few years over looked the fields at the local high school, she loved to watch whatever was going on – track meets, rugby games whatever.

Mom watched curling, and tennis and baseball and hockey. I remember Kent saying that he was at the kitchen table with a friend of his, with Mom and she remembered there was an important time in a tennis match coming up, she got up and ran, yes ran – she was I think 93 at the time, because she did not want to miss the shot!

Her expression, I am so mad, I could Spit tacks! Yep, she said that - spit tacks! I didn't like knowing that I made her spit tacks, mind you my brothers made her spit tacks on occasion as well, I think a few of you here may have as well.

Mom's face when you did something that she did not approve. As kids, we did not need to hear her words. Her disappointment was obvious, that was more harsh than any words she could say. Man those looks spoke volumes. I am sure my brothers, Brian, Scott and Kent are nodding now. We all knew "the look".

I hated disappointing my Mom. Thankfully I got away with a few things that she never knew about!

To be brave and strong and true my whole life through – she often sang that, she lived it - to the core.

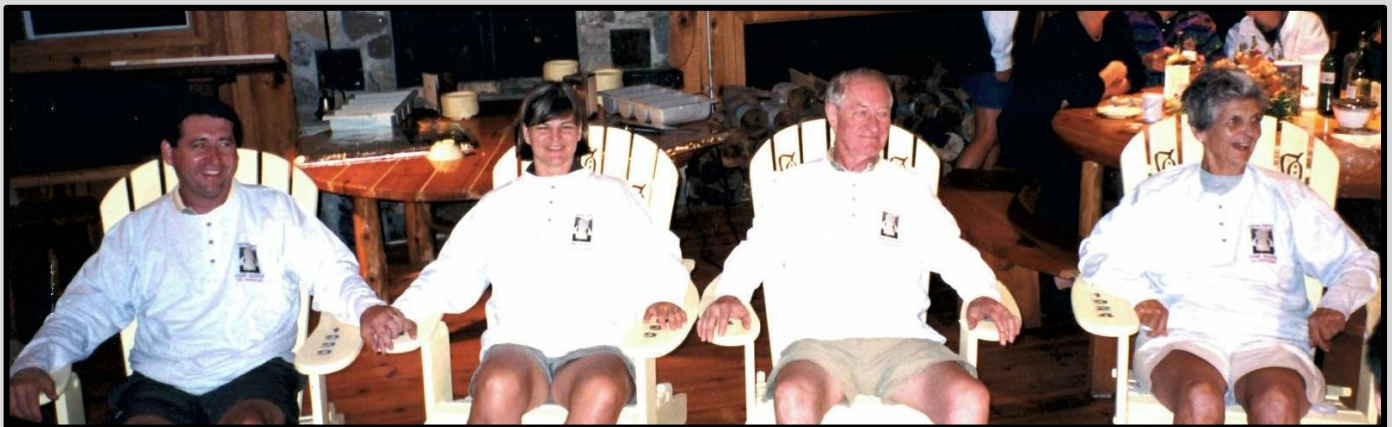
Several recent Oconto staff who are here now, had the privilege of going to her cottage during the Summer to watch The Bachelor with her. They did not totally get why she liked the show so much, but I know, she just wanted the company, and she loved seeing people do crazy things! The Bachelor is good at that

Mom's wisdom is over whelming
Just last week, Mom said to me
The world will be a better place when I am gone
Of course I looked at her a bit quizzically,
she said well you know, people are marrying all kinds of people now. That is different, it is going to make the world a better place. We are all the same on the inside.

Now, a special word to her grandchildren. The love she felt for you is beyond compare. She saw each of you as an individual and saw the truth of your being. Don't worry, she understood you. She was so proud of you, her love will carry on inside of you and guide you.

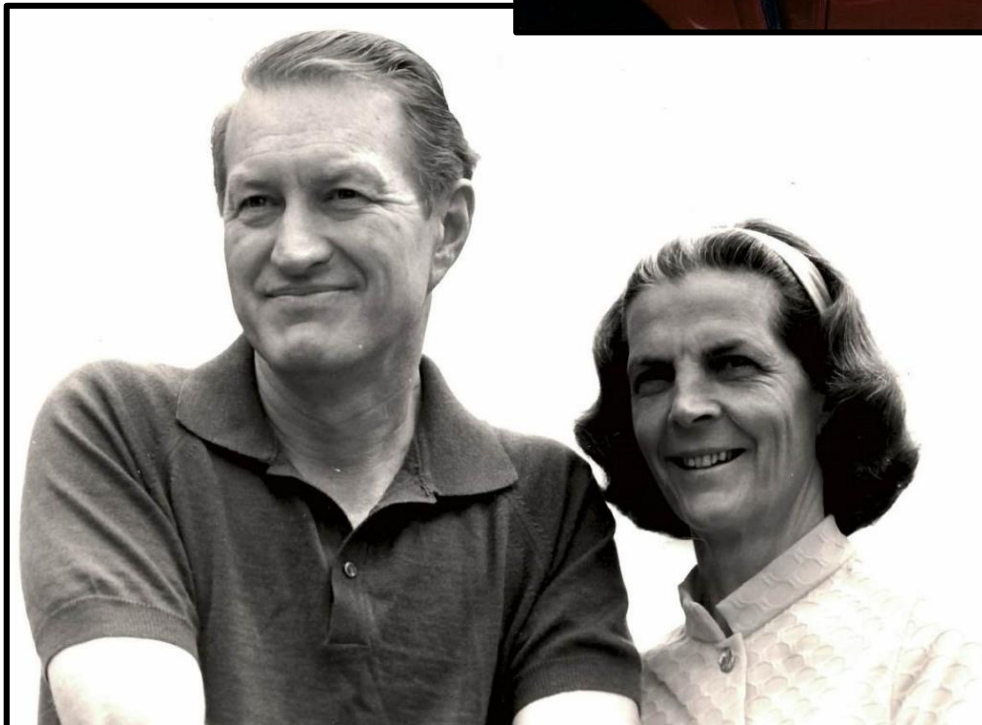
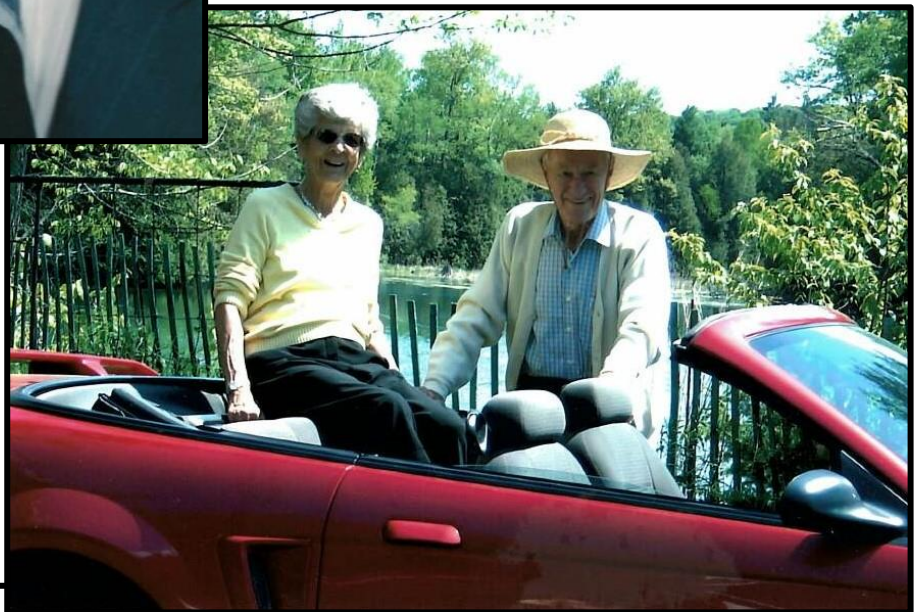
So, knowing that she is listening to me now,
Mom, What a legacy you have left on this earth
You have so much to be proud of
You are loved – so much
Please give Dad a hug for all of us, we hope you two are dancing now, you haven't had a good dance for over six years.

You will be missed, but not forgotten
Your influence will live on in so many.
We love you Mom.





“My first year of Intermediates when my tent was right on the shore of the swim dock. At rest hour I used to sit on my bed and watch June swim laps. She was a beautiful swimmer, very fit and I often thought... I want to be like Mrs. Labbett.”

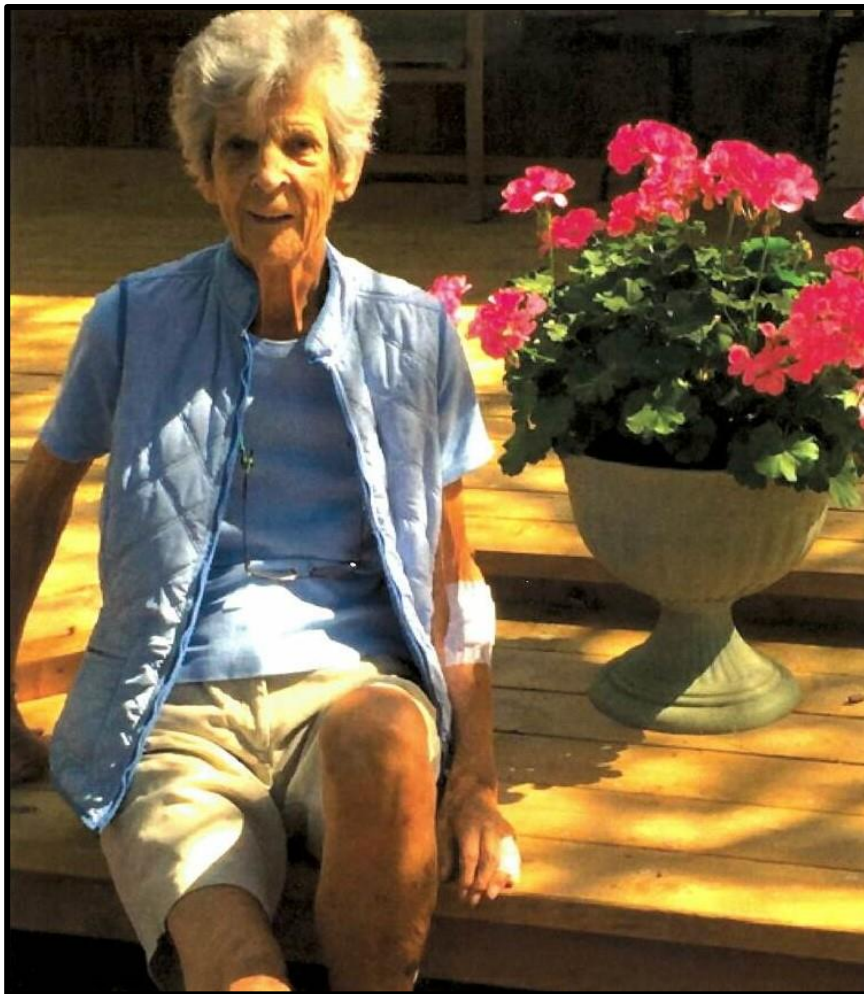


“When I was 11, Mrs. Labbett stood on the stage for the morning sing song. One morning, it happened be August 1st, she told us that if you walked down the stairs backwards, you would get good luck for the entire month. For 52 years, I have been walking down the stairs backwards each month on the first day!”

Message delivered at the funeral by Kirsty Griffiths

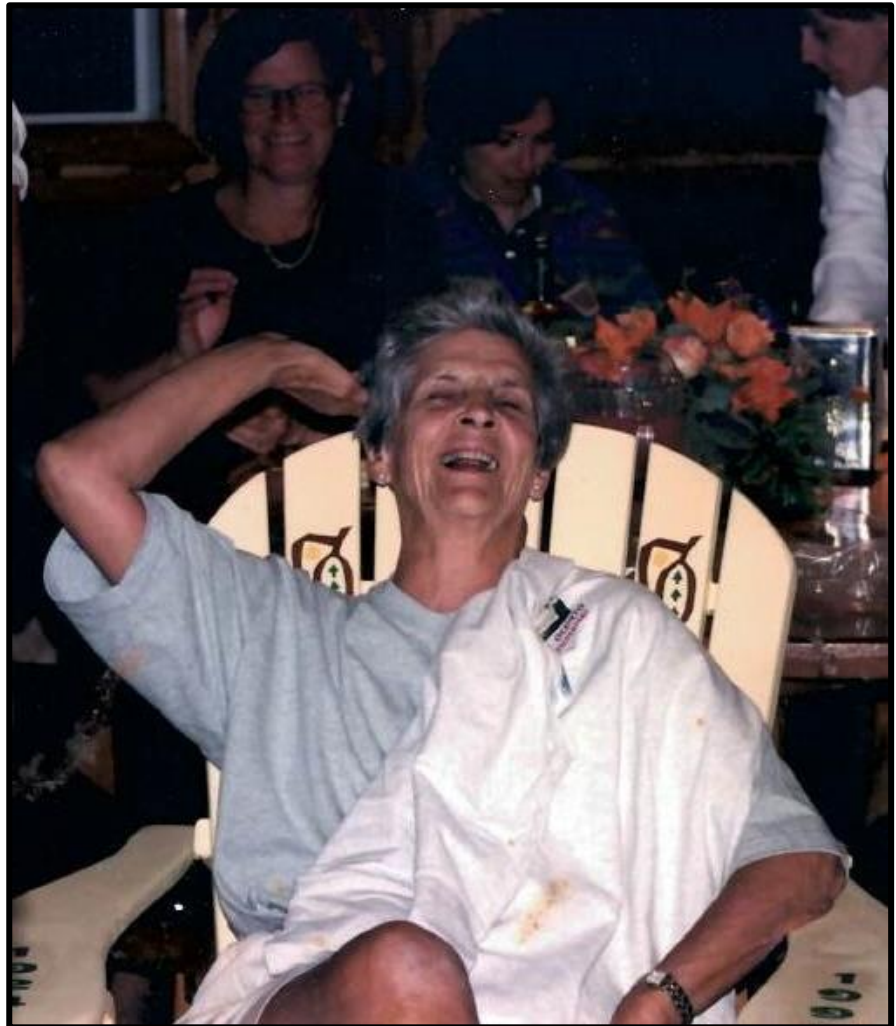
JUNE, MRS L, MRS. LABBETT...

August 1964, I was 12 years old when I came down the steps off the bus at Camp Oconto for the first time. Mrs. Labbett stood at the bottom, smiled at me and called me by name as she shook my hand. She knew my name! I had never met her. I will remember that handshake and all the countless others I received as we greeted each other over the years. Even a few weeks ago when I last saw June we greeted each other with a handshake, oh a kiss, a hug too! June always extended her hand in greeting to you and drew you into her presence. You were special. Now, about her knowing my name. When I became a counsellor I remember sitting at the dinner table with my campers for the first meal. Mrs. Labbett would make the rounds of the dining hall sitting at as many tables as she could, checking in on everyone and making sure she knew everyone's name. It was then I learned a secret of hers. If she struggled for a name, unbeknownst to the child, she would slide her arm around the girl's shoulder and with her hand take a peek inside the collar... where of course you had your name tag sewn on. My memories of June at camp are many and are often joined by Cliff as they were such a strong partnership in the running of Oconto. June arriving at the flag raising circle and tapping her foot on her rock that marked her place, June striding up the hill to the dining room with a whole bunch of little people around her, June with her rubber boots on digging trenches by the riding ring for some septic problem along with Cliff and her father Dr. Kennedy, June in full rain gear, including her yellow sower's hat, setting an example, June standing at the window of the tuck shop, learning names and letting you take ever so much time in trying to decide if it would be MacIntosh toffee or a pop in a glass bottle. June with her beloved pump organ and hymn books which the boys lugged into the chapel every Sunday, June sitting in her swivel, Naugahyde, green chair with Choco the Dachshund tucked in beside her, her glasses on a fancy,



metal, chain around her neck, her yellow newsprint note paper and her day timer, running some meeting or other, June in the laundry room helping her mother put the dish towels through the wringer washer, because her mother wasn't really supposed to be doing that during her August stays at camp, June in her deerskin dress at "Indian Council" and standing on the beach singing out to Hiawatha as he went upon his journey, June sitting in the wooden captain's chair beside the stage of Main Lodge during Assemblies, 6 days a week, eager to jump up and wish everyone a happy day. June was everywhere in camp. If she wore a fit bit back then she would have made her 10,000 steps in the first two hours of the day.....wonderful, amazing, insightful, strong, beautiful, dedicated, role model, quiet, hero, smiling, welcoming, full of spirit, incredible, real presence, positive force, inspirational, warm, loving, caring, kind, supportive, a rock, a

shaper of lives, great influence on generations of girls..... these are some of the descriptions of June Labbett from the Camp Oconto Facebook posting of her passing. June believed in every person she met. She believed in your presence, your limitless ability, your passions, and your inherent worth as a person. She valued each and every person she met and at Camp Oconto it didn't matter if you were a camper, semi, counsellor, medical, kitchen or maintenance staff. When you were with her she had you feel as if you were the only person that mattered to her at the time, giving you 100% of her attention, making you feel your own worth and importance in her life. I've never asked Brian, Scott, Kent or Lisa how you felt sharing your mom with hundreds of other girls as intensely as she did at Camp Oconto. I'm sure it had its advantages and disadvantages. 3 boys in a girls' camp??? From all of us at Oconto who benefitted from your parent's love, care and concern I thank you from the bottom of my heart. About 6 years ago just after Cliff had passed and I was dealing with a marriage breakup, we were brought together on a project for Camp Oconto's 90th anniversary. I had retired, and Lisa called me to see if I would take on a project that June had always wanted to complete. She wanted to have written memories of people's times at Camp Oconto. I was so fortunate to spend time with June during that project and in these last few years. June had a memory for people. She was able to stretch that memory of hers as we went back in time and created a book of pictures and stories - "Camp Oconto Memories" for camp's 90th anniversary. So many stories she could tell. She could look at a picture and remember the names of people in it from 60 years ago. I remember the day the book was delivered and I drove to Unionville to show June. She was sitting with a group in an activity room at the Marleigh. We



went to a sunny area down the hall and oohed and aahed over the book. We were both so excited. I think every resident and staff member of Amica, as it's known today, has seen that book and heard about Camp Oconto. True to form she would take no credit for its production. That project brought us together at a time when we needed each other. For many of us June was a beacon of light in the dark times and she shone brightly on our successes at other times. She has moved with the times instead of being stuck in the past. Yet she never lost sight of her care, respect, love and compassion for everyone nor her belief in your goodness and strengths. She was always giving you a second or third chance to shine and find your stride, believing always in YOU. So if you think that a light has gone out with June's passing, think again and look around you. Look at all the lights shining brighter here today and all over the world for their having known June Labbett. Our lights will continue to shine on with a little bit of June's rays in them. As long as you shine, she will too.

Message delivered at the funeral by Paddy Hardman

I first attended camp as a camper at the age of eight, sent from far-flung Quebec city for four weeks! Best decision my parents ever made!

During my years at camp including a stint as assistant director, I came to realize that Mrs. Labbett was a most extraordinary leader. While I completed a degree in physical education prior to law school, everything I needed to know about children and play I learned from Mrs. Labbett. Her constant focus on camp being for the camper helped ensure that counsellors did not drift away from considering each camper's needs. Even her quiet presence outside the bung, watching the campers and counsellors rush excitedly to their programs, inspired confidence that all was right with the world!

From the first day of camp when she inexplicably knew your name to the times that she called you over to see how everything was going you knew that you, and the camp, were in safe hands. Mrs. Labbett dealt with all the issues that arose from having a bunch of 18 to 22 year-olds as counsellors in an even handed way to ensure that both they and their charges had a safe and wonderful summer.

During my 27 years on the bench, often dealing with youth court and family court, I have reflected on the steady, principled approach of Mrs. Labbett and tried to remain true to the ideals she embodied. Before making a decision affecting children, I always step into their shoes to see what my plan will mean to them.

One of the lasting memories I have of Mrs. Labbett is at chapel. With the lazy breeze rustling the leaves and the warm sun dappling our heads as we sat on the logs, I recall Mrs. Labbett reassuring us about our place in God's world and our responsibility to be good friends to those around us and the environment. Before the days of the "Giving Tree" story, there were many others. I recall the broken bit of brown glass, swept into the corner, that twinkled as hard as it could and became part of the eye of Jesus in a new church window. And the tale about the mean king who put on a mask to appear nice and became nice! (I think of that last one often.)

Every young person who was fortunate enough to come under Mrs. Labbett's wing emerged from the experience a more confident individual. I will be forever grateful that I knew Mrs. Labbett.

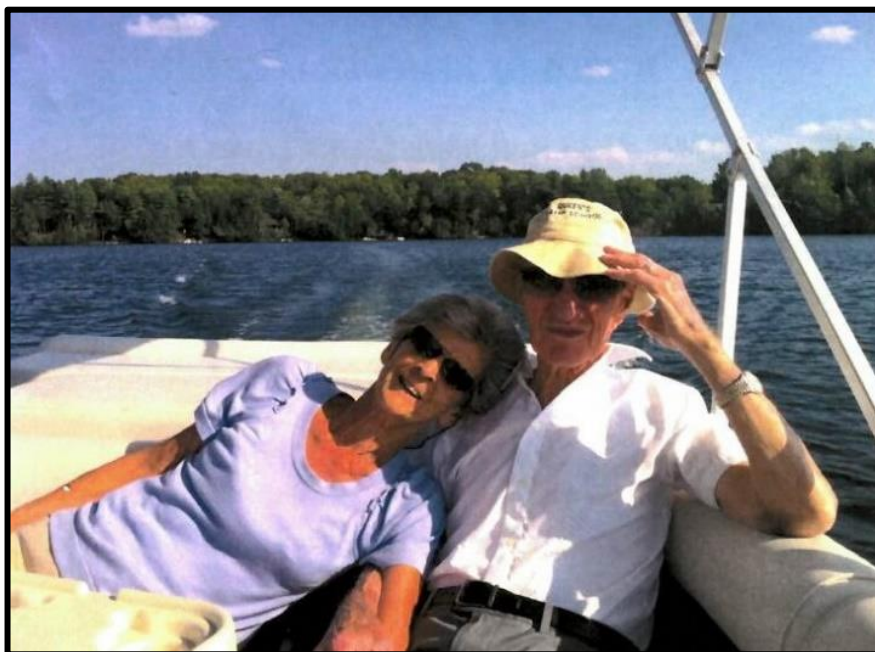


“June was a very special lady. She always had a smile on her face. I will always remember her laugh. I feel very privileged to have known June.”



“Mrs. Labbett always spoke so beautifully at Chapel. The Chapel at Oconto is one of my favourite spots on earth.”

“I remember June’s sense of humour and boundless compassion when I was a camper.”



Bronwyn (Wilson) Gorsline

I remember feeling a lot of nervous excitement bringing my now husband Ted over to meet my grandparents for the first time. I was head over heels in love with Ted and I wanted June and Cliff (I called them Duddee and Teddy) to love him too.



Ted and I arrived to their 4th floor condo at The Hunt Club on a sunny afternoon in September 2010. We had a lovely visit and I left knowing they thought Ted was quite the charming gentleman (which he is).

As we were leaving, Ted and I shared a smooch in the parking lot before getting in to his car. All of a sudden, we heard loud cheering and clapping from somewhere nearby. We turned to see my grandparents standing on their balcony applauding our kiss.

Duddee and Teddy- thank you for cheering for me at every turn. I will hold you both in my heart forever and strive to follow the beautiful example you set for how to care and how to love.



I am one of 12 people who were lucky to be June's grandchildren (she also had 7 wonderful great-grandchildren). Being her grandchild (or great-grandchild) meant that you always had someone cheering for you at sports events and whenever you did any kind of test (either in person or from a distance). It meant that you always had someone who wanted to listen to you, go for a swim or boat ride with you and feed you jube jubes. It meant you always had a fun dance partner and someone who was willing to surprise you with a cheeky surprise like a costume dress-up.



Since June died in May, we have received an outpouring of stories and anecdotes about June's impact as a friend, a Camp Director and a volunteer in her community. Thank you for sharing so many wonderful tidbits about the very full and wonderful life she led.



