

CON DARLING

“Brockville’s Ambassador of Smiles” Remembered

By Phil Melchers

Con Darling. The name certainly rings to the ear. For most, it brings forth an image of a lone statue on Blockhouse Island, its smile, welcoming and enduring. It has been a long time since the world last saw that loveable clown. It's been a long time since he last walked in a parade. Yet within the city of Brockville his message remains: joy and laughter, a testament immortal.



Here's a hint in dealing with Mr. Darling: It would be best to expect the unexpected. So too is this true for his origin story. For Con, the clown originally emerged during figure skating with his brother. Carol Whittaker, widow to Con, remembers. "They were both excellent figure skaters, but in the clown suits they acted like they didn't have a clue." This is an example of Con's flair for showmanship, a staple of his personality. Remembered by his family today, this flair could be seen within his love for music, (he was an avid musician), his inner sense of pure joy (Darling love, as they call it), and of course, his more than eccentric quirks.

Con's quirks came in many forms, but none were as strange as Myrtle, his poultry companion. Though it was unclear where exactly Myrtle came from, the sight of a chicken in a carriage was certainly part of Con's image. How exactly the chicken came to be named? Well, the story goes like this: One day a stranger asked Con what his chicken was named. Con replied by asking the stranger what her name was. When she said "Myrtle," Con then replied, "Well, oh my god, that's the chicken's name too!"

Outside of his make-up, Con was described as being "a marshmallow," and "a big ole softie." Remembered by his daughters Angie and Heather, Con would often watch Price is Right, outright weeping whenever the person he was cheering for won. That was just how Con was. He enjoyed seeing people happy. As Carol, Heather and Angie all agree, benevolence was in his blood. He was born with it, and when asked if we would ever see another Con Darling, they all replied with a stern, "No!" Though some have tried, none will ever replace Con.

Before becoming a clown, Con originally wanted to be a doctor but couldn't because he had to work on raising a family. Instead, Con became the next best thing, a clown, giving testimony to the phrase, laughter is the best medicine. "If it is, then he healed a lot of people," says Carol.

*Con Darling in the 1989 Santa Claus Parade.
Photos provided by Peter D. Munro/Brockville*

There isn't an adult in Brockville over the age of 30 who hasn't heard the name Con Darling and doesn't have a special memory of him walking the Santa Claus Parade in Brockville for several decades, dressed as a clown, and pushing a baby carriage with a chicken in it. There is film footage at the Brockville museum circa 1962, showing him in a Santa Parade. Mr. Darling was a very generous, giving man, who loved children, loved life, and people. Mr. Darling also donated a lot of his time on telethons to help raise money in the Brockville area as well. He was born in 1926 and passed away in 1993. In Brockville, on Blockhouse Island, there is a statue of Con that was erected in 1995 with these words:

Con Darling,

**Ambassador Of Smiles,
Dedicated His Life to The
Betterment of Humanity.**

**This Memorial Pays Tribute To
His Love Of Community
Both Young and Old.
May his Memory and Spirit Of
Giving Live In Us All.**



It is true that even though Con started every parade at the front, he always ended each at the back. Though his daughters, who often dressed as clowns themselves, remember having to wait for him, they recognized that his dawdling pace was, in reality, a measure of his generosity. For him, it was important that no child would ever be left without a lollipop or a chance to pet Myrtle. During parades Con made sure to grant significance to every child, to make sure none were forgotten. An

important message he carried, even during his later years.

This December it is important to remember Con as the good soul he was. With Christmas being his favourite holiday, no other time would seem more appropriate. So let's remember Con, for his legacy, and his message. The same as we see it on that statue's smiling face: "Joy, simple joy, give joy to all and let none be left behind." LH