

POSITIVE POST

Reflections on a New Rural Story



FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

Barbara Barter's
Recipe for Scalded Cake

THE BIRTH OF THE POSITIVE POST AT THE FORMER COTTAGE HOSPITAL

Mallary McGrath
Participative Marketing Specialist, Ryakuga
Municipal Councillor, Town of Branch

Good things are happening in rural communities. Success is happening, life is happening. Those of us fortunate enough to call a rural community home already know that this true. We know that people are opening businesses or celebrating their 25th year in business, kids are riding their bicycles to playgrounds while a fishing boat sails proudly to the wharf and tourists browse the local shop. There is great activity and even greater pride. However, this is not the rural NL story that we see in mainstream media. An online search of “rural NL” news shows disheartening titles with words such as ghost villages, depopulation, outmigration, dying. While the province’s population is falling overall and people are leaving rural communities for urban areas, as they always have, I believe that there are good rural news stories waiting to be told. We need a place to communicate such media and ensure that such positive news stories are accessible to everyone. It is my belief that this is best accomplished through a grassroots, participatory media approach.

I learned in 2010 that communities can make their own media. Inclusive, participatory community media where every voice in a community is welcomed and encouraged to contribute. It was in 2010 I was introduced to the local grassroots communications company Ryakuga. This grassroots organization, directed by Fred Campbell, supports the development of community media and has been supporting such community development initiatives in Newfoundland and Labrador since 1992. Volunteering with Ryakuga in March of 2010 was the beginning of my own passion for community media as I realized that we (the people who live in rural communities) can take control of our media, create our own media with our voices, our issues and our own solutions and thrust open the doors to grassroots community development! For more information on Ryakuga please see <http://www.ryakuga.org/>

Fast forward to attending Telling a New Rural Story: Mobilizing Assets for Vibrant Communities in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference in May 2019 in Norris Point. Housed at the former Cottage Hospital, now a community hub, participants present were community leaders from around the province that enthusiastically discussed rural success stories. In these moments it occurred to participants and I that sharing such stories are valuable and energizing as it refreshes and restores our view on rural living. While mainstream media laments for rural life, the participants at this conference were sharing positive narratives of thriving rural initiatives and enterprises, of people “moving home,” people supporting local and building community partnerships. We decided that these are the real rural stories we want to tell and need to tell, and the idea of The Positive Post, a community-based newsletter was born. Our intent is to share stories from rural communities that highlight projects, programs, ideas, businesses, and plans that are continuously happening, and take ownership of media that is disseminated about rural.

As our vision is that The Positive Post will be participatory, we will be encouraging others to share their voice and it will be created and distributed by volunteers. Such participatory communications efforts are not new in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the late 1960s the Memorial University Extension Service collaborated with the National Film Board of Canada to help express the voices and dialogue of people from Fogo Island. In the 1970’s our province saw the use of television transmitter programs in rural communities where programming and producing were done by local volunteers from the community. This university extension work continued into the 1980’s and early 1990’s with many communities permanently establishing their own community channels (i.e. BayTV in Placentia which is now in the process of its own rebirth). The 2000’s saw many community radio events supported by Ryakuga. Such events were so well received that Norris Point established their own community radio station, VOBB (Voice of Bonne Bay) and Bell Island established RBI (Radio Bell Island).

Many communities and regions have also had local newspapers shut down as mass media and technology have become our sources for news. What differentiates The Positive Post is that it will be a continuum of local people producing local, positive news pieces and dialogue from their communities. We know that good things are happening in our communities and that grassroots participatory media approaches have worked well in community development initiatives in our province. It’s the good news stories we need to share and The Positive Post, a volunteer, participatory community newsletter will be our voice.



The Positive Post will be participatory, encouraging others to share their voice.



EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

First Cottage Conference | provides a welcome relief
from "Doom and Gloom"



**WRITTEN BY
JOANIE CRANSTON**

Those of us who live and work in rural Newfoundland are tired of the doom and gloom narrative that is being told about us by policy makers and the media. We recognize the incredible beauty of our surroundings, the strength and resilience of our people, the culture and heritage of our communities, and our potential for a sustainable future. The constant negative focus stifles and inhibits investment and development in rural communities. A positive approach facilitates change and growth, and inspires new ways of addressing challenges.

The Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital Heritage Corporation is a not for profit community Corporation. We operate as a social enterprise to adaptively reuse the old Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital for the preservation of culture and heritage, the promotion of health and wellness, and community economic and social development. We have often worked with researchers from Grenfell and Memorial University and have found these relationships to be helpful to validate and profile the work that we do. So when the opportunity arose to work with Brennan Lowery to host a small conference around the themes of telling a new rural story and dispelling the myth of doom and gloom we readily agreed.

Many hours of volunteer time and effort went into planning the event which we hoped would demonstrate our capacity to create a different kind of conference model – a “cottage conference”. It would bring together a small number of invited guests from a variety of backgrounds in community development; culture, heritage and the arts; food security; social enterprise; and community-based research. We wanted the event to be participatory, to allow plenty of time for net-working and the sharing of ideas. We recognize that leaders are found in unlikely places and that we all have valuable ideas to share. We wanted to provide opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships with researchers and other community groups, and foster new ones; partnerships are one of the most valuable resources for organizations such as ours but they require time and face-to-face interactions to truly thrive.

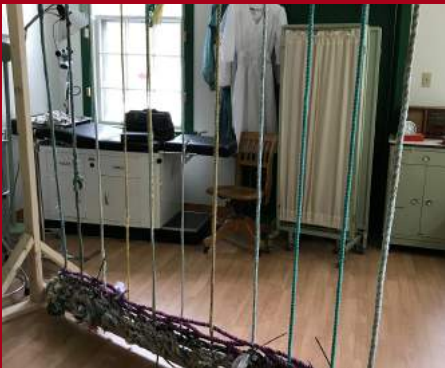
In order to achieve this we piloted the use of “situation rooms”; places in the building where participants could gather to share ideas and craft solutions, while engaging in various activities. The theme of the rooms was “Wicked Questions, Real Answers”. Sub-themes focused on how Social Enterprise, Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Community-based Research, and Rural Networks could be the answers to some of the wicked questions. There were four main rooms:

- 1. The Museum Room focused on how culture, heritage and the arts sustain our communities by telling our stories and shaping our future; an artist collective set up a rope making machine and participants worked together to create a rope which was then woven into a tapestry on the wharf in Norris Point;*
- 2. The Community Kitchen and Dining Room focused on food security issues while participants worked cooperatively to prepare food for the events, using fresh produce and local ingredients as much as possible;*
- 3. The Voice of Bonne Bay Community Radio Station - a small studio was created in the former board room of the old cottage hospital creating a comfortable and informal atmosphere for interviews about the forum with a focus on participatory communications and how telling our stories is one of the real answers;*
- 4. The “old staff lounge” aka art hub room across from the community kitchen provided a Maker Space for a “press gallery”; a small 3-D printing press allowed participants to create their own prints while talking about how this technology could benefit rural communities.*



Besides the situation rooms, we also had communal spaces for round table discussions and sharing of ideas. We used the studio room on the main floor which had the advantage of being located next to the former “labour and delivery room”. This room served as a space for an informal daycare; the youngest participants at the forum created artwork and built structures out of wooden blocks under the gentle eye of the oldest participant at the forum, making this a truly intergenerational event. We held some events in community spaces as well; we wanted to involve them in the event as much as possible. We had a round table discussion and a delicious lunch at the newly renovated Lion’s Den/ Senior’s Centre, and we had an evening gathering in “Zach’s Shed”. We invited youth from the local school to participate in the round table and some of them came after school to take part in the situation rooms. Some of us went on a “walk-about” at Baker’s Brook, a resettled community, where a local tour guide shared stories of resilience and family connections.

The event was successful in so many ways:



- it was the first, of what we hope will be annual “cottage conferences”; it allowed us to pilot this model with respectful and informed participants who provided valuable feedback;

- it helped to establish the reputation of the BBCHHC as a valuable partner for community-based research and development initiatives, and high-lighted our accomplishment in the adaptive re-use of a heritage structure;

- the revenue generated through the provision of accommodations, catering and venues will contribute to the sustainability of the centre;

- it built relationships and fostered networks;

- it led to the creation of The Positive Post – a way to continue the conversation and carry the momentum forward, one step toward building strong rural communities;



Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it inspired us to work harder and more collaboratively to achieve the goal of high-lighting our assets and telling a new story about the vibrant places where we live in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador.



Click [HERE](#) to listen to the song:
The Cottage Hospital and A Wicked Problem
by Ivan Emke
(seated in the centre of
the above photograph)

NURSING A COMMUNITY AT THE BONNE BAY COTTAGE HOSPITAL

Josh Smee, WeavEast Fellow Newfoundland and Labrador



Is there a space in the social innovation ecosystem for a ghost or two? If there is, I know just the spirit. On the West Coast of Newfoundland in the town of Norris Point, nestled in Gros Morne National Park, there are a few ghosts who've had a front-row seat for a fascinating experiment in community-building.

That experiment is happening in the old Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital (now renamed the Julia Ann Walsh Heritage Center). Opened in 1940 as part of a network of "Cottage Hospitals" that brought health services to many of Newfoundland and Labrador's isolated outpost communities, the Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital was at the heart of life in Norris Point and the other communities nestled around Bonne Bay (which sits in the centre of what is now Gros Morne) for more than 60 years, closing only in 2001 (as) when a new Health Centre opened down the road.

After the end of its life as a hospital, a question hung in the air: what could happen to this landmark, and to the green spaces and gardens around it? It turns out the answer is "a lot". 18 years on, the building remains at the heart of the community.

Thanks to tenacious work in the community, ownership of the facility was transferred to the Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital Heritage Corporation, a nonprofit created to support the adaptive reuse of the space. Since then, it has become home to a community radio station, a library, a community garden, an (youth) international backpackers hostel, a cottage hospital museum room, a physiotherapy clinic and other health services, to the arts, and to community gatherings of all shapes and sizes. It's a unique space where tourists from around the world share the hallways with local residents who still rely on services being offered there. The money they bring in helps keep the place running, and the huge mix of uses means there's always something happening.

There is a thriving community around Bonne Bay, one that integrates new arrivals and longtime residents far more smoothly than many others. A big part of that integration happens thanks to what's happening in the old hospital. It's only fitting that it was at a conference within these walls that NLers got their first introduction to the work of WeavEast.

"We really enjoyed hosting our first annual Cottage Conference. The gathering of so many great minds and passionate community developers was inspiring. The old hospital (and its ghosts) are happy when people stay there and share ideas and cook in the kitchens, and especially when children and seniors are welcomed and included. The children played and created artwork while the adults talked. We believe in the power of collective impact to innovate change for a better future for our communities" says Joanie Cranston, who has spearheaded the redevelopment of the space.

This is a great example of an important kind of Atlantic Canadian story – the use of a physical space to catalyze a change in how a community works. In Norris Point, it has helped strengthen many of the intangible ties that hold a community together. When people hear their friend on the local radio station, or bump into their neighbour in the library when heading in for a physio session, they're weaving their own community closer together, and that has an impact. This isn't by any means a perfect story. Making these projects work remains a challenge from a business model perspective. How can we begin a conversation about investing in community cohesion? This might be a place to start.

Anyhow, back to the ghosts. If you ever have a chance to visit the old Cottage Hospital, you'll see that much of the old equipment is still there - a few wards look like the doctors just stepped out for a coffee. There are plenty of stories about ghosts; the first time I spent a night at the hostel there it was a cold November night and I was alone in the building, and I do think I met a few of them. I'm sure they're pleased to have so much company these days!

STANDING ON A NEWFOUNDLAND CLIFF

Magie Dominic
(Inspired by Al Purdy's
'Trees at the Arctic Circle')
READ BY GREG WOOD AT NEW RURAL
STORY FORUM AT BONNE BAY
COTTAGE HOSPITAL

*The breeze had changed to a robust wind,
I could feel it across my shoulders. It was rushing the clouds.*

*Waves below were crashing on ancient stones
that were long ago torn from the cliffs;
sea foam littered the beach.*

*The sky was bursting with colors I'd never seen in my life.
Mauve and cerise and splashes of charcoal
crisscrossed the sky like chalk marks left by a child.
The air felt like silver.*

*Wind raged around me and ripped through the tuckamore
trees,
those swirling dervishes that inhabit the tops
of Newfoundland cliffs,
branches and limbs gone wild,
outliving the elements.*

*Tuckamores are unique to Newfoundland;
they challenge torturous storms
and the waves crashing below them;
defy the wind and its violence,
and when denied the chance to grow upward,
in an act of survival and daring,
they simply grow sideways.*

*I stood alone at the top of the cliff that day,
waves crashing below,
a furious wind engulfing me and the tuckamores,
and I inhaled their courage and daring.
I reclaimed a part of myself.*

*I devoured a piece of the cliff that day;
a taste of wildness and strength;
of vastness; of forest and storms.
Alchemy.*

REFLECTIONS FROM THE NEW RURAL STORY FORUM



WRITTEN BY
BRENNAN LOWERY

Rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador have a wealth of assets that sustain them, from a strong sense of place, to stunning natural beauty, to the dedicated champions who work hard for their communities every day. Yet, often the stories we often hear about rural places are obsessed with their challenges, from demographic decline to climate change vulnerability and every other problem imaginable. What can we do about that?

As an academic, answering that question starts with recognizing that we are often the ones telling that problem-based narrative, that we often go about identifying problems and needs in order to “solve” them with our chosen model or methodology. Another big source of these negative stories is the media. “If it bleeds, it reads” is an old mantra in journalism, which perhaps explains why so many articles in this province about rural areas tend to focus on their challenges. Government agencies often tell the same story, including in where and when funding decisions are made. This province has seen a widespread retreat from rural development institutions, leaving much less local capacity for rural communities to come together to enhance their sustainability.



Rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador have a wealth of assets that sustain them, from a strong sense of place, to stunning natural beauty, to the dedicated champions who work hard for their communities every day.



What is missing in this discourse is the voices of rural communities themselves and the vision for what they want their future to look like. That isn't because rural communities lack strong voices; it's in rural Newfoundland that I've found some of the most vocal advocates for community sustainability that I've ever encountered. One of the most inspiring rural community advocates I know is Joanie Cranston, whom I got to know while on a writing retreat at the former Bonne Bay Cottage hospital, now called simply the Old Cottage Hospital in Norris Point. If you have had the privilege of going to the Cottage Hospital, you will know that it is so much more than a heritage building. It is an embodiment of rural revitalization through all of the ways that the community uses it and comes together there. It is also a testament to the essential role of community champions in sustaining rural communities. When Joanie and I first started talking about organizing a forum at the Cottage Hospital, I was inspired by the energy of that space and the amazing good news story that the building represents. As more partners came into the planning process for the event, it became clear that we had the potential to influence the conversation province-wide about the sustainability of rural communities. We thought it was important to acknowledge and build on other recent efforts to elevate rural voices and tell a new story, like the November 2018 forum on Fogo Island informed by the recently developed PLACE model of community development, and the Sustainable Northern Coastal Communities initiative on the Great Northern Peninsula. Fast forward to the forum itself – in which 37 rural community leaders, support organizations, researchers, and community engagement workers spent two beautiful spring days together discussing the future of rural NL. At the end of that action-packed 48 hours, there seemed to be a real sense of hope in the room and a desire to carry forward the energy of the forum to start telling a new story about rural communities.

This first edition of the Positive Post aims to do just that. As one of the key action items arising from the forum (recommended by Mallery McGrath, another community champion hailing from the proud community of Branch), this participatory publication seeks to change the narrative that is told about rural Newfoundland and Labrador. This first edition consists of reflections and recommendations from the participants of the New Rural Story Forum in May 2019, acting as a participatory report on the forum as well as an invitation to continue the conversation. We are launching the Positive Post on the eve of an event that aims to be the next site of that conversation: the PLACE Dialogues co-hosted by Fishing for Success in Petty Harbour and the Centre for Social Enterprise at Memorial University. I'm excited to continue this vital conversation about changing the story told about rural communities in this province, first and foremost by making sure that rural community members themselves are the ones telling that story. I invite and challenge fellow researchers and others to work with rural communities so that we are amplifying their stories, as opposed to telling a story about them or for them. I hope you enjoy this inaugural edition of the Positive Post and invite you to join in a new conversation about the future of rural communities in our province.

SCALDED CAKE

Barbara Barter

2 cups of flour or bread and roll mix (without the yeast)

Raisins to your own taste but the more, the sweeter

About ½ cup butter (the original recipe called for pork cut up into small cubes but, for those of us who have to watch our fat content...)

Bring water to a boil and begin pouring over the mixture, it should start to expand a bit. Mix with a spoon until you get a mixture that you can kneed with your hands, and mix thoroughly.

Grease your hands, form into balls, and flatten as much as possible (get them as flat as you can, thick ones will be doughy). Place in a greased pan/cook sheet and cook at 400-435 degrees until brown.

Keep checking the bottom as they may brown on the bottom faster than the top. When they do, I turn them over for a few minutes. Good hot or cold. Often eaten with fish or at a pot luck. Make sure they are cold before you cover them or they will go soggy.



ENJOY!

Photo credits: Terra Barrett, Brennan Lowery. 2018-2019.

Photos taken at New Rural Story Conference, in Bonne Bay, and at the Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital.

Layout and formatting by Terra Barrett.

REFLECTIONS



ON A NEW RURAL STORY