

# MINDFUL TRAVEL: Port Medway a small village with a big heart (but not for everybody)

Aug 28, 2016 7:37 AM by: Sandra Phinney



1 / 12 A typical scene in Port Medway, close to the lighthouse and main wharf. (SANDRA PHINNEY)

I'm not a regular churchgoer, but if the timing is right when I travel, I like to attend a Sunday service. It's a great way to get a sense for community and catch a glimpse of the folks who live there. I'm also partial to hymn sings — especially when no one seems to care whether I can carry a tune or not.

So it was that I recently found myself walking into the Baptist church in [Port Medway](#). As I crossed the threshold, a chap handed me the day's bulletin, saying, "We stole this from another church."

Using the words "stole" and "church" in the same sentence was an interesting juxtaposition, but I reckoned all would be explained — if not forgiven.

Turns out that the chap was Pastor Terry Brewer, who was doing double duty; the church bulletin he had offered was from his other charge, the Milton Baptist Church in Milton.

After three locals and three come from aways, including me, were introduced to the choir (in a boom box) we were invited to sing a hymn — and another, and another, and another, and another. *We're off to a good start*, I thought.

Following a few announcements, the pastor then launched into one of the sweetest sermons I've ever heard. To top it off, in the middle of the sermon, he quoted Dr. Seuss. I could have hugged him on the spot.

Before leaving, I went to the front of the church to thank him for such a joyful service. As we shook hands, he asked, "Where are you from?"

"Yarmouth," I said.

He bowed his head and replied, "My sympathies."

Then we both broke out in laughter.

It's been said that laughter is the elixir of the soul. I can't remember the last time I laughed out loud in a church. It felt good.

### Village wit

The night before, I was also treated to several big belly laughs when [Calvin Trillin](#) read from some of his published works at the Old Meeting House in the village.

Trillin was the third author to present readings in a series called the [Port Medway Readers' Festival](#), which takes place during the summer. (He was preceded by Elizabeth Hay and Joan Clark in July.)

Apparently, the festival continues the tradition of the Tennysonian Reading Circle that was started by the ladies of Port Medway in 1903. The festival itself was founded 14 years ago; proceeds go toward the upkeep and preservation of the [Old Meeting House](#) and the Old [Port Medway Cemetery](#) — both worth visiting, although I can't fathom what the purpose was in placing the pews in the meeting house facing one another in what's called the "collegiate" style. Matters not.

The author read several passages from articles he wrote for *The New Yorker*, and from one of his books titled "Quite Enough of Calvin Trillin," to a full house of chortling grey-headed admirers.

Each reading had a Canadian twist, and included titles such as *Loaded for Raccoons*, where we were introduced to the Old Timer who advised Trillin that putting a trout in his well would guarantee clear water ... sure as shootin.'

When he read a recent column from *The New Yorker* titled [Fleeing, Hypothetically](#), the crowd broke out in guffaws.

I'm told that Trillin once said, "Port Medway is not for everyone."

He should know. Although he lives in New York, he's spent more than 40 summers in this village. Perhaps he's merely hopeful that not everyone will *want* to live (or visit) here.

The first time I visited this village was in June when I slipped into Port Medway to get the scoop on The Port Grocer for [Rural Delivery](#). I was so smitten that within a week I returned for a couple of days with my sister, Carmen. This month, I returned with my husband, sister, and two friends.

### So, what's the draw?

In part, it's [The Port Grocer](#) — TPG for short — housed in a grand old dame that's been around since the early 1900s. The building has housed everything from a ceramics studio and general store to a used clothing outlet and Farmer's Quick Way.

After being listed for sale for three years, three women bought it in the winter of 2014 and gave the old building a new *raison d'être*. Although one of the partners had to leave the scene, Deb Melanson and Annabelle Singleton have transformed TPG into the heart of the community. In the process, they've had help from Annabelle's partner, Robie Sagar, and scores of community volunteers.

TPG is a going concern. You can have lunch in the cafe or simply read a book or shoot the breeze with a friend over a cup of coffee. Puzzles, games and books are provided. It's also a place to pick up some dry goods — and village gossip — along with some homemade frozen soups and meat pies.

Need to mail a letter? Check. Want to buy a handmade present? Check. Perhaps you just have a craving for fresh tomatoes or peas? (Psst, go out back and raid the community garden!)

Friday nights, both local and travelling musicians step up to the mikes; toes start to twitch, and TPG shakes and shimmies. On Sundays, patrons pour out onto the deck to enjoy Sunday brunch, which draws people from all parts of the province.

But there's more to TPG than meets the eye at ground level. Meet Shelley Stevens-Moore, an artist who operates [The Crow's Nest Gallery and Gift Shop](#) on the second floor (when she isn't serving customers downstairs).

Everything in her shop is made locally. For example, she has boats and giant knitting needles made by her father, Jimmy; wooden spoons made by her uncle Billy; wooden dories built by her uncle Larry; quilts by her aunt Virginia — and more.

In back of The Crow's Nest, a small flat that's painted peach and right out of a '60s movie set reminds me of attic apartments we lived in when going to university. TPG owners offer the flat to visiting musicians on Friday nights, and they also rent it to visitors.

Mind you, in order to get a bit of a breeze on a hot summer night, you need to leave the downstairs door to the street open, as well as the door at the head of the stairs leading into the flat. But that's OK; Port Medway is the kind of place where people neither put padlocks on their bikes nor lock their cars.

It comes as no surprise that real estate listings now print statements such as: *A short walk or drive to The Port Grocer.*

In case you are wondering, Port Medway is about 25 kilometres northeast of Liverpool. The population seems to hover around 200, and can increase by 50 per cent in the summer. The village has a long and colourful history as a shipbuilding, fishing and international port of call in the 19th century. Today, generational lobster fishing families keep it a working community.

## Meet more village people

If you drive five kilometres to the end of Long Cove Road across from the Baptist church, you might meet up with Elinor Roberts — a feisty 84-year-old, and the author of “Dis Is How It Was ... an Dat’s Dat.”

Elinor befriends critters like porcupines and raccoons. It’s not uncommon to see her feeding them in her kitchen or on the veranda. Alas, when I was there, the raccoons had put the run to the porcupines. But I watched a masked bandit help himself to several hunks of bread from a saucer.

I don’t have enough space to recount the tale behind the \$2 chandelier Elinor hung from the ceiling in the fishing shanty next to the wharf; just ask her about it.

Three of Elinor’s daughters live in Port Medway. Sheena Mason owns [Outback Kayak Tours](#). (Have made a note to myself to sign up for a paddle the next time I’m there.) Susan Chouinard sells smoked fish which she smokes herself. (And, yes, it is delicious.) Susan is also an artist and sells her paintings and homemade jams at the Sunday farmers markets held on the large lawn at TPG. Nancy Griffin operates [Nancy’s BnB](#) — where my sister and two friends stayed.

Although Nancy officially has only one bedroom for rent, when faced with housing three guests, she said, “No problem,” and gave up her own room.

Speaking of characters, you’ll meet plenty more in the village, including Clarence Hottot who repairs bikes and lawn mowers. Clarence also operates an antique store (some would call it a junk shop) at Hottot’s Corner, across from his home, with the help of his friend Maud. This is where I bought a handsome carved mallard, some bling for my niece and a few teacups for 10 cents apiece.

In the same building is newly opened [Port Medway Art & Design](#). You’ll need more than spare change to purchase something here, but every item is exquisite.

The shop belongs to Pamela Purves, who sells her own fine art photography along with a selection of custom-designed decorative furniture and fabric items. How she manages to make mesmerizing photos of fog is beyond me, but she has. Perhaps on my next visit, I’ll muster up the courage to ask her how she does it.

Meanwhile, back home, I've been thinking a lot about the statement "Port Medway is not for everyone." I concur. After all, there's neither fast food nor fine dining here. No gimmicks, no glitzy attractions, no hoopla. No BS either. And if you expect your meal to show up in 10 minutes at The Port Grocer — well, don't.

But what you *will* discover in Port Medway is a strong sense of community, good food, the redemptive power of humour, an opportunity to connect with people — and plenty of reasons to return.

\* \* \*

Coming up on Sept. 24 is the third annual Port Jam. There will be live music at The Port Grocer from 2 to 11 p.m., along with a roast pork dinner, burgers, popcorn, beer tent, community market — and more.

## Comments

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**Angela Mombourquette** · Part-time Faculty at University of King's College, Halifax

Nice piece, Sandra.

Unlike · Reply · 1 · Aug 28, 2016 8:31am



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

Oh Angela Mombourquette! What fun to see you pop into view! Still want to connect for coffee sometime. Maybe in Port Medway!

Like · Reply · 1 · Aug 28, 2016 11:48am



**Norma Mcdonell**

Carol Baker , an important Canadian singer/ songwriter is from Port Medway....

Unlike · Reply · 3 · Aug 28, 2016 8:47am



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

Oh YES! DRAT! I forgot to mention that Norma. Thanks for the reminder!

Like · Reply · 1 · Aug 28, 2016 11:44am



**Pete Munro** · Works at On the chain gang

She's doing a show at the Astor in Liverpool this fall

Unlike · Reply · 2 · Aug 28, 2016 12:13pm



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

Pete Munro Good to know! I'll get the word around.

Like · Reply · 1 · Aug 28, 2016 12:42pm



**Linda Mason** · Miss Murphy's Business College Halifax N S

Wonderful story - you covered everything and living just down the road for 52 years I need someone like you to write this story and make me think again - how lucky am I...love Elinor and her way of life...she is one great gal.

Unlike · Reply · 6 · Aug 28, 2016 9:24am



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

Thanks for commenting Linda! Such a special place you live in!

Like · Reply · 1 · Aug 28, 2016 11:45am



**Linda Mason** · Miss Murphy's Business College Halifax N S

Sandra Phinney - well I moved from the "big city" (Halifax) in 1964 and never looked back. We love to share the South Shore and there are all kinds of tiny villages and communities that are similar to Port Medway - next time try out Mill Village and then go to Milton, Queens County...if you need a list let me know and I will give you great ideas. Loved your story....

Unlike · Reply · 2 · Aug 28, 2016 12:16pm · Edited



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

Linda Mason Yes, we spent some time in Mill Village which I also love (lovely cafe and gift shop and the river view is amazing.) Also used Port Medway as "home base" and scouted around East/West Germany, LaHave etc. So much to discover on that shore.

Like · Reply · 1 · Aug 28, 2016 12:42pm



**Nancie McKinnon** · Chief Traveler at Budget Travelers Sandbox

My parents grew up in Mill Village, not that far from Port Medway. I remember visiting PM when I was a child. It was on my list to visit this summer, but I ran out of time. I'll get there next summer, for sure. Thanks for the nice right up.

Unlike · Reply · 4 · Aug 28, 2016 9:52am



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

And Mill Village is another gem we have. The Riverbank Cafe and General Store is also a special place. So peaceful there on the river.  
Also has a great gift shop!

Like · Reply · Aug 28, 2016 11:49am · Edited



**Joe Whitty**

Amazing article. I also love Port Medway and always have. I had the pleasure to teach three of the four Farmer family, who were owners of the general store many years ago. This article has inspired me to make another visit to this quaint community this Fall.

Unlike · Reply · 2 · Aug 28, 2016 10:08am



**Sandra Phinney** · Works at Freelance Writer and Photographer

Thanks Joe. And, yes, do visit there again this fall! I'll be back before the snow flies too.

Like · Reply · Aug 28, 2016 11:53am · Edited

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