

Survivor!

BIG CHUTE

Snake bite victim drives himself to Midland hospital for treatment

BY SHARON WEATHERALL
FREE PRESS SPECIAL

Terry Dunlop of Collingwood says he did not get too 'rattled' when he was bit by a Massasauga Rattler in back of his Big Chute, Tea Lake cottage near Midland earlier this month. Instead he kept his cool, did not panic and probably bought himself some time.

The Trinity United Church minister was able to keep calm after a 16" snake fastened itself to his foot, by mentally reviewing valuable self taught education.

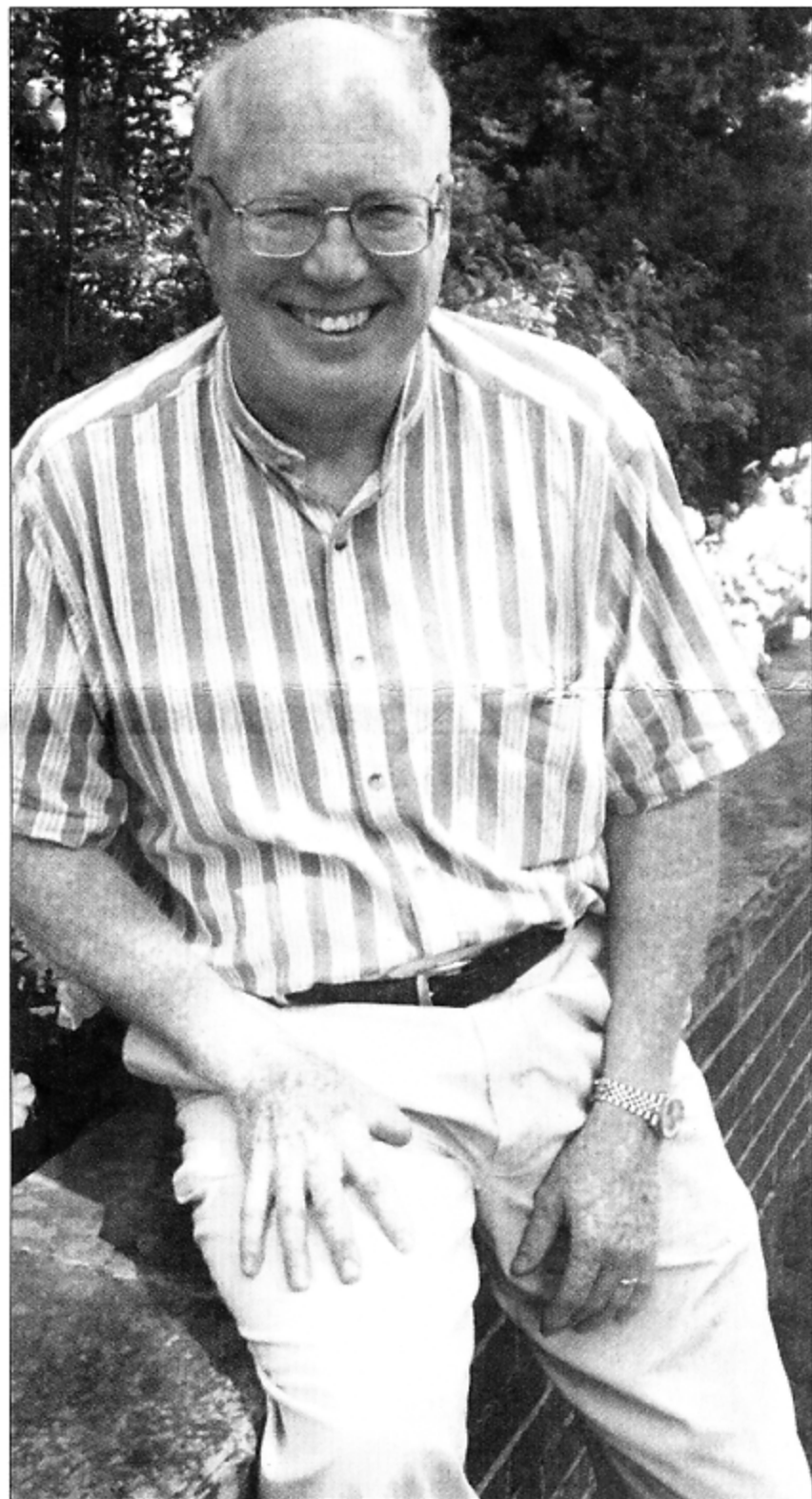
"I am familiar with snakes due to the cottage. Knowing the area is a rattle snake habitat, I made myself knowledgeable about them many years ago when my kids were younger," said Dunlop.

"We have seen over a dozen Massasauga Rattlers over twenty years. I appreciate the fact they are endangered, so whenever any came to close to the cottage, I have gently relocated them elsewhere.

"They were no danger to move, with a shovel and pail.

"Their striking distance is one third to one half of their body length and they are not a fast moving snake."

Even so, at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, July 2, when he felt a jolt of sharp pain in the side of right foot, the reality of being bitten by a snake still caught him off guard. He had been walking in his yard clearing some branches so he could put his boat in the lake and was on his way back up to the cottage, when the fangs "punctured" his foot.



SHARON WEATHERALL PHOTO

Terry Dunlop of Collingwood was bitten by a Massasauga Rattlesnake on July 2, at his cottage near Midland. Having educated himself on snakes, he remained calm and went to the hospital where he was later administered ten vials of anti-venom. While the bite has healed, Dunlop still suffers from the side-effects of the costly serum. It is about \$1,000 per vial.

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Cottage

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"I did not hear a rattle. I looked down to see the puncture marks and small bit of blood. It did not bleed a lot. Then I looked up to see the snake slowly moving away. I wanted to identify it because I knew I they would want to know details about it at the hospital," he said.

Dunlop determined the age of the snake from the number of rattles on it's tail. This snake had four and he figured it to be about one and half years of age, since a young snake will shed 2-3 times in it's first year of growth. Dunlop said he walked back up to the cottage and told his wife who got much more upset about it than he did. Then he calmly drove himself to the hospital.

"I knew it would not kill me, I just needed anti-venom. I stayed calm because I knew if panicked it would make the blood flow faster to my heart and that could be dangerous. My foot was already swelling. I called Coldwater Clinic which used to carry anti-venom and when I could to get an answer, called Midland hospital, told them I had been bitten and then drove myself there."

At the hospital a number of people looked at the bite and asked Dunlop questions, judging his knowledge of snakes to ensure it had been a rattler. Within two hours his foot had turned an ugly red and purple colour and they were marking it with a ball point pen, measuring and monitoring it constantly. Dunlop said at the same time he kept his own record. After two hours the medical staff told him he would need the anti-venom, which he was informed by internist Dr. Dolezel, was very expensive and he had to sign a consent form. Dolezel, who Dunlop said is know to be an authority in Ontario on treating snake bites, told him the snake venom could cause serious tissue damage to his foot.

About four hours later, he was administered with ten vials of anti-venom. It was an expensive fix but a small cost in comparison to a life. Judged on the severity of the bite and quickness of the swelling, a physician must determine how much anti-venom to administer. According to Huronia District Hospital (HDH) in Midland - one of two locations in the area that carry the serum - vials are about \$1,000 each and are currently in short demand due to a contaminated batch earlier in the year. Because the anti-venom is no longer available in Canada, but must be purchased from Wales, is another cost factor.

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cost factor.

"I was becoming very anxious by the time they actually administered the anti-venom. The problem was the substance in the vials was a thick, almost tofu type substance that was not liquid. They had to inject saline solution into the end of it and roll the bottles to completely dissolve the substance before it was put into an IV. They had several people rolling the vials, including two student doctors, a nurse and a doctor," said Dunlop.

"After four hours I was very anxious about possible tissue damage. They had tested for allergic reaction to horses, before they hooked me up to the IV. I was told by a Dr. Veale the anti-venom (Polyvalent Crotalidea) was a new product that had no reported allergic reactions. I was given morphine for the enormous pain I suffered. The pain went on for ten days - it was far worse than foot surgery I had a few years before."

Dunlop stayed in the hospital two days, one day in the emergency and another day on the floor, then he was released. He said the worst part of the ordeal was the excruciating pain from the bite. He had to lay on

ger bitten by rattler

the couch with his leg elevated. He had been warned at the hospital he may also suffer neurological symptoms which could last days, or even weeks. A month later, he is still suffering from numbness and muscle spasm from his elbow to his wrist in both arms. The bite is all but healed, with only a tiny puncture scar to remind him of his experience, and a tenderness and burning sensation sometimes to the skin surrounding it.

Of the experience, Dunlop said he feels that while he was well cared for in the hospital, he thinks the protocol in treating a snake bite victim could be improved, perhaps through regular in-service, so that all staff members are updated on treatment procedures. Dunlop had questions about administration of medication and the monitoring of his swelling foot and leg. A former member of the hospital board of directors, Dunlop became involved HDH when he was minister for the sold water Pastoral Charge, including Waubashene and Eady churches. He says he has always been proactive about his own health and medical care.

Marlene Jackson, director of patient care services at HDH, said that each individual patient is different and therefore treated differently depending on the progression of the swelling, or even if they they need medication due to the fact it may have been a dry bite (no venom) or not from a rattle snake. Jackson said it is difficult since there are only 2-3 bites a year and some nurses may not have ever had to treat a person who has been bit, but that does not mean they are not educated. She assured there is a protocol and all staff are given extensive education of snake bites and a review of medicines each year.

"This year in particular with the shortage of anti-venom, we did a lot of prevention and proactive awareness education" she said.

"There is a tick sheet and a number of

steps to follow. The staff is briefed on protocol and handout sheets are given to all members."

Dunlop says he bears no anger or fear for the Massasauga Rattlesnake even after what he has been through.

"The snake was only defending itself and I must have stepped within six inches of it to have bee struck. It was only defending itself," he said.

Dunlop said you cannot control a snake in

it's own habitat. They are very amphibious and swim inland from the lake. If he had been walking in the woods he would have been wearing protective footwear. Recently the minister shared the story with his Collingwood congregation and the children of the church, to try and make them more aware of what to do in case of meeting a poisonous snake, reminding them the species is endangered and they should never hurt one.

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