

# Mother appreciates Pembroke's spirit and acceptance during week-long visit

Barbara Wade's visit to Pembroke this fall gave her a first-hand view of what "community living" is all about.

It also confirmed her belief that her daughter, Patsy, has been able to develop a very rich life, filled with friends and a variety of interests, since moving out of the Rideau Regional Centre nearly 20 years ago.

"This has been a week to live Patsy's life with her," Mrs. Wade said as she prepared to return to her home in Victoria, B.C. "Her life in Pembroke is just wonderful."

Together, they had visited the Salvation Army and the Mac's Milk store where Patsy volunteers.

They attended a meeting of the Pembroke Doll Club.

They went to church and then to the Sunday afternoon flea market Patsy enjoys each week.

They hosted a luncheon for more than a dozen of Patsy's friends, and Mrs. Wade learned to take the time to stop and visit with her daughter's acquaintances wherever they went.

Before she moved to Pembroke in the mid-1980s, Patsy had spent 24 years as a resident of the Rideau Regional Centre, the Smiths Falls institution for people with developmental disabilities.

"I don't want to relive those days and the frustration of trying to get help," Mrs. Wade says in response to questions about Patsy's institutionalization.

At the time, it was the family's only choice.

Until she was 13, Patsy had been tutored privately or educated in a special class at her private tutor's school.

"After that, there was nothing. There was no help," her mother recalls. "It (Rideau Regional Centre) was the only option."

While Patsy lived at the centre, the rest of the family followed her father's military career throughout North America.

They moved from Ottawa to British Columbia and Virginia Beach before retiring in Victoria, B.C.

During those intervening years, new options became available for Patsy.

A movement began to take residents out of institutions and into the community.

Patsy expressed an interest in moving, but only if she could be together with her boyfriend, John Dickerson.

They became the first two residents to leave a residence together. Patsy still remembers the date. It was June 30, 1986.

While she wasn't familiar with Pembroke, her mother recalls being "thrilled" with her daughter's decision.

Patsy's care at Rideau had been satisfactory, but as a mother, Mrs. Wade knew life could hold more for her daughter.



Patsy Wade, right, enjoys a moment with her mother, Barbara, at a luncheon they hosted for friends in Pembroke during Barbara's visit from British Columbia. (Submitted photo)

"We were so impressed by Pembroke. Everybody seemed so kind, and it was just the right size," she says.

The family watched Patsy blossom as she moved from a group home to more independent living, and began working at ARC Industries and later The Prospector.

"She became much more confident and even more outgoing," Mrs. Wade says.

Patsy confirms there were never any regrets about the move.

"I can get out and do some things and meet new friends," she says of her life in Pembroke.

Barbara admits that others have suggested she should move Patsy to the west coast to be closer to the rest of the family.

"Why would I do that?" she asks. "She's made her life here. She is established, and she's so happy."

She monitors her daughter's activities through regular phone calls and ongoing contact with the staff at Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley who support Patsy.

"I have no hesitation phoning at any time, and we communicate by e-mail," she says. "The association is most caring and forward thinking - they're always looking ahead and improving things."

"I wouldn't dream of changing anything," she concludes.

*Editor's note:* This is one in a series of articles prepared by Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley. There has been some controversy regarding Ontario's plans to close institutions, including the Rideau Regional Centre. Community Living assists people to live in a state of dignity, share in all elements of living in the community, and have the opportunity to participate effectively.

The Pembroke area has embraced independent living for people with disabilities for a number of years.

This series highlights some of the many success stories in our community. Individuals and families are invited to contact Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley for more information at 735-0659.