



Volunteers in Action

Aline Haché: Giving Hope

By André Veniot, Freelance Writer

Aline Haché loves to sing. “In fact, She’s a great singer,” says Chaplain Phil Ferris. It was her voice that brought Haché and Ferris together 14 years ago in, for some people the unlikeliest of places, Dorchester Penitentiary.

“I have a sister that was going to sing for the inmates at the penitentiary on Christmas Eve,” explains Haché, a cheerful 63 year-old. “They wanted a choir with lots of people. She asked me to go along. So I went. That’s how my life as a volunteer at Dorchester started – because I love to sing.”

It was this chance meeting that brought Haché and Ferris together, for he was then chaplain at the institution. “Aline is very cheerful, very positive and interested in people. And being Acadian, she brings that cultural flair, which is great. She’s had a willingness to serve right from the beginning,” says Ferris.

Haché became and remains one of 310 volunteers who give freely of their time at both Dorchester and Westmorland institutions and one of 10,000 across Canada who each year help offenders safely reintegrate into their communities and become law-abiding citizens.

Some do it through tutoring, literacy training, helping with computer and vocational skills. Others work in health care to help sick and dying inmates or through sports and theatre groups or being members of citizens’ advisory committees.

Aline Haché, along with her husband Aldéric, work with the chaplain and Circles of Support program. Every Tuesday night the two drive to Dorchester to sing and pray with the inmates.

“I look forward to it and try not to miss any sessions. The guys really appreciate it when we go. They thank us every week. Sometimes we’re not too many, just myself and my husband and one or two more. Sometimes we’re five or six,” she says.

Her presence and her activities with offenders have grown over time. She takes minimum-security offenders out on escorted passes and she’s on the board of the national association of volunteers who work with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC).

“I escort people from Westmorland Institution. CSC gives us

training and tells us what to do and what our responsibilities are. Last year one of the projects was painting a church in Rexton, so I would drive them once a week for five or six weeks. It gave us a chance to get to know them better as human beings,” says Haché.

Both Aline and Aldéric derive a lot of personal satisfaction from their time as volunteers. “I’ve been told by some of them that we’ve made a positive difference in their lives,” says Aline.

“Sometimes we’ll meet someone who is now on the street and they’ll tell us we gave them hope, that we didn’t judge them. We listen a lot. Sometimes we think we aren’t doing anything of any value but all of a sudden a guy will tell us, ‘What you told me the other day, I thought about it and it makes sense.’ So that motivates us to go again, and again.”

For some offenders, it’s the idea that every week the Hachés will drive 40 minutes to Dorchester and another 40 minutes back to Moncton, just to spend time with them that’s important. “That’s a real eye-opener for them. It lets them know that there are people on the outside who care for them,” she says.

Chaplain Ferris says “Mrs. Haché is not a fearful person. Right from the word go she was just as comfortable with them as with anyone on the outside. She’s liked very much by the inmates. I’ve never heard a negative word about Aline.”

“In fact,” he says “she really stands out. She doesn’t only do visitations, she does toy projects, she’s with the Christian Council for Reconciliation and with the umbrella group for volunteers. I’d really like to have another 15 or 20 people like her. She has a lovely gift and spirit. She’s very kind.”

Ed Muise, spokesperson for CSC, says its volunteers like Aline and Aldéric Haché that help offenders reintegrate into their communities once they get paroled. “Those of us who work in CSC represent authority. But our volunteers represent society and without them it would be very difficult for offenders to once again become accepted by their community and contribute to it.” ■