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ROBBIE HAIGH ON 'SENIORITY:' Public access TV personality and local volunteer aims to make a difference

Robbie Haigh, host of the cable TV show "Seniority," was driving on Water Street some time ago when she spotted a friend who had just been through a terrible trauma. Haigh quickly pulled over, executing a terrible parking job, so she could leap out of the car and give the friend a much-needed hug. As she got back into her car, Haigh noticed a woman walking by, who smirked at her.

PLYMOUTH – Robbie Haigh, host of the cable TV show "Seniority," was driving on Water Street some time ago when she spotted a friend who had just been through a terrible trauma. Haigh quickly pulled over, executing a terrible parking job, so she could leap out of the car and give the friend a much-needed hug. As she got back into her car, Haigh noticed a woman walking by, who smirked at her.

"That's no way to park a car," the woman said.

"I know. You're right. I just needed to give a friend a hug," Haigh responded.

"I wish I had a friend to give me a hug," the woman confessed.

Haigh was so anxious to move her car in order to comply with the woman's criticism, she said didn't realize what she should have done. She should have gotten out of her car, once again, she said, and hugged this woman, whose crabby nature belied her inner pain.

Haigh sees the incident as telling of what everyone should be doing, spreading more joy and love, and remembering that many people simply do not get enough.

For her, seniors are among those who are simply not getting enough – enough respect, enough love, enough of a voice. That's why she created and hosts her show, "Seniority," which airs on PACTV's public access station. Robbie is determined to help seniors and everyone she can to exercise their voice, to be happier and to live life to its fullest.

Haigh grew up in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where you couldn't step out of your front door without bumping into people of Scottish descent. Years later, she couldn't help laughing over this common question:

"Oh, you're from Cape Breton? Do you know a man named Mac?"

Uh, yeah, she new about 10,000 of them, all nicknamed for their Scottish surname of MacGilvry, MacGregor, MacDonald and the like. Haigh's maiden name was Curtis, which, of course, is also Scottish.

Back in the day, when she was a child, girls had few options in Cape Breton, which was a coal mining town. Women were allowed to be barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen, not necessarily in that order. Haigh had different ideas about her future and graduated early from high school, at age 16, with the express intent of fleeing her limiting environment.

"The stork dropped me off at the wrong house," she said, laughing.

She wound up living with her aunt in Boston where she pursued a career in nursing. In time, she became a licensed practical nurse. After training at Massachusetts General Hospital, she worked at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. It was while logging shifts here that she met Leonard Haigh, a young man working at a diner she frequented on Brookline Avenue. The two would talk briefly while she drank her coffee, and one day, he decided to spice up the conversation, so to speak.

Robbie was sitting at a table with some of her girlfriends and had ordered coffee, per usual. Leonard delivered the coffee to her and watched as she took a healthy sip, then spit it out on the counter. It was loaded with salt.

The salted coffee, apparently, cinched the deal.

"I fell in love with him," Robbie said, laughing. "Anyone who would go to that extra trouble to make someone take notice of them is impressive. He laughed as loud as I did."

The two married, and started their lives together in Dorchester, where they lived for eight years. A Korean War veteran, Leonard became a hairdresser and Robbie continued to work as an LPN throughout their marriage, working schedules around their three young children. From Dorchester, the family moved to Scituate, where they lived for 33 years before landing in America's Hometown.

They were looking for a place to build a summer home and had been visiting Plymouth since their dating days. It seemed ridiculous, however, to be building a summer home near the water when they already lived in Scituate. So, the Haighs decided to simply move to Plymouth, where they built a home on Little Herring Pond.

Robbie became a member of Plymouth Area Community Television, or PACTV, eight years ago while serving on the Council on Aging, just four years after her beloved husband died. The town needed a new senior center and Robbie was concerned when she realized that some town officials and others seemed to be



PHOTO/ WICKED LOCAL PHOTO/EMILY CLARK

Robbie Haigh produces and stars in the cable TV show "Seniority," which airs on PACTV and on other cable stations.

either sweeping the issue under the carpet or offering up thrown-together building ideas. She wanted the best for Plymouth's seniors and she knew she was going to have to fight for it.

Robbie took the PACTV courses on video production and created and starred in the show "Seniority" to get the word out about the need for a good senior center, and also to give seniors a voice.

"We marched in front of Town Hall to get a building that was worthy," Robbie said. "I told the Council on Aging I'd do the show for one year."

They proved to be famous last words. Robbie has been producing and starring in "Seniority" for eight years, and the show continues to gain in popularity.

The reason may be Robbie's approach. She said she's always loved seniors and, as a nurse, often worked as their advocate. Seniors have so much to give, she added. They often have more to give because they've had more experience and developed so much wisdom.

"They're wonderful people who have lived," she said. "They're not old; they simply have seniority."

In addition, Robbie said she has found that many seniors are afraid to speak up or to complain about something important because they feel vulnerable and worry about the ramifications. Her show is all about overcoming that fear and simply speaking your mind, she added, without any fear of backlash. Seniors need to know they have the same rights and privileges as younger folk, and their issues should not be brushed under the carpet. Seniors are every bit as vital and important as the young, she reiterated.

As a result, "Seniority" is not age-specific. She shines a light on talented, skilled and wonderfully philosophical people who share their experiences and their ideas with the public. Her connections as a Habitat for Humanity of Greater Plymouth, Pilgrim Hall Museum and Memorial Hall volunteer have helped Robbie deliver a constant stream of fabulous guests on her show, she said.

"Seniority" has featured Senate President Therese Murray, Rep. Vinny deMacedo and others, helping viewers understand complex issues or offering them vital information.

Robbie goes to all this effort to be of service to the community, and now films the show in Sandwich for distribution to PACTV. She balks at the notion that giving is some sort of exchange.

"People say it's 'giving back,'" she said. "It's not. You just give."

Robbie is also passionate about giving love, and contends that everyone needs seven hugs a day. Most people don't get enough love, she said, and noted that the incident with the woman who criticized her parking job is a case in point.

And, Robbie should soon be spreading her joy more visibly as she prepares to move into The Residences at the Armory on Court Street. She has purchased an apartment there and said she is so excited she will be living downtown. The Armory, with its barred lower windows, is where Plymouth once housed its munitions. A friend of hers had something to say when she discovered that Robbie would be moving into the building: "I always knew one day you'd be behind bars."

"Seniority" newest segments air on PACTV public access stations at 6:30 p.m. Mondays and are replayed at 10:30 a.m. Tuesdays, 3 p.m. Thursdays and 3:30 p.m. Saturdays.

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