

HELPING OTHERS

Researching the life of Robbert Hartog led his biographer on a journey of discovery that revealed one of Midland's leading citizens spent a lifetime

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By Douglas Glynn

Serendipitous choice put student on path

Shannon Teahen thinks being chosen to write a biography of Robbert Hartog was "very serendipitous."

Teahen was completing her master's degree in history at the University of Waterloo in 2008 when Prof. Kenneth McLaughlin approached the circulation desk of St. Jerome's University library, where she worked part-time, to offer her the opportunity to take on the task.

Since then she has travelled across Ontario, to Europe and Thailand discovering the role Hartog played as a business man, philanthropist, community leader, initiator, supporter, booster and mentor. She even uncovered some details, albeit murky, about his role as part of an intelligence group with the Royal Netherlands Army during the height of the Second World War.

Teahen, who started her research with a list of about 20 names provided by Fred Hacker and Reinhart Weber, who commissioned the book, said she ended up conducting some 100 oral interviews.

"I was constantly amazed at the breadth and reach of his involvement in business and charitable causes," she says.

Her book, *Robbert Hartog: A Lifetime of Changing Lives*, will have its official launch at the Midland YMCA tomorrow night (Thursday) at 7 p. m.

The book traces Hartog's life before he came to Toronto in 1941 from The Netherlands following the outbreak of war. It touches briefly on his return to Europe to serve with the Royal Netherlands Army in 1943. Teahen says little information is available about his role with the military "although he reportedly flew to France in a light plane during the Normandy campaign."

Teahen writes of his return to Toronto in 1945 and his business ventures there, in Midland and Cambridge.

She visited Midland at the outset to meet with Hacker and Weber, before going to Barrie, Collingwood, Cambridge, Waterloo, Burlington, and various other cities where Hartog "touched and changed the lives of numerous people.

"Researching Robbert's life took me to The Netherlands to meet his childhood friend and his cousin; to Thailand to meet his long-time friends at Jaguar Industries, a relationship that began when he was on a Canadian Executive Service Organization trip.

"Those whom Robbert surrounded himself with made my research a pleasure, because Robbert's friends were always more than happy to speak of his numerous achievements," she said.

Hartog, who died in 2008 on the eve of his 89th birthday, had many achievements, including being presented with the Order of Canada.

He was instrumental in bringing industries to Midland and was, says Teahen, considered a valued member of the boards of directors of numerous Canadian corporations.

Hartog also played key roles with Georgian College, the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, the YMCA of Simcoe-Muskoka, Huronia District Hospital, the Industrial Research and Development Institute and St. Paul's United Church.

What helped her bring Hartog's "voice" to the book, she says, "was having access to his private papers."

Teahen describes the book, which is almost 200 pages, as a hybrid. "A lot is local in the Midland, Barrie and Penetanguishene area, but it is international, as well.

Now 25 and living in Toronto where she is working on a Ph D in history, Teahen describes the book as a tribute to "an inspirational Canadian.

"Robbert's determination, generosity, and humility combined with the extent of his involvement locally, nationally, and internationally will astound any reader.

"Robbert has made a lasting impression on me and I am thrilled to share his story."