

Invictus Games Radio Podcast: Episode Four- Caroline McIntosh

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Pj: Welcome to Invictus Games Radio. I'm Pj Kwong. The Invictus Games Toronto 2017 take place September 23rd to 30th and will harness the power of sport to inspire the recovery of wounded, ill and injured servicemen and women. This podcast shines a light on the stories of those competing in the Games and those surrounding them. Their spirit is unconquered.

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Pj: A conversation with Caroline McIntosh, Invictus Games Toronto 2017 volunteer. Caroline McIntosh's story is a compelling display of gratitude towards our military community. Her story includes playing a role in the naming of Ontario's Highway of Heroes and the creation of the commemorative Highway of Heroes coin from the Canadian Mint. She's part of the Invictus Games Toronto 2017 volunteer workforce to support the rehabilitation of injured service members and veterans. Welcome Caroline.

Caroline McIntosh: Thank you very much.

Pj: OK I asked you when we first met, which was at an event, why you wanted to be involved, and you said simply because I am Dutch. Tell me what you meant by that.

Caroline McIntosh: I was born in the, in the Netherlands. I came to Canada in 1967 and I became Canadian back... I think it was 1982, something like that. Anyway. Basically what happened was my, when my boys were born. I...

Pj: You have two sons.

Caroline McIntosh: I have two sons. When my two boys were born, I made a commitment to them to kind of carry on, because the Dutch and the Canadians have such an incredible relationship and the reason for that is because Canada was very instrumental in the freeing of the Netherlands during World War II. My mother and my father were directly impacted by the Canadian soldiers. My mother in fact took care of the Canadian pilot's grave for about a year after his plane was shot down and then after the war his remains were relocated to the larger cemetery in the western part of the Netherlands. In addition to that, my grandfather and my two... Sorry, and my uncles were part of the, the underground, the Dutch underground and there were a number of Canadian soldiers that came through their false attic and they were protected by my family so. It's that incredible legacy that the Canadian, Canadian military, the Canadian soldiers left behind in the in the Netherlands that I felt and feel very compelled to then give back because I literally would not be sitting here if it were not for the Canadian soldiers during World War II.

Pj: The whole movement around the Highway of Heroes. Obviously you have a deep and affection for the Canadian military. Tell me about your involvement in the Highway of Heroes project here in Ontario.

Caroline McIntosh: OK I heard about the Highway of Heroes petition that had been posted by a gentleman by the name of Jay Forbes. It was supported by a number of other players if you will, individuals. However, Jay was the one who had originally written the, written the petition. I, it interested me a great deal because I have been involved in kind of in... On a friend basis with the military for quite a bit and also with my commitment with my sons and you know carrying that forward with that legacy. So when it came an opportunity to actually give back and be able to go on are the soldiers and they had given their lives. That's what the Hero, the Highway of Heroes represented. I jumped at the opportunity to become a petition signer. In addition to that, I contacted Jay Forbes and I got in touch with a gentleman by the name of Pete Fisher who's a journalist and photographer and he was the gentleman who actually was part of the coining of the phrase Highway of Heroes. We became friends and over the space of the next four years or so, after the Highway of Heroes petition was done in, and the highway was named and everything. Of course there were the grassroots support people going to the bridges in the overpasses as our soldiers were being... Their remains were being repatriated back to Canada, and at one point in August of 2010, Pete Fisher went to the Royal Canadian Mint on a tour in Ottawa, came back home again and had e-mailed them saying it'd be really great if we were able to have a vote commemorating the Highway of Heroes grassroots support as well as him a member commemorative coin for the military families who've lost soldiers. How about if we do that? The Royal Canadian Mint basically after some backing and forthing and came back and said basically you know, we don't think so. We do a lot in terms of the Remembrance Day coins and things like that, so we're not going to do one specifically for the Highway of Heroes. Pete sent out an e-mail that evening, I responded, called them up and said no that's not acceptable. We need to do this because as Canadians we it... We need to recognize our soldiers, you know their sacrifices. So that evening I wrote the petition. And basically Pete and I started on a journey of gathering support, grassroots support. By the time six weeks had gone by, I had gotten the... The support of EMS, police and firefighters associations right across Canada which translated into about 250,000 signatures. There was about 10,000 signatures on the petition itself, as well Peter had gone out on his end of things with municipalities mayors and a number of different organizations. It was such a groundswell of support for the idea of this commemorative coin that the role Canadian Mint actually ended up saying yes and eight months later they minted the coin.

Pj: You know what that is a huge feat. And when you think about Canadian groundswell of support to use your words, when we're talking about the Invictus Games Toronto 2017, which will be here next year next September in 2017. Tell me what you think that that groundswell of support will mean for wounded servicemen and veterans. And women, service women as well.

- Caroline McIntosh:** And service women as well. The groundswell of support... We've been talking a little bit because I'm I'm the volunteer, I'm the team lead for volunteer recruiting and we've had some discussion about, are we going to get people volunteering for the Invictus Games and it is, in my opinion, because of what I saw the reaction of people with the Highway of Heroes coin and you know people go, this is absolutely. I think Canadians are just waiting for an opportunity to be able to give back that empathy that they have for soldiers and be able to translate that and I think that our, I think the saying that we that we're working behind with the Toronto Invictus Games empathy, turning empathy into empowerment is exactly that and I honestly believe that Canadians... We have such a reputation in terms of our soldiers giving back, our soldiers representing us on the world stage so to speak, that it's, it's an opportunity for Canadians. I think that they honestly... The Invictus Games are going to be, they're going to be, people are just going to jump at the opportunity to be able to do just a little thing to give back to our soldiers again for everything that they've given back to us.
- Pj:** We're talking on a day that we've had different people come through the office and one of the people that you had a chance to meet quite by surprise that evoked a hugely emotional response was a volunteer named Mort. Can you tell me a little about that encounter?
- Caroline McIntosh:** OK I will do my best.
- Pj:** And he's a volunteer with the Invictus Games Toronto 2017.
- Caroline McIntosh:** He is. He is. I had not come across Mort yet. Mort actually has served with the Canadian military through three different types of war conflicts including World War II. And today was the first day, first time that I've met Mort. And he's there with his jacket with his beautiful medals and everything else and it's like wow he's a Canadian soldier. And so as soon as I got the opportunity to actually ask him, I sat down with him at the table and I said, "Mort, so did you serve in the Netherlands?" And he said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, I did." And I went, "Oh a Canadian soldier," that's what I'm thinking and I asked him, I said, "So where did you serve? Like what, what region?" And he went, "Twente." And I nearly fell off my chair because Twente just happens to be the region that I actually I was born in Hengelo Twente and my mother's village is in that, in that region and so it turned out that Mort actually served in the same place as my mother was. Where she grew up and where I was born in Hengelo and we proceeding to kind of... It was a very, very emotional because Mort, his representation, his... The fact that he's a Canadian soldier who served, you know, is exactly the reason why, he's the visceral reason why I commit. I've committed to the military and you know given that legacy to my children and told, talked to people all the time about the fact that, you know, the Dutch and the Canadians, Canadians were so worth... That's what they did for, for us. And here was a, a real live representation and not only that, but he actually served where I was born so...
- Pj:** You know, makes it real.
- Caroline McIntosh:** Very very very real.

- Pj:** Talk about a small world moment. So tell me how you think that volunteering at the Invictus Games Toronto 2017. How is this going to help wounded soldiers and veterans?
- Caroline McIntosh:** There was a... There was a volunteer rally a few weeks ago in which a gentleman, a soldier by the name of **Joel Guido** came forward and stood up and spoke to the entire group there and he has PTSD. And he spoke about the impact that one particular volunteer had on him at the Orlando 2016 Games in May of this year and the very fact that it's, it was an, an opportunity for this individual to, to give back to him, to recognize his service, to recognize his sacrifice, to be nonjudgmental, to allow him space and it was just a very incredible circumstance that he described and it really emphasized for me that volunteering for the Invictus Games is not just about being a volunteer. There are very, very real people who are going to be the incredibly beneficiaries of the time and commitment that people are going to make. The Invictus Games are not the Pan-Am, they're not the Olympics, the Invictus Games are about injured soldiers and it's our opportunity as Canadians, as volunteers, to be able to give back to this, to this incredible group of individuals who have such incredible courage and heart and determination to come through. Joel said to me that afterwards, and I went up to him and I said, "That was an incredible story," and he said, "You know, it's all about when I got injured, I lost my identity and the Invictus Games allowed me to get back." Basically, in May of this year, about 25 to 30 per cent what he called his own identity, to come back to himself again, who he was before he was injured and he is so... Sorry, it's not 25, sorry, 75 per cent. What he's so looking forward to is Toronto 2017 to get the idea that he will come back and be able to, to get his 25, the rest of his 25 per cent of his identity and he really, really emphasized what impact it would be to be a volunteer and be able to allow someone to have that kind of a life journey.
- Pj:** Three quick things that Canadians might relate to in terms of what you're going to get out of this experience. Or what they might as well.
- Caroline McIntosh:** What they might get out... They are... It's a world stage. There are individuals coming from all over 17 countries. So we have an opportunity as Canadians to represent Canada, to represent Toronto. The visceral understanding that they are... As volunteers that they are... I mean the at the end of the day, the individuals who are going to benefit the most from this will be the soldiers themselves. So it's representing Canada, Toronto, being ambassadors in that respect because of course the media is going to be here from all over the world. We get to show them what it means to be Canadian. We get to show our soldiers what it means to be Canadian. And our gratefulness to their, to their sacrifice and at the end of the day, they get a t-shirt. *[Both laugh]*
- Pj:** And you know what's great, actually about volunteerism in general, typically making new friendships, new relationships, people that you would come across, like you wouldn't necessarily have ever met Mort...
- Caroline McIntosh:** Oh absolutely
- Pj:** ... if it were not for volunteer here.

- Caroline McIntosh:** Yes. Yes
- Pj:** So that's pretty special. If somebody is in a position where they can't devote time to volunteerism in general, how can people in Canada and throughout the world, how can we support volunteerism do you think?
- Caroline McIntosh:** Volunteerism at the Games you mean at Invictus or just in general?
- Pj:** At the Games for sure, but also in general.
- Caroline McIntosh:** It's being cognitive of... Cognisant of where someone comes up to them, perhaps they are as a manager, they're working within, they're in a work environment and someone as a volunteer comes up to them and says, you know I'd really like to be able to give some time. It's, it's being it's encouraging their employers to be more... Good community citizens if you will, from a, from a society point of view. It really for me, volunteerism really is a translation of the values that Canadian holds, Canadians hold for each other and Canadians hold within this country and what we represent on the world stage. What we represent to each other, the opportunity. I have, I've done a little bit of volunteering. See I have a friend of mine who does Syrian volunteering for the Syrian refugees. It's being... Volunteering is an opportunity for us to give back in whichever way shape or form and for, for us just to grows as a society, as a community is really what I would encourage people to really have a look at. It's, it's giving back and whether it's five minutes or five hours or 50 hours, it doesn't matter. If you're volunteering, you're doing something and you're giving back and I think that, at the end of the day, makes everyone feel good about themselves as well as.
- Pj:** Yeah for sure. Now my last question, what are you most looking forward to at the Invictus Games Toronto 2017?
- Caroline McIntosh:** I am really looking forward to being able to understand what kind of an impact, positive impact, that I and the other volunteers are going to have on the soldiers because at the end of the day, Invictus is about that journey. It's about taking back their identity. It's about being able to, to move forward through their injuries, which whichever shape or form these injuries take, whether it's the, the physical injuries with limbs and things or the invisible injuries with PTSD and all of that, it's being able to take back that identity and I'm most looking forward to from the start of the Games to the end of the Games, watching that visceral growth happen with our competitors.
- Pj:** Caroline McIntosh, you have been a treat to talk to. Thank you so much for your commitment and for talking to me.
- Caroline McIntosh:** Thank you very much.
- [Music Playing]**
- Pj:** Thanks for listening to Invictus Games Radio. For more information visit:
www.invictusgames2017.com.