

BY JENNIFER NAULT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE GRANDMAISON

With summer just around the corner, we amateur photographers are beginning to dust off our cameras to capture some of our leisurely moments. But for nationally acclaimed outdoor photographer Mike Grandmaison (B.Sc. Hons. 1976), taking photographs is far more than a leisurely endeavour:

At times, being a career photographer can be downright dangerous. Driving up around Wawa, in Lake Superior Park, Mike Grandmaison had skirted along Fenton Lake on many occasions. The sight of the lush, boreal forest fringing the islands and shoreline captured his imagination; he had always wanted to photograph the location, but it seemed quite inaccessible.

But on this of all days, Grandmaison seizes the opportunity. Confronted with pouring rain, screeching wind gusts, and no place to pull his car over on a busy northern Ontario highway, he concocts a MacGyver-inspired plan. He carefully shimmies his car up close to a guardrail, pulls on his raingear, grabs his camera and tripod, opens the door, and hops over the vehicle toward the back end. In just those few seconds, he is soaked to the skin. Without missing a beat, he pops open the back hatch, and positions his camera and tripod snugly underneath. Vehicles speed by, hydroplaning over the wet pavement.

"I photographed the lake that day – with a long lens, and all the while, I barely had room to manoeuvre," Grandmaison recounts.

But the stormy weather proved a necessary artistic constraint. "The rain created this slowed down, misty kind of feeling," he recalls. "It was a special moment. It turned out nicely, but not as I expected. I've always wanted to do this kind of a shot. The opportunity was there, though the conditions were really awful."

Clockwise from top left:
Northern lights in Sudbury;
Mount Rundle in Banff, Alberta;
Killarney, Ontario; and Burnt
Point, Tobermory, Ontario.



NATURAL WORLDS



Morning glory (page 10, far left),
Rushing River, Ontario (page 10, right),
cottonwood near Bird's Hill Park,
Manitoba (this page).

A master of braving whatever weather throws his way, Grandmaison had to gather his strength – and his wits – to photograph Fenton Lake that day. The result would delight any Tolkien enthusiast; the photograph is mystical, dreamy, and inviting (see page 12).

He used the local high school darkroom after hours to hone his craft.

Grandmaison has a way of showing Canada at its most elemental, revealing a side of our country that we know to exist, but have never quite been able to capture. That moment at Fenton Lake, like many photographic moments over his career, is preserved and offered up for all to see in numerous postcards, calendars, books of photography, and even postage stamps.

“The quality of the images, their colour, subject, composition and photographic technique all speak to a talent that is careful and persistent in evincing the best from nature. His work is anything but photographic clichés,” says W. Jan A. Volney, a research scientist with the Canadian Forest Service, for whom Grandmaison has worked on assignment. “He is a person of unquestioned integrity. It is a real pleasure to work with him.”

Born and raised in Sudbury, Ontario, Mike Grandmaison says his interest in photography developed over time, and as a “natural progression” from a childhood spent in the woods in

northern Ontario. His affinity for the outdoors grew from fishing and hiking excursions with his father, and from his time as a boy scout. At an early age, Grandmaison learned the lay of the land, and was particularly interested in the vegetation – the grasses, plants, and trees – surrounding him.

In high school, Grandmaison did particularly well in science. When it came time to pursue post-secondary education, his interest in biology was a guiding force. Still, he laughs, “Though I decided to try out biology, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. Most kids don’t.” He considered studying forestry at Lakehead; however, the proximity of Laurentian University, and financial considerations, made Laurentian the obvious choice.

Grandmaison pursued his interest in biology, and he zeroed in on botany “right off the bat.” The small class sizes were a benefit, too, he says. He felt the advantage of small, specialized courses, such as one in Arctic ecology, where “there were only five of us!” he says. “You just can’t get that in big universities.”

Grandmaison made strong connections with biology students and professors that continue to influence his career to this day. Back in the mid-1970s, the professors in the biology department, were, Grandmaison recalls with palpable affection, “like buddies, very approachable. You could go at any time of the day and talk to them.” There was a warm camaraderie in the department.

Professors organized field trips, excursions that enhanced classroom instruction in a hands-on, tangible way. “We got to look at the systems that we were learning about in school. We had a real, live view.”

Grandmaison is quick to point out the strong connection

between his Laurentian education and his career as a photographer. “I started taking photographs as a result of those great field trips we did with the biology department, especially with some of the profs, such as Gerard Courtin and Keith Winterhalder.”

Gerard Courtin, for example, had an immeasurable influence on the young Grandmaison. “He was such an enthusiastic teacher and made the material so interesting – even for someone who just wanted to learn about plants.” Today, after almost 30 years, their connection has come full circle: Grandmaison has collaborated with Courtin on his latest book of photography. Courtin has written the introduction to the soon-to-be-released *Georgian Bay: A Photographer’s Wonderland* (Key Porter Books, April 2008). In doing so, Courtin joins the ranks of CBC radio host Shelagh Rogers, a past contributor to another of Grandmaison’s many books of photography.

A late bloomer to the field of photography, Grandmaison decided to “splurge” on himself, and purchased a camera, his “own little graduation gift,” in 1976. His interest in photography had been piqued from those university biology field trips. He adds, “A lot of my friends had cameras and would record things on our trips. Then, they would put on slide shows – at that time, slide shows were a big thing – so, I was actually one of the few who *didn’t* have a camera,” he says.

His interest in photography progressed rapidly. Not finding a job in his field right away, Grandmaison took a job managing a small camera store in Sturgeon Falls for a year. He used the local high school darkroom after hours to hone his craft. He still saw it as a hobby, though. And all the while, he kept looking for work in his field, but “there wasn’t much going on in Sudbury.”

In late November 1978, Grandmaison made a big move out to Edmonton, where he’d heard the Canadian Forest Service was hiring. He stayed with them for 20 years. Following a long career with the Canadian Forest Service, which took him first in Edmonton and then to Winnipeg, Grandmaison eventually established a home-based photography studio in Winnipeg in 1996.

Over his career as a photographer, Grandmaison’s work has been widely published in popular magazines and glossy, coffee-table books, and his stunning images have been

HIS AFFINITY FOR THE
OUTDOORS GREW
FROM FISHING AND
HIKING EXCURSIONS
WITH HIS FATHER.



adopted by government and leading corporations. He shoots for a broad range of clients, in fields ranging from agriculture to architecture. His experience in the natural sciences and passion for photography has made him a highly sought-after outdoor photographer.

Grandmaison's assignment photography takes him on location across Canada. Just a peek at his itinerary provides a sense of just how dedicated he is to his craft. In communication with *Laurentian Alumni Magazine* in early fall 2007, he wrote, offhandedly:

I'm off in a day or two, travelling across the Prairies photographing on assignment and for stock, delivering a workshop at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge with some colleagues, and doing a couple of *Rockies* book launches along the way. I should be back in Winnipeg around mid-September for about a week before I head out to Georgian Bay and Muskoka to capture fall colours until mid-October. Upon my return, I will be working feverishly on the *Georgian Bay* book and my new website.

Whew! His book of Georgian Bay photography is now available and his new website has just gone live at www.grandmaison.mb.ca. 

Fenton Lake, Ontario.



MIKE GRANDMAISON CELEBRATES LAND RECLAMATION IN SUDBURY

The Sudbury environmental community might remember Mike Grandmaison as an important contributor of photography (along with Don Johnston) to *Healing the Landscape: Celebrating Sudbury's Reclamation Story*, a bilingual artistic photographic book published as a Millennium Project. The book celebrates land reclamation achievements in the Sudbury area, and illustrates the marriage of science and art in a compelling story of revegetation and restoration of the devastated Sudbury area and the community that achieved it.



BRINGING SCIENCE TO THE MASSES

"Science is another set of senses; we look through time, we look through space, we look at the very large, we look at the very small, and the universe is elegant, the universe is beautiful, and if we can just convey that to the public, we don't have to worry about teaching them facts, just the basics. We have an obligation as science communicators to inspire the public." – Bob McDonald

BY SAMANTHA KUULA



For once, it was he who was wonderstruck. Choking back tears as he stood before the convocation crowd, Bob McDonald, one of the most recognizable voices and faces of science today, graciously accepted an honorary doctorate from Laurentian University in fall 2007. Taking a breath to still his emotions, McDonald told an eager audience of new Laurentian grads that his science career began "many moons ago," when he talked his way into a job at the Ontario Science Centre. Before that moment, he had been unsure about his path in life – even flailing a little – but when an opportunity came his way, he seized it.

Approaching life's challenges with passion and perseverance, McDonald attributes his success to never turning down an opportunity – and it shows. He has been communicating science internationally through television, radio, print, and live presentations for more than 30 years, most notably as host of CBC radio's "Quirks and Quarks," the world's longest-running science program. He also contributes stories to several news programs on CBC television, along with hosting and writing the children's television series, "Head's Up." For seven years, he hosted and co-produced the award-winning children's science program, "Wonderstruck."

Bob McDonald dropped by Science North after the convocation ceremony. Though his visit was unannounced, the

buzz quickly spread as fans gathered for autographs and photos. McDonald was happy to comply. He playfully moved through the exhibits before addressing his fans. He spoke of future projects, and, of course, of his love of science. He focused on the importance of taking chances and seizing opportunities.

When asked how he conveys complex scientific topics, McDonald talked about using analogies and visual representations to get people excited about science. He's been doing it for a long time, too. In 1972, the Ontario Science Centre was on the look out for people to give live science performances. "The scientists there took me under their wing and helped me learn about things like static electricity and lasers. I guess you could say I'm an opportunist," he said.

The gathering at Science North hung on his every word. Bob McDonald is a natural – he uses stories and personal anecdotes to build connections and bring science to the masses. His message is simple: "Have fun in your work, never turn down an opportunity, and say 'yes' to every opportunity, even if it scares the pants off you." 

Samantha Kuula is a science communications graduate student at Laurentian University and Science North.