

A PATRIOTIC PASTIME

Creating unique Canadian keepsakes

by Denise Dow, Quispamis, N.B.

Have you ever noticed the American eagle displayed on many homes in the United States and wondered why Canadians don't have something similar? As a teen, I'd visit cousins in New England and come away with a feeling of envy at the wonderful emblem that they could put on their home to show that they were proud of their country.

As the daughter of a member of the Canadian Coast Guard, I was keenly proud of my red Maple Leaf flag and put up a new one each year for the spring and summer seasons, which on the East Coast, lasts three to four months if you're lucky. But what about the other months of the year? I decided it was time to do something about it.

The maple leaf is recognized worldwide as a symbol of Canada, so I thought creating a plaque featuring maple leaves, along with a banner read-

ing "Strong and Free," would make a heartfelt statement about how it feels to be Canadian.

I'm not an artist, so I attempted to find someone to make a carving for me, but that didn't work out. Then it occurred to me—who better to draw a beautiful maple leaf than Mother Nature herself? So I picked some leaves off the tree in the backyard and began tracing them on paper. Next, I traced the paper drawing onto a piece of pine and cut out the shape in my workshop. I then used a rotary tool to carve out the veins in the leaves, and the words, to give it a 3D effect. I flipped it over and did the back side the same way except I did the banner in French, using the words "Forte & Libre." My mother was French so I am somewhat bilingual. Both of my parents were very "crafty," so it was not a stretch to figure out a way to make this happen. I must say, it was one of the most enjoyable moments of my life.



Denise has created Strong and Free Emblems—a line of patriotic products.

That was back in 2006 and since then "Strong & Free" has become my passion. In 2010, I made the trek to the winter Olympics in Vancouver in an RV I called the Strong & Free and witnessed firsthand how our country's athletes performed so admirably on the world stage.

Since then, I have gone on to create Strong & Free Emblems—a line of patriotic products—and worked with licensees to produce items for major retailers across Canada. A new plaque, mailbox and address frame are currently in the design phase and I have another licensee creating an online apparel line.

I also worked with a close friend, Sonya MacAskill,

to create a fun colouring book called "Colour Me Canadian/Colore-moi Canadien" that teaches children, as well as people from other countries, about Canada. I am currently offering it as an e-book online and making a donation to VETS Canada for each book downloaded.

The year 2017 will mark Canada's 150th birthday. I will be preparing the Strong & Free RV for another coast to coast journey to encourage Canadians to celebrate our country—and those who keep us strong and free. ■

To learn more about Denise's line of products, go to www.strongandfreemblem.com.