

Clara Caroline Murphy

JUNE 29, 2018

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CLARA CAROLINE MURPHY

Clara was born in the town of Frank, Alberta in 1932. The times were extremely hard and the coal mining community and surrounding area had seen more than its fair share of difficulties which rocked the very foundation of the somewhat isolated communities along the Crowsnest Pass. The impact of the Frank Slide which buried the whole community of the town of Frank while it slept on April 29, 1903 along with the horrific Hillcrest Mine Disaster in 1914 were devastating. These events challenged the fortitude and resilience of the surrounding communities. Life was hard but despite that being the norm, a new town of Frank just to the west of the massive boulders was born. This was a testament to the courage and strength of the people of the Crowsnest Pass. Part of the rebirth of Frank was the welcoming of a second baby girl, Clara Caroline Carney, to her parents Violet and Harry Carney as well as her 2 year old sister Joan.

The family left the dark and dusty world of an underground mining community in the Crowsnest Pass to go farming just on the fringe where the Rocky Mountains end and the High Plains of the Alberta Prairie begin. This was truly God's Country especially when the wind was not blowing. The family farm and its background mountain landscape was so dramatic that it was highlighted on a Canada Post postage stamp in the late 70's!



Clara grew up on a farm near Cowley, Alberta with her parents Harry and Violet and her older sister Joan who was born in 1930. This was the time of the “Great Depression” also known as the “Dirty Thirties” so if anyone knew the value of a dollar it was Clara. As a young girl she collected and sold eggs from their farm and she learned the importance of hard work at an early age. Her motto was “work first and play later”. This carried through to her adult life and she was careful of every dollar she spent, never knowing when she might need her rainy day fund and always making sure her work and everyone else’s around her was done.

Clara was very loving and giving and when she got a job at Alberta Government Telephones (AGT) she saved enough money to fund the building of her parents’ new home. She literally was “plugged” into the community through her job as a Telephone Operator. In those days, every call had to be connected and disconnected by hand. Perhaps because of her closeness to her community or because she was thankful for what she had, she always concerned herself about the welfare of others who she perceived to be less fortunate. Her greatest sense of purpose came from helping others and throughout the years, she gathered an eclectic collection of “unique friends” along the way.

On June 23, 1955, Clara married her husband of 55 years, Leo Murphy. Leo was also from the Cowley area and was part of a large family of nine children. The Murphy family were progressive farmers and ranchers. Leo also grew up learning the value of hard work. Given that rural schools only went to Grade 8, he was sent off to Spokane to Boarding School and then attended Gonzaga University coming back to work in the oil patch as a mud engineer. It did not take long for Leo and Clara to start their family with Regena being their first born, followed by Patrick, Jerry, and, finally, Steve. The last 2 kids were Irish Twins of sorts; they were born a mere 11 months apart. In her primary role as Household CEO, Clara’s children were her pride and joy although they often tested her mettle. While raising her family with Leo in the oil patch, Clara not only had to look after the household and

the cooking; she also had to be able to pack up their home on wheels and be ready to move to a new site on short notice. No doubt she was quite relieved when they left their 8X42 foot trailer (She loved her Youngstown Custom Kitchen and had the cleanest house around!) behind to get settled in Red Deer in 1964.

This allowed Clara to form even stronger friendships including a lifelong bond with the Mulder family. Dicky and Jerry were neighbors and the two families helped one another. Clara or Regena would often babysit their son John and Clara/Regena even looked after John when Dicky had Denica in the hospital. The friendship continued to grow and they even became neighbors in Sylvan Lake. Through thick and thin they were there for one another. When Dicky suffered a severe stroke in several years ago, the families remained close and Clara maintained the relationship by telephone and visiting whenever she had the opportunity.

Despite having a family who required a great deal of her attention, Clara was always willing to lend a hand whether it was a neighbor, close friend or family member or maybe even someone she did not know very well. She formed close and lasting friendships with many families and people along the way and always followed the Golden Rule. She even had to convert and become Catholic in order to marry Leo. One such unique friendship she formed was with her hairdresser Ramona from Bentley. Clara was always concerned that someone was taking advantage of her and that Ramona was loaning or giving money to others when she needed it herself. To remedy this she made arrangements to set up a charge account that Clara would keep track of and administer. When Ramona wanted to buy something such as a new washer, Clara would write a cheque for the amount she required and hold onto the rest. Clara even made the same arrangement later with her daughter, Regena, and her family.

Though Clara did not hand out smiles easily, she always treated everyone with kindness and respect. She always told her children as they were growing up (some

took longer than others!) she would be there for them and it was expected for them to call if they needed a ride - even if it was the middle of the night. Clara would get dressed, assuming she had even been to bed yet, go round up her kid or kids and their friends, bring them home and feed them. Sometimes she would even feed them the meal she was planning for dinner the next day. Cabbage rolls became the favourite amongst the kids' friends.

Perhaps looking in retrospect, Clara's most fulfilled chapters in her life were when she was engaged in the role of caregiver. She lovingly looked after her father-in-law when he became bed ridden and never complained. She made sure he had everything he needed and scolded Steve or the other children when they, in good fun, teased Grandpa. Since Clara's father passed away when her mother was still quite young, Clara took it upon herself to look after Violet and even pulled Regena out of school early to help with the move from the farm to Bellevue. When Violet could no longer live by herself, Clara and Leo took her into their home in Sylvan Lake. She lived in the ground floor Mother-in-Law suite and had a beautiful view of the Lake. She was frequently visited by the kids whom now were returning with their families to share in many memorable weekends at the Lake. Often there were 4 generations of family gathering at the Sylvan Lake house (affectionately dubbed "Murphy's Bar & Grill), with always something cooking and going on at the Murphy household -especially in the summers.

Clara and sometimes just Leo took Granny Carney into town and to Red Deer so she could "go gallivanting", do her shopping and maybe make a major purchase. Unfortunately for Clara, given Granny Carney's indecisiveness, often the purchase had to be returned but even that was ok. Her Mom lived with the two of them until the last few years of her life when she went into the seniors Home in Sylvan Lake and. She passed away in August 2000.

One of Clara's greatest challenges which was a testament to her courage and fortitude was her care for her husband Leo after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. At first Leo was more or less forgetful but as the disease rapidly progressed Clara met every challenge without complaint. She was simply doing "what had to be done". It truly was a "Labour of Love". As a family it was a huge challenge to have to say goodbye so many times as Dad's dementia progressed. Leo's 74 years of great health being always willing to "yoke up", when there was real work to be done, was followed by 6 years of everyone "pitching in" while Clara quietly soldiered on caring for Leo I Sylvan Lake in the only home they had ever owned. In looking in retrospect she nearly exhausted herself to her own personal demise. Finally, in January of 2010 Clara had no choice but to put him into the Home in Red Deer and then in April of 2010 he passed away. Though his passing was a tremendous blow, Clara rallied and found new purpose by doing all she could to help her grown children. By this time she lived next door to Regena and her family and she made many meals and helped out whenever needed. Her signature Christmas Pudding and sauce, Chocolate Zucchini Cake made lovingly for Birthdays and other special occasions and her awesome Apple Butter are just a few of the many culinary dishes that have been shared throughout the years.

Clara maintained strong connections with her seven grandchildren - Kyle, Koel (deceased September 1986), Jeffrey, Braden, Stuart, Katlyn and Mitchell as well as her two great grandchildren, Mylo and Nava. She enjoyed visits from grandkids spending time over the years at Sylvan Lake Hockey Camp, hosting tea or overnight stopovers when travelling between Edmonton and Calgary for jobs and school and took advantage of opportunities to watch Lacrosse and Hockey Tournaments. She totally enjoyed having long distance or Face Time chats to Perth, Australia, Peterborough, Ontario and Boulder, Colorado.

Clara suffered another blow in January of 2016 when her son Steve passed away unexpectedly. Though in the hospital at the time with her own health challenges,

she was determined to get out of the hospital and reclaim her role as the true matriarch of the Murphy family. In many ways, the last two and a half years were her most peaceful and enjoyable – she became a voracious reader. Her crisp recall of past events including shenanigans which were thought to be long forgotten and her wise insights were illustrations of her keen intellect. Although always engaged and concerned with everyone’s welfare around her, she learned to “Let it be” and that it was not necessarily her job to engineer a solution. Maybe she thought that given there were four grandchildren with that professional career designation that she could be assured the family could deal with whatever life decided to throw at us. Since recovering from her hear two months in hospital over Christmas 2015, once again Clara found renewed purpose in helping family and others around her. She continued to extend a hand of friendship to those she came to know until her passing on June 29, 2018.

We are all thankful that she was out and about, independently, grocery shopping, that she was not alone, she did not suffer, and, she had spoken to all three of us children within the last 24 hours of her life. She was high-spirited and enthusiastic about upcoming family events. Clara never became self-absorbed in her own challenges. To her that was counterproductive and essentially choked ones capacity for empathy and compassion. She was never concerned with how much she had. Instead, she was concerned about helping others and she enjoyed sharing whatever she did have. Life was about family and her primary sources of happiness were in helping her family and friends and playing an active role in their lives.

For obvious reasons she will be missed but not forgotten.

Messages of Condolence

Such a beautiful story about a wonderful lady!!! We always enjoyed a visit with Aunt Clara and Uncle Leo. They were there for us when we were in Sylvan Lake for the hockey schools. We enjoyed our time when Aunt Clara, Regena, Dan and Pat joined the Lengyel family on our Pacific cruise. Aunt Clara always had a quick wit that brightened the day. I remember Uncle Leo and Aunt Clara on their wedding day. They were so happy with each other. It is an amazing life story. Aunt Clara will be missed. Love to the whole family, Ter and Julaine

— **Julaine Hamer**

This is a very sad passing, having lived next door to Uncle Leo and Aunt Clara for many years I had the good fortune to be able to know them well, I miss them both and have nothing but respect for the lives they lived! My condolences to all who knew Clara! ☹ ☹ ☹

— **Marlin Murphy**

So many memories and her way of stretching a dollar, to make something out of little and make it look so easy. Loved visiting them at the lake. Truly a remarkable, hard working, loving, caring lady. My sympathies to you and all the extended families.

Take care of each other as she did of you.

Love, Betty Jo

— **Betty jo hossner**

Truly a beautiful tribute to one very special lady, Aunt Clara as well as her unique, and colourful husband, Uncle Leo. I truly loved them both and so enjoyed every moment I was blessed to be in their company. Duane will be glad to have them both with him, creating some sheenanigans to test the mettle of the angels. My deepest condolences to all the family. May your wonderful memories keep her close. Remembering one who made a difference: thank you Aunt Clara. Much love . . . Buttercup.

— **Bonnie MacPhail**

What a truly wonderful homage to a terrific lady. Clara was indeed selfless and would offer assistance whenever needed. Her kindness and caring were easy to see. I was surprised when after some knee surgery a few years ago she offered to drive me if needed even at her advanced age. But then I realized that was just the kind of giving woman Clara was. Sincere condolences to all those affected by her passing on both family and friends. She will be missed for certain.

Brad Handford (community pharmacist)

— **Brad Handford**

To all the Murphies!

Will see you at the memorial, but here is it in writing: we all will miss this wonderful mother, grandma, friend etc etc etc. I picked up the phone to have a visit and of course I put the phone away. O Clara thank you for being such a good friend, for having a shoulder to lean on for 50 some years! God was so gracious to put you into my life. In the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen!!!

— **Dicky Mulder-Jansen**

Carol and I would like to express our deepest loving thoughts of condolences to the family. I grew up a lot of my young years next to Aunt Clara and Uncle Leo and have nothing but fond and loving memories of both of them. Aunt Clara was one of my Aunts who I had a lot of respect for. I can remember her parents farm next to ours and she will be missed in many ways.

Love to the family

— Caroline and Marlin Murphy

Aunt Clara was an amazing lady, she will be missed by many. You will all be in my thoughts and prayers. Sending you big hugs.

— Bill and Brenda Kuhl

We'll remember Clara's quick wit and ready smile! Loved her visits here in Fernie. She would say, "Don't you feel claustrophobic in these mountains?" She was truly a prairie girl! She was a very special lady who endured much, but never dwelled on it. And, as the story reveals, was always ready for the next challenge.

Our sincerest condolences to the family left to mourn her passing.

We're unable to attend the memorial but our thoughts and prayers are with you all.

Love, Don and Reggie

— Don and Reggie Vinge



<https://www.myalternatives.ca/obituaries/murphy-clara-caroline>

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