

Florence Campbell

By Charles Campbell

(This is a slightly edited version of what I said at my mother's Memorial.)

I want to begin by disagreeing with William Wordsworth - who famously said 'the good die first' – and with his noted late 20th century radical disciple, one Billy Joel, who asserted in his even more famous song the extreme proposition - that 'only the good die young'.

Florence Campbell certainly did not die young nor did she die first. Her brother, Harry Mallisee, her Grand friends Helen, Skip and Dorothy, her sister-in-law Liz Keizer, Kay Keachie, her great Muskoka buddy, Betty Purvis and so many others, all predeceased her. I see a few mature faces here, friends who have survived my mother ... and we are glad you could make it ... but none, I think I am right, are older. You especially may want to join me in saying Mr. Wordsworth and to troubadour Billy that the real truth is that ... the GOOD are the hardest to kill.

**

Florence Campbell had extraordinary good health throughout her life I can remember only five times seeing her actually sick in bed with so much as a cold, and three of those in the last four years. She never was in a hospital overnight for anything other than childbirth. The closest she came was about two months ago after a fall. The Emergency doctor at Sunnybrook, after completing some stitches and X-rays, strongly recommended - at two thirty in the morning - that staying the rest of the night was a good idea. She told him to take a hike and ordered her chauffeur to take her home. Her own view was she did pretty well with her body until about age ninety one when chronic dizziness made getting around tricky and macular degeneration reduced her vision. She was blessed with great hair and skin which she tended well to the very end. Her bridge friends called her the Duchess. And know this – she only gave up a lifetime of heavy smoking at age seventy. And she never dropped her liking for a scotch before supper. Two actually but never more.

She insisted on staying at home in her last few weeks as her body failed her, a wish we were able to oblige with the extraordinary assistance of a team of wonderful home care workers. Josie and Eve are here today. They will find it hard to believe that everyone else in the room knew my mother as unfailing even-tempered and gracious. The last few weeks uncomfortable weeks she was not herself.

Till almost the end she was giving directions on the garden which she could barely see and on menu and food preparation instructions when she could barely swallow and hadn't been in the kitchen for weeks. When we felt we had to expanded the home care team she refused, indeed ordered them out of her house. She told one very gracious but unwelcome nurse who was concerned about her trying to go down stairs – which mother was patently unable to do, she told her to 'go away' – she'd been 'up and down three or four times that day'!

She got her way and passed in her own bed at home. The death certificate say 'dehydration'. It was not pretty but it was quick - in her ninety seventh year. Two uncomfortable months and three bad days in almost ninety seven years – extraordinary!

**

Florence Elizabeth Campbell was born in 1915 on a farm outside Pittsburgh, near the coal town of Renton. To visit the farm today you would get off the expressway in Munroeville and drive through beautiful hilly countryside, the north end of the Appalachian Mountains, through pleasant suburban sprawl – I know I'm not supposed to describe such things as pleasant - to New Texas Road, then down Mallisee Lane to Mallisee Farm. From the porch of my cousin's house you can survey Mallisee valley and the subdivision disappear and it looks as has all my life and much as it did, I assume, when the first Mallisee came out from city and bought the land in 1865. My great grandfather was one of the first commuter, family in the country and working in the city – in 1865.

My two cousins still live and work on the farm. We visited many times and I still have a close relationship with cousin Virginia Mallisee who is here today.

I have in my files some genealogical research saying the very first Mallisee, Henrik Pieter, arrived in Philadelphia October 31 1786 with his wife and four children. There is an obit in the file noting the family legend that his son Thomas crossed the Appalachian mountains in 1825 in a Conestoga wagon – instead of the customary family Buick – with his wife and two sons and settled in the young city of Pittsburgh. And another interesting news article dating from the 20s concerns my mother's Uncle Lewis, who ran away at age 15 and lied to join the Union Army, got caught and sent home but then persuaded his mother to let him join up anyhow. And he did and fought for the Union. It appears from the news article he dined out on that adventure for the rest of his life.

My mother's memory of her father was driving around with him – in his Buick - collecting rent and mortgage payments and of taking his money out of the local bank before banks collapsed. Her brother's recall was entirely different. Growing up on a busy farm he was sure his father was a farmer. My grandfather, legend has it, sold hay to Dick Mellon for his horses. Dick was the brother of Andrew Mellon, the famous Secretary of the Treasury in the 20s who FDR

unsuccessfully prosecuted for tax fraud. Andrew then gave the keepings to the government to found the National Gallery in Washington. When my grandfather brought all his money downtown to the Mellon bank Dick, gave my grandfather a set of cooking pots. The National Gallery survives very grandly. Archeologists are still looking for the Mallisee pots.

After high school my mother attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology and obtained a Bachelor of Social Work and worked the City of Pittsburgh's Department of Welfare administering New Deal employment and welfare programmes. Her first vote in 1936 was for FDR, something that had to be kept secret from her family for this was ground zero for the Republicans. I told the joke at my uncle's funeral a few years ago, to a church full of rock ribs, that when his father found out about my mother's transgression he took his wayward daughter to the bridge in Buffalo and pointed north – 'that way, the socialists!' Here's the punchline - nobody laughed.

One of my mother's uncles made a regular summer excursion to Gravenhurst by car in the 20s. My mother did the same trip in the late 30s, driving her own car, and met my father on the dock in Beaumaris. They married at the beginning of the war and she became a camp follower – in the best sense of the word – as he was shipped from camp to camp all over eastern Canada doing administrative work. He was sent overseas only after the war in Europe had ended. I was born September 4, 1945, three days after the war was finally over. I am just about the very first baby boomer.

My mother was a busy homemaker for the next 20 years with her three sons. I'd have you here all evening if I tried to 'tell all' of this life. But then most of you know this life.

The core truth is this – Florence Campbell had a lifetime devotion to her children. Mark Twain said it well. "My mother had a good deal of trouble with me. I think she enjoyed it." And no matter how old we got, she was on watch looking for signs of improvement. In this, the eternal quest, she was always patient and rarely criticized us for procrastination, perhaps because she was a master. The one time she did catch me out for delay, I said, "Just wait". And she did.

My parents' social network was centred on the Belletre Club, an organization of young Rosedale school mates, who went to UTS together. The club continued, with some changes in membership, playing bridge, golf, parties and many personal connections throughout their lives. I believe my mother is the last to die of that pre-war social group and their spouses.

Other than the family farm Muskoka was, as you all know, where her heart was. She told of her early cottage days listening to the big bands at Dunn's Pavilion from the boat in Bala Bay. Our family rented in Muskoka for many summers and then bought a property in 1963 and my father built a cottage – with my mother's money. The property was sold three years ago. Until last two years we could say we'd been to Muskoka every summer of our lives. She loved her friends

in Muskoka, and the Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country Club where she was Lady's Section President twice. She had many dear friends there, Betty Purvis, Libby and John Brooke, Jean Andrews, Mary and Gordon Hare, Phyllis Parker, Gail Brooker, Marg and Bob Spratt (who also lived across the road in the city) Dora Brunton and many, many, more. It was her world. We had five Christmases in that cottage, most as, as I recall with the family of my father's sister, Florence Deacon and that grand family of cousins. And we had many more Thanksgiving dinners at the cottage, with the family of my Uncle John and Aunt Margery and another great gang of cousins and of course the Brooke family.

My mother was proud to have been the first woman to buy a big Grew inboard/outboard from Brown Boat Works in Port Carling. I don't think she drove it herself more than once a year. I was especially pleased with that.

When her boys were a little older my mother became active in the YWCA of Canada as volunteer on various National Board Committees and then as National President for a term. She was proud that that gave her the opportunity to visit every Y in the country, her adopted country.

I say 'adopted' guardedly. If you knew her well, you would know she was a first and foremost an American patriot. She would never have lifted a finger to help the British in WWII because they hadn't paid back their war loan from WWI. In 1967 when I was graduating from U of T she was urging me to take up the wonderful opportunity, as the son of the true blood, to join the American army and see the world. It was of the few times I knew unequivocally what she wanted me to do with my life. It was not quite the first time we disagreed. And nor was it last time she buried her disapproval of my chosen political course.

My mother had an active and life time interest in politics and even when her macular degeneration made it impossible for her to read the papers she listened to the news and until the last she was on top of most elections. She ran for office once, on the cottagers' slate, as a councilor for the Township of Muskoka Lakes. She lost but loved the adventure. She enjoyed telling me that my friend Jack Layton and the NDP were 'finished', until they weren't. Then she admitted Jack was a good speaker. This was key concession. Above all she valued a politician who spoke well and – this she could not hide – her distained those with awkward French accents. Of whom she spoke ... my lips are sealed.

She was ... she was ... many things

- An extraordinary household manager – both her house on Lawrence Crescent and the cottage in Muskoka. I don't mean to suggest she got dirty under fingernails. But she kept track of everything inside. She was also economical. The loyalty of Mervyn

Brown of Port Carling who help build the cottage as a very young man and kept it functional all its years was deeply appreciated.

- She was an excellent bridge player and an enthusiastic golfer and golf fan. Also hockey when the Leafs were in their prime. And football – when her brother was playing for Ohio State.
- She was smooth and polite – so smooth and polite that most people thought she was gracious and nice – when in fact she was shrewd and cleverly non-confrontational as well as totally gracious and nice. You never actually heard the word 'no'. She would outwait you to get her way. She could outwait a tree stump. I can't recall her ever being angry or to argue, the last few weeks have been exception but I chose to forget them.
- She was intensely interested in her grandchildren, Linda, Will, Jenny and Maggie, who summered at the cottage as young children with their mother for several years. In her declining days she concentrated on remembering exactly where they were in school and life and treasured their phone calls. She was intensely proud of them.
- She liked to dress well and wanted her sons to dress properly – shirt and tie, business suit - at all times. I am the only nine year old who had outgrown two three piece suits. Her standard was unrelenting – suit and tie always ... for casual Fridays – rock concerts, canoe trips, whatever!
- She loved drinks and chat before dinner in the sun room at the cottage
- She had a droll and wicked wit and loved to tease.
- She was a very poor collector of important things. She threw away a whole cupboard full of carefully filed *Popular Mechanics* and *Mechanics Illustrated* and worse, and an almost mint set 1950 to '54 *Superman* Comics. She tossed toy train tracks just because they were bent out of shape (which really annoyed my father) ... and a perfectly fine aquarium aerator just because I had no aquarium.
In her defense I should say she kept a pristine set of hand-painted, bone china tea cups, so delicate they never bore the weight of, nor suffered the corrosion of, tea and saucers so fine they never bore the weight of the cup. One time the rumbling of the toy train near-by, she claimed, caused two cups to crack in three and five pieces. Which is why, I believe, the tracks got so badly bent.

**

I think Florence Campbell was not a religious person. But maybe that is wrong. She took her boys to church every Sunday and she knew most songs in the Presbyterian hymn book. She taught respect for religion and lived an exemplary life of kindness. Although she did not call it such she lived as a shining example of what it means to be Christian, which, to me, is the life of

sacrifice of self to others. And so it was that Florence Campbell's life bore witness to this, the heart and soul of Christ's message.

As I observe her life – and the lives of many other *mothers* I believe the wellspring of self-sacrifice - the highest and most noble contribution the Christian religion to our common humanity – is rooted precisely there – in the nature of, in the imperatives and dictates of, and the joys of ... motherhood.

Speaking as a litigation lawyer who gets hired to deploy very direct language, to say *yes* and *no*, to win or to lose, and then send the file to dead storage and move on to the next – and as someone who has never had children - I struggle mightily to wrap my head around the imperatives of motherhood. I wonder ... how could I ever be *retained* as a mother. Mothers don't win or lose. There is no judge and the file never closes. There is just patience, forbearance and more patience and even more forbearance ... and tact beyond all understanding.

I don't believe that these qualities required of a parent are unnatural to men, but they are for us acquired skills and, for me beyond understanding. But they are not beyond my total and complete and utter admiration and beyond my hope that I may, on necessary occasions, measure up to this lofty standard.

**

My mother's notion of a good funeral was a friendly party and an occasion to say nice things about the deceased. I've read that the nice words appease the angry ghost of the departed. It is hard to believe that the ghost of Florence Campbell would be angry – and certainly that we ever know it – but – out of an abundance of caution - so please join us afterwards – and speak up ... for your own protection.