

# Florence Campbell: A Family Anchor

*By Audrey Brooks*



Florence was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1923. Her father was posted there with the Army, and was transferred to Calgary when she was two years old.

Curiously, Florence's dad was born in Halifax, England. He and some friends worked in men's clubs as sommeliers, a profession that did not require immigration papers in those days. Later, her dad and one of his friends decided to work as bellhops on ships, "in order to see the world." It was a nice day in June when their ship happened to go down the St. Lawrence River, and that's how they ended up in Canada.

Florence's mom was born in France of English parents. She had a sister, Dorothy, since deceased, as are her close relatives: aunts, uncles, cousins; she misses the big family gatherings that used to be so enjoyable. Family relationships were always a priority in Florence's life.

Stan and Florence met playing in a tennis tournament at the Calgary Lawn Tennis Club, playing mixed doubles, which Florence insists she won, but Stan wouldn't admit it. They both attended Central high school in Calgary, which was a small city in the 1940's.

They went together for a while, but were aware of each other in school before that. They were married in 1943 in Calgary. Stan was in the air force then, stationed in Trenton, Ontario. Florence notes that they both got sick at their wedding: Stan spent two days in his bunk on the train to Trenton; Florence fared a little better. She noted that Trenton was hot all the time in summer: "It rained hot water!"

Florence had all of her schooling in Calgary. She took comptometer courses, and worked in the offices of The Bay and other businesses. Later, in her 40s, she decided to go to university, motivated by the fact that her daughter's Grade 2 teacher was so bad. Florence thought she could do better, so gained her Bachelor of Education and taught elementary school in West Edmonton. After retiring from teaching, at the age of 62, Florence volunteered with Edmonton Social Services one day a week, enjoying meeting and interacting with different groups of professionals.

The couple's daughter Susan was born in Trenton, Ontario. Sally was born in Alberta, and Virginia in Manitoba – so, like their parents, they are "cosmopolitan Canadians." Florence and Stan were strongly supportive of their daughters and encouraged them however possible. Because Stan was away a lot as a pilot, Florence was often the chief parent. Her independence, sense of adventure and determination made her a wonderful role model to her successful daughters.

Her daughter Sally Rehorick recalls how supportive Florence was of her figure skating. While Sally was training at the Royal Glenora Club (Florence was busy being a champion tennis player), Florence became very knowledgeable in the sport and accompanied Sally to two World Championships at which she was an official. While Sally was busy on the judges' stand, Florence struck up conversations with others seated

in the VIP stands and was positively delighted to meet the likes of champion skaters Joannie Rochette and Brian Orser.

Stan and Florence had been attending the United Church but were not comfortable there, since they didn't believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, or the Virgin Birth. While at university, Florence heard that one of her professors was going to speak at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, so she went to hear him. Later, UCE minister Bob Wrigley had a talk on Unidentified Flying Objects, which interested Stan. He started coming, though he was not previously interested in attending any church. Florence also met UCE member Morris Simons before she ever came to the church, as he owned a piano store in Edmonton, and all the musicians in town knew him.

At UCE, Florence met those who became life-long friends and "family". Later, the Campbells became part of an extended church family, which were informal groups that were started during Rev. Rob Brownlee's ministry at UCE in the 1970s. Edmonton was a transient place then due to the oil industry boom, and many people didn't have family here. Rob drew names out of a hat, and the "Extended Families," were formed. The family consisted of Stan and Florence, Jim and Elin Logan, Marg and Brian Staples, and Keith and Kathy Wright. Though today some of them are spread apart geographically and see each other less frequently, they stay in touch.

Elin Logan recalls the happy times together, gathering over a meal or a special trip. Often they went cross country skiing in Devon where the Staples lived. The church owned property around Athabasca. Each summer there would be a church camping weekend. The first time the Logans met Florence and Stan, they arrived in a yellow convertible which was pulling their house trailer. The rest of the families, in tents, were green with envy. Other events included camping at Pigeon Lake and cross country skiing at Cynthia, Alberta. They were brave souls as it was possibly the coldest weekend of the winter, with cars barely starting.

Throughout these years, Florence was really the loving grandmother of the group. She never forgot a birthday and always tried to keep an eye on the group. If someone needed support or help, Florence spread the word. She always said that because the Campbell clan was so small, the extended family was very important to her and Stan. Both Florence and Stan were very active in the church for many years. Florence was on the Ministerial Relations committee, organized the community kitchen project which taught inner city women how to shop and cook healthy meals. Both Florence and Stan worked at every Uni Art Festival, a church arts festival, during the 1970s. As well, Florence was on the Care and Connection committee for several years. She sent many a thoughtful note to ill church members. The couple also were very involved in helping a family from Vietnam who came to Canada with the support of our church.

It was helpful to have Stan be part of the Unitarian Church too – he served on the search committee for a new minister. Serving on committees helped both of them get to know more people. Their daughter Sally was married in the church, and it was nice that they could make up their own personalized wedding service.

Florence and Stan visited their daughters wherever they happened to be living at the time. When Sue and Ginny were living in Winnipeg, they flew a Piper Aztec, with Dad at the controls, to visit them. Florence had packed a complete Thanksgiving turkey dinner to

enjoy upon arrival in Winnipeg. Sally recalls touring Paris with her mother and enjoying it so much as Florence recalled it as the home of her mother, a city with special meaning. When her husband Stan retired, they travelled to China, Greece and other places. Florence brought back a beautiful piece of Chinese embroidery that is framed and hangs in her living room, as a memento of this trip. Florence currently lives at her home in Edmonton with her beautiful daughters still a major part of her life, along with her friends and extended family.

*Interviewed 2014*