
Kennedy, Verna

Author Unknown



Verna Alice Mohon was born Feb 3, 1911 to John and Wilhelmina Mohon in Holland, Manitoba. She was the second youngest of six children: Clifford, Rita, Lynn, Arnold, Verna and Norman. All preceded her in death.

She attended a one-room school for grades one to eight about five miles outside of Holland. For grades nine to thirteen, she attended the high school in Holland. Following graduation, she moved to Winnipeg to attend the Teacher's College for a year. After completing the program, she was unable to get a teaching position as the depression dominated everything.

Verna decided to visit her sister, Rita, who was a Victoria Order nurse in Oliver, BC. At that moment in time along came a handsome, curly-headed young man named Charlie Duncan Kennedy who was teaching in Okanagan Falls. The two met at a dance and became friends. Verna returned to Holland where, for four and a half years, she taught in her old one-room school.

Love, however, won out. After a mail courtship and two visits, they married on Dec. 30, 1939 in Smithers BC where Charlie was teaching. They were married at home by a minister - no family attending. Their honeymoon never materialized because they got caught in a snowstorm and returned home the following day. They remained in Smithers until June 1940 when Charlie accepted a teaching position in West Vancouver. They built a small house there and moved in.

On November 20, 1940, they were excited to welcome their first born, Lloyd James. Their joy was short-lived as Lloyd developed co meningitis in the hospital nursery and died three weeks later. He was buried in the children's area of the West Vancouver Cemetery. Both parents were devastated and sad emptiness was left in Verna's heart.

It was in West Vancouver that they met Irwin and Peggy Witherly. The husbands taught together and the wives became fast friends. In later years when both were widowed, the two women travelled together and enjoyed many visits. Peggy still lives in Delta.

Barry John Kennedy was born on July 29, 1942 in St Paul's Hospital (Vancouver). Verna and Charlie were thrilled with their curly, red-headed son. On October 27, 1945 they welcomed daughter Carol Lynn as a baby sister for Barry.

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In the summer of 1948, they moved to Penticton as Charlie had accepted a teaching position in Summerland. The Kennedy grandparents lived in Naramata and the family enjoyed good times. After a year, they moved to the Sr. Kennedy home in Naramata.

In 1949, tragedy enveloped the family. Charlie, Verna's husband of only ten years entered hospital for tests and died suddenly before tests were even completed leaving Verna a young widow with two small children.

After a year at home looking after Barry and Carol, Verna re-entered the teaching profession at the Naramata School where she taught for the next 24 years. Verna started teaching in the Naramata Community Hall until the new primary room was completed.

Tragedy seemed to be an integral part of Verna's life. On a Monday morning just after Carol and Verna had gone to school, the fire alarm was roused by Roy Baker, the bus driver, to say "the Kennedy house is in flames." The Hancocks were the first to know. With the help of neighbours and volunteer firemen, precious keepsakes and most of the furniture was saved. Percy Hancock, with valiant effort, even managed to save the electric stove, a prized possession at that time. It was a good thing Percy had on his rubber boots because he cut the electricity off with an axe. Verna and the children moved to downtown Naramata for a year while a new house rose from the ashes with help from family and friends. The Kennedy grandparents were always there for Verna and her children and in later years she became the caregiver for old grandma Kennedy. Grandpa Kennedy died before his wife who was in a home in Summerland until her death.

During her years as teacher in Naramata, Verna trained many principals and was a great help to novice teachers. Her experience served them all well. She felt that many of their later achievements were in part due to her influence.

Naramata parents entrusted their children to Verna, knowing she would guide and nurture them through their early years and introduce them to the joy of learning. She loved teaching and took an avid interest in all her students which continued long after they left school. She remembered every birthday, knew who they married and often the names of their children. Her amazing memory astounded everyone who knew her.

May Day was an important event in her life. Verna trained many young men and ladies to do the Maypole dance and to curtsy and bow. I'm sure that many remember the winding and unwinding of the ribbons and Verna in a panic state on the sidelines. She continued to help with the festivities even after she retired.

In 1981 Verna moved to her apartment on Lakeshore Drive in Penticton. Her vast gardens were becoming just too much to care for. In her retirement, much of her time was spent visiting children and grandchildren as well as making trips to Europe, Hawaii and New Zealand. Family was extremely important to Verna and she to them.

Carol, Verna's daughter, died of cancer on Dec. 2, 1994. She is buried next to her father Charlie and mother Verna in the Penticton cemetery.

Verna is survived by her son Barry, daughter in law, Wilma, 4 grandchildren, Chris, David, Jonathan and Stilianiana and many, many friends, mainly Doreen McLennan who spent hours and hours enjoying Verna's company and helping out in later life.

Verna has given a good part of her life to this community of Naramata. She was very special, so special that a room in the Naramata School is now the Verna Kennedy Room. Verna's pallbearers were handpicked by her before her death and included students she had taught over the years. Many families were represented: Mark Berry, Don Day, Al Formo, Kevin Hill, Brian McGibney and Ted Ritchie.

Glad you were a big part of our lives, Verna! Happy Sailing!!!!

