



Ann Elizabeth Bilechuk

July 13, 1933 - September 10, 2019

Celebration of Life to be held:

~ Saturday November 2nd

~ 1-3 pm

~ Macassa Bay Yacht Club

<http://www.mbyc-hamilton.org/main/index.php>

80 Harbour Front Drive Hamilton, ON L8L OB1

~~ With sad and heavy hearts we advise the passing on September 10th 2019 of Ann Elizabeth Bilechuk in her 86th year. Ann leaves behind 4 daughters: Olga, Annmarie (Carmen), Cathy, and Helen. More about her below.

~~ if you have any stories about Mom we would like to hear them. Feel free to use this website to do so. If you'd like to make a donation in her honour, we encourage you to give to the Royal Botanical Gardens (<https://www.rbg.ca/donate>). If however none of that is possible, or you'd like to do more, give a listen to The Chieftains or Johnny Cash, any of their songs will do.

~~ Mom's story started in Wexford County in Ireland in 1933 as Annie Murphy or Nan Murphy. Her father came from the Murphy line known as "the Saints", because there were so many Murphys in Wexford and environs.

~~ She was in effect an only child, described herself as a lonely one, because no one else was home at the same time. Her older siblings were put out to work as soon as possible, there would have been others closer in age if they had survived, but infant mortality was too common amongst the rural poor. And later Mom herself was no longer at home for the younger children. No surprise that newborns were rushed to baptism. The story goes that the day Mom was transported to the church, probably by donkey and cart, it was pouring rain, she howled the whole time, and her mother (Mammy to her and Granny for us) said she never looked back.

~~ Her father worked as a labourer for a local farmer (most land was owned by several generations of the same Anglo-Irish gentry.) Instead of a tractor he used a horse and plow, because he said, you always need good fertilizer while tractors never gave back and were such dirty things. From a fistful of soil he could advise what should be planted next. His

foreman would lend him to other farms who would take him for the day to do just that. But it was a hard life despite the country's recovery after the fight for Independence, the great depression, WWII and rationing were over.

~~ As a child Mom walked barefoot, for her shoes to last longer, the mile or so to primary school in Clohamon. For the longer trek to sell their eggs at market or perhaps see films or the pictures in Bunclody, Granny would make Mom take the seat in the cart, and herself would walk leading the donkey.

~~ After primary there would be no more school. No money for it, but the parish priest ruled his flock (a benevolent dictator like in *The Quiet Man*) and with the help of his own sibling, who was the Mother Superior, arrangements were made for Mom to go to her convent school. The most respectable work for someone like Nan Murphy (other than marriage or becoming a nun) was to be trained for domestic service.

~~ At the convent she was thrown into Gaelic immersion. Had to be fluent quickly in order to stay as all classes were in Gaelic which was reinstated as an official language after Independence. They were allowed in their off times to speak English, but proper or King's English only, the Irish brogue was not allowed, no slang and definitely do not say anything that would be considered foul outside the chicken coop.

~~ Aside from prayers, religious studies and usual school lessons, there was Irish step dancing, violin lessons, hurling, and chores to be fulfilled within the somewhat self-sufficient community. Someone had to churn the butter or scrub the bannister. But there was no better reference letter than that from the convent though a titled peer's came close.

~~ After leaving the convent school, Ann Elizabeth Murphy found employment as an upstairs maid for an actual Lord & Lady (like in *Downton*, but their butler made her life so miserable she had to leave). Later moved to Liverpool, first port of call for the Irish, and worked as an au pair for the US Vice-Consul's family (his wife was a very sophisticated aristocrat from Spain).

~~ By the age of 20, she turned down the invite from the Americans to go with them to their new post in Germany, and found herself instead on a long and lonely sojourn on an ocean liner bound for Canada.

~~ She had decided to seek her fortune in a foreign country provided it was English speaking and a member of the Commonwealth (she was too afraid to try the US because of what she knew about the war and saw in the movies the brashness of the Yanks; this was before JFK.)

But how she ended up at the Canadian consular office versus Australia's for example, she could not remember. Listening to her tell it, wonder if the official had to meet a quota under the Diefenbaker domestic plan. Oh my dear says he, in the most sincere tsk tsk voice, Australia is not the place for such a fine Irish Catholic girl like you, it started out as a penal colony you know. She would do better in a big city like Toronto (also much less wet than

Vancouver and Liverpool; no more chilblains clinched the deal for her).

~~ Arrangements were made, passage was paid by the government, who collected it back later. But none of that mattered when she was awarded Canadian citizenship. It was the proudest day of her life other than her children's milestones.

~~ Her eldest would say: my mother is from Ireland, my father the Ukraine, they met and married in Toronto, and I'm not to blame. Which leads to the next big milestone – divorce.

~~ Mom was devastated to finally recognize that the man she married and the father of her children would never be the same man he was when he wooed her. For her the shame and to no longer be a proper married woman allowed the sacraments by the Church was so hard to bear, but divorce was necessary. By then the family were in Hamilton and had a small business, Yorkshire Fish & Chips.

~~ All was not lost, though the home and business were gone, for "Irish Annie" emerged. Single with 4 kids with no other family or support. It was make do as best she could, lemonade out of lemons etc., including back to domestic work and serving coffee and doughnuts. There were plenty of adventures and our little group never missed a laugh or an episode of Monty Python.

~~ Mom made sure her children and any of their friends who stuck around were taught sewing, cooking, gardening, how to drive, how to swim though she couldn't swim herself, how to recycle/reuse, to love the outdoors and even did her best to help find work. No money no problem, cause if something is broken fix it yourself - there was a lot you could do with a staple gun, drill and rolls of duct tape. And there were many many hours of listening to traditional Irish music, stories about the old sod and "The Saints", her love of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and country music.

~~ By the 1980's there were operations and treatment for ovarian cancer and removal of a tumour the doctor said was the size of your head. She was one of the lucky 5% to survive. It was tough, but she was tougher. As the years went by, more age related health issues arose including a lengthy stay in hospital in 2016. On her last birthday just a couple months ago she was amazed that she'd made it this far.

~~ We are blessed and grateful for the resources that were made available to us and for the people we met along the way. On her and our behalf we say, thank you.

~~ The following is her favourite prayer entitled To our Blessed Mother:

Dear Blessed Mother, never was it known that anyone who fled to Thy protection, implored Thy help and sought Thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto Thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother to Thee I come before Thee to stand sinful and sorrowful. Oh Mother of the Word Incarnate despise not my petition but in Thy clemency please hear and answer my plea. Amen.

Comments



“ Annmarie,
Our deepest sympathy in the passing of your mother. We know how much she was loved and how special she was to you, Carm and to your sisters.
May you find comfort in the many memories and stories which will be shared for years to come. Wishing you hope in the midst of sorrow, and comfort in the midst of pain.

All our love,
Connie, Matthew and Sabrina Colella

Connie Colella - September 21, 2019 at 09:29 AM



“ Our sincerest condolences on the passing of your mother. She was a very special woman, who will be missed by many. Sending prayer to you and your family.
Lots of love, Sam, Fil and the Tinebra family

Sam Tinebra - September 18, 2019 at 06:48 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



hbilechuk - September 17, 2019 at 11:01 AM



“ A trip to Calgary and the Rockies after cancer recovery.

hbilechuk - September 17, 2019 at 11:06 AM



“ Wow what a looker!! Will miss u Ann, my friend. Godspeed hunny!

Kim - September 17, 2019 at 08:36 PM



“ you will surely be missed ann my condolences to the family! i'll always remember ann as a very strong woman,smart,kind,and who says it how it is.soar high!

diane gilligan - September 19, 2019 at 07:59 AM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



hbilechuk - September 16, 2019 at 11:49 AM



“ Dear Blessed Mother, never was it known that anyone who fled to Thy protection, implored Thy help and sought Thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto Thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother to Thee I come before Thee to stand sinful and sorrowful. Oh Mother of the Word Incarnate despise not my petition but in Thy clemency please hear and answer my plea. Amen.

hbilechuk - September 16, 2019 at 11:48 AM



“ AMEN

diane gilligan - September 19, 2019 at 07:58 AM



“ We are saddened to hear about the loss of your mother. She was a wonderful women with a great personality.

My brother Carm has always spoke highly of Ms. Bilechuk (his mother-in-law), and with all the warm -hearted stories that Annmarie and Carm have shared with my family over the years, they would always have us laughing and knowing she was truly special.

Our sincerest condolences,
Angelo and Leanne Tinebra

Angelo Tinebra - September 15, 2019 at 08:41 PM



“Thinking of you all as you celebrate your mother’s remarkable life.
Thank you Ann (my other mother) for making me feel special and worthwhile in those awkward preteen & teen years. Great memories I have of growing up with your daughter Annmarie. Rob & I have fond memories of our many tea breaks, listening to Johnny Cash and yes...playing the spoons.
Thank you for making us all welcome in your home.

Our sincere sympathy,
Nancy & Rob

Nancy & Rob Hind - September 15, 2019 at 07:06 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



october - September 14, 2019 at 08:41 PM



“ Mom's mom, Annmarie and Jimmy
october - September 14, 2019 at 08:49 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



october - September 14, 2019 at 08:39 PM



“ And mom's dad did not like tractors.....
october - September 14, 2019 at 08:47 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



october - September 14, 2019 at 08:09 PM



“ My beautiful mother-in-Law. I am going to miss her cabbage rolls, roast beef... and the fun times we had, especially when she told her stories. Love you Ann. Carmen

october - September 14, 2019 at 08:49 PM



“ Deepest condolences to all your family
Our thoughts and prayers are with you all
John Polidoro and family

john polidoro - September 14, 2019 at 12:28 PM



“ Ann Marie and family I am so sorry for your loss

Charlene Schoenholz - September 14, 2019 at 09:09 AM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



olgab411 - September 13, 2019 at 07:52 PM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Ann Elizabeth Bilechuk.



September 13, 2019 at 07:31 PM



“ I remember meeting Mrs. Bilechuk while in High School. She was so jovial. Helen was having a small get together of friends and her mother joined in, keeping things lively. She had a ready wit and sense of humour. We all felt comfortable with her, even though we were teenagers. She was just so natural and down to earth. I am glad Helen had the opportunity to support her Mom when she was at such a crucial stage with the cancer. They had a bond then and now which many mothers and daughters would love to have. She will be greatly missed.

Linda Voth - September 13, 2019 at 07:00 PM



“ hbilechuk is following this tribute.

hbilechuk - September 13, 2019 at 04:35 PM



“ I am so sorry for your loss Olga, I can sure see the family resemblance in this photo. My thoughts and hugs are with you during this difficult time. Leslie Buckland xo

Leslie Buckland - September 13, 2019 at 06:45 PM



“ I met Helen while living in the North End of Hamilton, maybe 10-years ago. We were both volunteering with Pathways to Education. To my obvious great misfortune, I never met her Mother, though I've been regaled with stories, over those years, of her indomitability.

Helen and sisters, please accept my condolences. Losing one's Mother is no small loss.

Mary Catharine Lawlor - September 15, 2019 at 08:03 PM