

Belleville resident joins centenarian club

BY AUDRA KENT

Belleville – Belleville resident Hazel McLuskie joined the ranks of the centenarians last month. She celebrated her 100th birthday in April with more than 60 friends and family to help her.

Born April 26, 1906, she was born Hazel Lidster to parents John and Clara (née Haggerty) Lidster. Her father was born in Ontario in 1868; his father was born in England in 1831, his mother in Ireland in 1831. Hazel's mother was born in Ontario in 1883; her father was born in Ontario in 1855, her mother, in England in 1857.

Hazel was born in Hungerford Township and raised on the Concession 4 in Corbyville. There she met her first husband, Samuel Malcolm, marrying him when she was just 17. Together they had 11 children: Alice (1924-73), Gladys (1926-2004), John (1927-2003), Joseph (1928-96), James (1929), Garnet (1931), Edna (1932), Kathleen (1937), Joyce (1941) and conjoined twins, Darlene and Marlene (1943).

Samuel Malcolm was a cheese maker and according to son, James Malcolm, "They travelled around, all over the place, including Slate Falls where he grew up. They lived there for about 12 years; no hydro, no telephone, no house. The homestead burned down. Grandfather had two farms and gave one to dad to use." Slate Falls was "where all the kids went to school."

Samuel Malcolm passed away as a result of leukemia in 1945, when Hazel was 39. Leaving her with eight children, Hazel's youngest was just four when Samuel died. Her sixth child, Garnet, died at a very young age as a result of pneumonia. And conjoined twins Marlene and Darlene, joined at the face, were born in 1943. They were sent to Toronto shortly after their birth in an attempt to be separated. Sadly, neither survived the operation.

After her husband's death, Hazel



■ Hazel McLuskie

worked in a number of restaurants in town, supporting herself and her children on that income, and "pension cheques from the government."

Eventually, Hazel remarried a gentleman by the name of Harry McLuskie. "Father was in the second World War, Harry too. He was a cook and that's where they met—in a restaurant on Front Street in Belleville," explains James Malcolm. Not sure what year his mom remarried, he adds that it was many years after his father's death as Joyce was the only child still living at home when they married.

Harry McLuskie passed away in 1984 when Hazel was 78 years old. She has been living on her own ever since. Until about ten years ago, she lived on Geddes Street off North Front Street in Belleville. She now resides in a nursing home in Belleville and has regular visits from her four surviving children, and her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

James describes his mom: "Mother is a very kind person. She would help anybody out if she could. She was always trying to help people and if any of us kids had any problems, she'd be the first person there to try to help us."

But, he adds, her health is "not as good as it could be. She can still talk and knows

things but can't remember names."

According to the last published Census (2001), there were only 3,795 people over the age of 100 in all of Canada. Of that number, 80.5 per cent were women. The Statistics Canada life expectancy of people born in 1901 is estimated at 56 years of age.

Born in 1906, it seems Hazel McLuskie has beaten the odds and can count herself among a truly unique group of Canadians.