

SELF-PROFILE:

To the Best of My Ability

By Pat Grant

I was born and raised in Leamington, Ontario, the most southern town in Canada. At the age of two years, I was stricken with a disease of the eye called retino-blastoma, which is cancer of the eye. In order to save my life, both eyes had to be removed. Doctors today do not know how I survived such a delicate operation. God must have had a plan for me!

I know I have given my parents bad moments and a lot of gray hair, but they let me be as normal as my three sisters, or any kid on the block. I rode a bike, roller skated, ran and played "hide and seek" - "I did it all!" I believe that this was the beginning of my independence all through life.

I attended school in Brantford at the Ontario School for the Blind, where I graduated from public and high school. This school taught me many of the basic things in life, such as sewing, knitting, cooking, crafts, dancing and physical education. This was also the start of my singing career.

After leaving school, I met and married my first husband and we were blessed with four children. The marriage started to fall apart after the birth of our first child, who died shortly after. Three years later we parted. Our second child died nine months later, leaving me with a one-year old daughter and pregnant with my fourth child. I found out three years later that my third child had a brain tumor and was epileptic. At the age of eight she started attending the Southwestern Regional Centre near Blenheim, where she remained until her death two-and-a-half years ago.



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My fourth child is married with two beautiful children and leads a normal life.

For a few years I was at loose ends, so I decided to return to my singing career. I joined a country music band traveling and doing night clubs for three years. At the end of this time, I found "road work" was not for me. So, I returned home to be near my children; I continued my singing for eight years with local bands.

During this time, I met and fell in love with my current husband. In 1978, we were married and moved to his family farm in Malden Township. The first three years of my second marriage were lonely until I met a wonderful neighbour, Lorraine Bailey, who introduced me to our local Anglican Church where I joined the choir and the Women's Group.

Lorraine also introduced me the Malden Branch of the Women's Institute. She opened a new avenue for me. I soon became an active member doing whatever I could to fit in. After four

years, I received my first appointment as First Vice-President, taking over two years later as President. Being one who loves to organize and get things done, I was in my glory!

Shortly after being President, one responsibility was to plan and organize the District Annual. I was sure nervous; but things worked out with the support of my Branch. At the end of my two-year term, they asked me stay on another. During this time, the Malden Branch decided to amalgamate with the neighbouring Branch of Anderdon, and became the Anderdon-Malden WI in 1990. I became its first President, so I was six years as Branch President.

After this, I was elected President of the Essex District WI. This time, my first responsibility was to plan the Area Convention. At the present time, I hold the office of First Vice-President in my local Branch, and hope my next big step will be an Area appointment.

I was also on the Conference '96 Planning Committee this past year helping to plan workshops and obtain door prizes.

I am so pleased and happy to be a part of this organization, where I've made so many wonderful friends and feel I can do a lot more if given the chance.

Having a handicap doesn't necessarily mean "that you sit on the side lines and let others do it for you!" My motto in life is "I do for others to the best of my ability." I belong to other organizations and I am kept very busy. I love to bake and have won several ribbons at our local Harrow Fair.

I hope my story will inspire others who sit alone and say "I just can't do it," for I certainly have done it!

Pat Grant is currently First Vice-President of the Anderdon-Malden WI in Essex District.

"FOOTPRINTS TO THE PAST"

By Beatrice Harry

As a prelude to the 100th anniversary of the WI, Hastings West District organized "Footprints to the Past." Over 200 students and their teachers from Stirling and Frankford schools, parents and public visitors followed the footprints to 17 different stations set up in the Stirling Community Hall and Library complex.

In an age of computers, it was a dramatic change for the students to step back to a time when basic skills were necessary for survival. A number of crafts were demonstrated, including the use of the dash churn, treadle sewing machine, spinning wheel and the weaving loom. The art of knitting, crocheting, embroidering, tatting and quilting were also exhibited.

The research and recordings of the dedicated Branch and District Tweedsmuir Curators were on view. In addition to the activities, students and visitors could inspect memorabilia related to railway and carpentry history, as well as the farm and home. A tea room was available and slides of the early architecture of Stirling were presented.

Beatrice Harry is the PRO for the Hastings West District WI.



A number of students look on as Beatrice Harry, River Valley WI member, demonstrated the art of weaving.

Photo courtesy of the Stirling, The News-Argus.