

Seniors' Month - Focus on Sylvia and Chris Mitchell

By Julie Conroy

During the past two weeks I have written about two members who were born in Halton Hills and lived in Acton most of their lives. This week, I am writing about Sylvia and Chris Mitchell who travelled many miles before making Rockwood their home.

Sylvia and Chris Mitchell were both born in Leighton Buzzard, which is a small market town 40 miles north of London, England. They grew up living about five minutes apart and both attended the same school as children.

When Chris was a teenager, he played a cornet in the Salvation Army Band. They met when his band played at Sylvia's church youth group concert.

Sylvia worked in the office of several companies after finishing school and Chris was apprenticed (which meant going to school one day and two evenings a week and working four days). He was studying to be a draughtsman and later he became a Design Engineer.

They married in 1961, and in 1973, Chris was offered a job working for BP near Swansea, South Wales. They lived there with their three children for three years. Their parents felt they had moved to the other side of the world when they moved to Wales, little realizing that later, they would do just that. They moved to Reading in 1976, which was nearer to London and their parents.

In 1981, they decided to immigrate to Canada looking for adventure. After checking out the positions available in Canada in the London newspapers, they decided that Calgary offered the most job opportunities in Chris's field. Sylvia laughed when she told me they had a map of Ontario, and scanned the map to find Calgary. They decided that Calgary must be a very small town, if it wasn't even on the map. Once they contacted Immigration Canada and visited Canada House in London, they quickly discovered just how large Canada was, and that Calgary was in Alberta.

Chris had several positions offered him in Calgary, and once he had accepted a position with Stone & Webster he flew to Calgary to start his new job leaving Sylvia, Diane 16, Alison 14 and Darren 10, to follow later. He was so impressed with the homes he saw in Calgary he decided to put in an offer on one he really liked with the understanding that if Sylvia didn't like it, they would be free to look for another.

Sylvia and the children arrived in Calgary, they were delighted with the home and decided to move in right away. Because they had no furniture or other household items, they bought pots, plates, cutlery, five pillows and five



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sleeping bags, and a small TV (which sat on the box it came in) and camped in the house until their belongings from Britain caught up with them.

They loved living in Calgary. The Rocky Mountains, Banff, Lake Louise and the Calgary stampede gave them the adventures they were looking for. They had no regrets.

They both worked in the petro-chemical industry for five years.

Due to a downturn in the economy, Chris changed companies and was transferred to Ontario in 1986 to work in fire protection.

Sylvia joined Panasonic, Canada, and was the manager of employee relations for almost 20 years until her retirement.

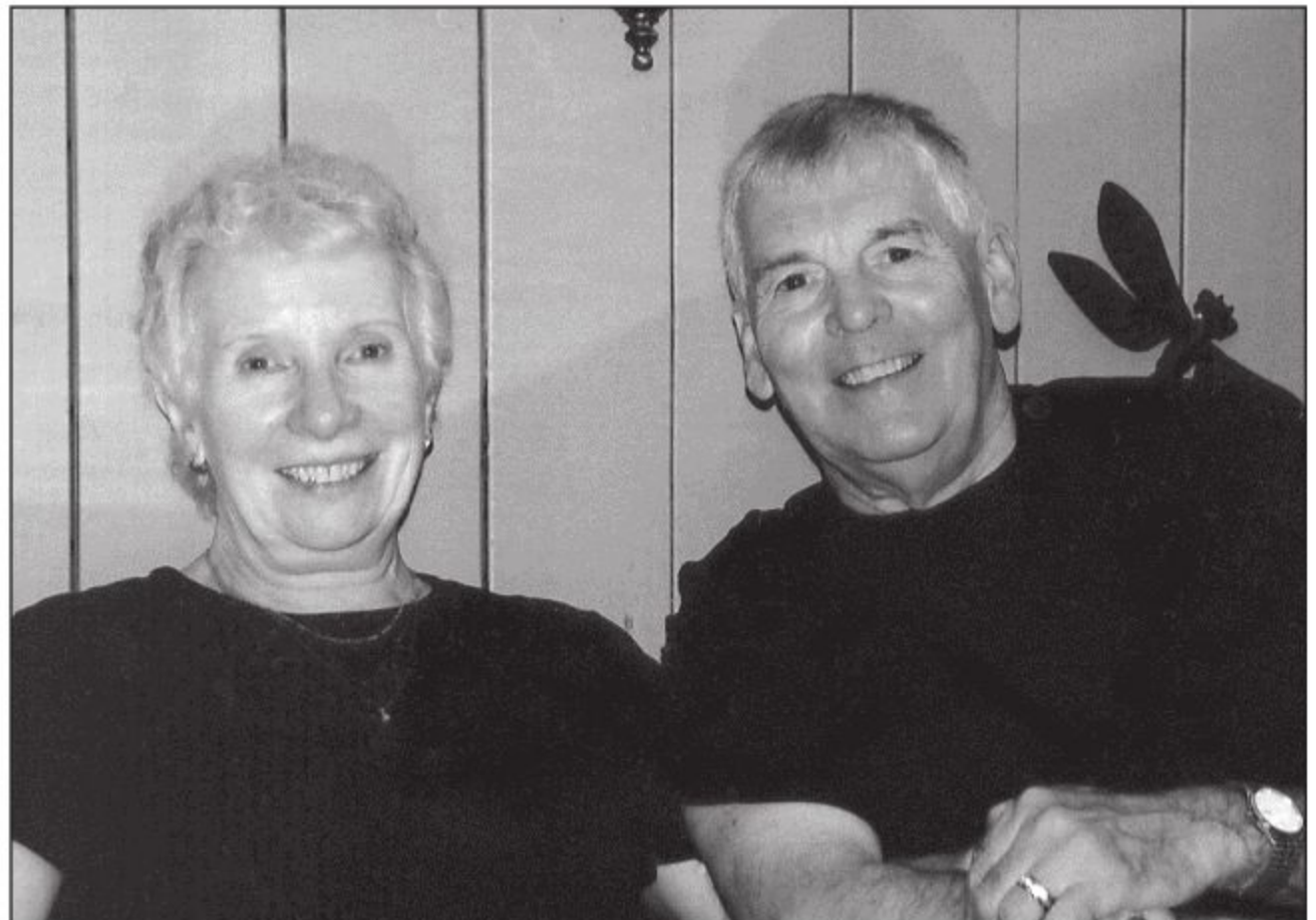
They lived in Brampton for 10 years, and then decided to move out of the city to Erin. They lived there for 11 years and continued to work in Mississauga.

Sylvia was a volunteer for East Wellington Community Services, and worked in their store on Main Street in Erin for several years.

In 2007, they started taking ballroom dance lessons in Guelph and really enjoy that.

In 2000, Chris started a small vending business which keeps them both busy still. When they retired in 2009 they moved to Rockwood, and joined the Acton Seniors Centre in 2010.

I first met Sylvia and Chris at a social dinner at the Centre. Sylvia mentioned she had read in The New Tanner that we were looking for volunteers. She started by working on the desk and shortly after became a Board member, taking on the daunting task of Fundraising chairperson. She and Chris became very busy working on various projects to raise funds for the Centre including the GST Auction, Bingo, Halloween dance, and Spring and Christmas bazaars. They are two very committed members who have given a lot of time and effort in keeping the Centre financially viable.



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