

Suitcase in the attic opens mystery and reveals coincidence

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Staff Writer

When Shirley Chaplin bought a house in Acton back in December 2006, she admitted she was strangely drawn to it.

The Georgetown resident had been looking around for an investment house, and after attending a few open houses in the Acton area, she returned to the same one, 62 Wellington Street, to take another look.

"I felt good about that house," said Shirley, "So I bought it."

Soon after, her son Paul and his wife Laura moved into the house and enjoyed their new home, as they settled into the neighbourhood.

On Mother's Day, Paul dropped by Shirley's home to show her something he found.

"It was a little black suitcase that he'd found in the attic," said Shirley. "He saw it when they did the home inspection when I bought the house, but had forgotten about it until recently, so he brought it down from the attic."

Once opened, Paul found the suitcase was filled with a number of sympathy and get-well cards, as well as the guest book from a funeral, that had taken place at Rumley Shoemaker Funeral Home (now McKinnon Funeral Home) on July 3, 1959.

From the guest book, Laura May Duffield was born December 11, 1880, at Cataract, Ontario, died June 30, 1959, and was laid to rest July 3, 1959, interred at Everton Cemetery. She was 78 years old, and had previously lived at the Flynn Nursing Home.

The bulk of the letters and cards were addressed to Orville Duffield, who was her son, living at 62 Wellington Street—the house that Shirley had bought. There was also a list of neighbours' names—

McCutcheons, Hansens, McEacherns, Coles, McDonalds and Dicks, many of them old-time Acton families, as well as the tags off the floral tributes at the funeral

"There was another item in the suitcase," said Shirley, "It was a copy of the *Acton Free Press*, with the obituary for Laura May in it."

By reading the obituary, Shirley was able to piece together that Laura May was Orville's mother, and had lost her husband James, 24 years before. She was a member of Knox Presbyterian Church in Acton, and Rev. Andy McKenzie conducted the service that day.

Shirley's first impulse was to try to find some family members who would want to take the suitcase back, as part of the family's heirlooms.

"I traveled to Everton Cemetery, and traced as many graves as I could," said Shirley, "I found Laura May, and her husband, and also Orville, who lived in the house when his mother died."

"By his grave marker, Orville died in 1999, and the people I bought the house from said they had lived there for nearly 10 years, so I'm guessing they bought it from the estate," said Shirley.

The other items in the suitcase were a number of letters to Orville, expressing condolences for the death of his mother.

Many of them were from the US, including Sidney, Ohio, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, as well as Ariss, Kitchener and Niagara Falls, Ontario.

But the biggest surprise for Shirley was when she read through the rest of the paper.

"My son and his wife sat there as I thumbed through it, waiting for me to find an item in the paper," said Shirley, "And on the back page, I found it."

That particular issue of the *Acton Free Press* had a photo of Shirley and her husband Hank, on their wedding day.

But the biggest surprise for Shirley was when she read through the rest of the paper.



Shirley Chaplin displays the contents of a suitcase found in the attic of an Acton home that she bought recently. It contained a copy of *The Acton Free Press*, that included her wedding photo (above).
Photo by Ted Brown

"It was the wedding announcement that they had run in the paper after we were married," grinned Shirley, "What were the chances that I'd buy a house in Acton, with a suitcase in the attic with a copy of the newspaper with my wedding photo in it?"

"I knew I was drawn to that house for a reason," said Shirley, "That photo in the newspaper was quite a coincidence."

Since that time, Shirley has been diligently looking for some descendants of the Duffields on Wellington Street, to return

the suitcase to it's rightful owners.

"The obituary says Laura May had 'seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren' so I'm sure there must be some relatives living around here," said Shirley. "I just want to see it all (the book and letters) back in her family's hands."

Anyone who might have any information about Laura May Duffield, or her descendants, is asked to contact Ted Brown at *The Independent & Free Press*, at 905-873-0301 ext. 257, or by e-mail at tbrown@independentfreepress.com

Car crash on Ninth Line

A Milton man was charged with having over 80 mg of alcohol in 100 ml of blood after a single-car accident on Ninth Line at Steeles Ave. Saturday morning. Police report at about 3:30 a.m. the driver of the vehicle lost control and hit a sign. There were no injuries. Charged is Robert Izzard, 23, of Wilson Dr.

Impaired driving charges

A Georgetown man is facing charges after a minor accident on Mountainview Rd. N. last Monday (June 30). Police say at about 6:50 p.m.

they responded to an accident where a vehicle was rear-ended by another vehicle driven by a man who fled on foot. Police searched the area and found the driver in the rear yard of a nearby home. Charged with impaired driving, having over 80 mg of alcohol in 100 ml of blood and fail to remain is Jean Perron, 44, of Ewing St.

Damage on street

Several mailboxes were knocked down, street signs and vehicles damaged on Berton

Police blotter

Bldv. in Georgetown last Saturday morning between 12:30 and 7:30 a.m. Lights were smashed in six vehicles parked at homes on the street.

Damage is about \$1,500.

Car break-ins

Police report someone attempted to break into a car parked at a Stewart MacLaren Rd. home sometime Wednesday or Thursday. There was about \$150 damage to a lock on the car door. Three unlocked vehicles parked at a

Prince St., Glen Williams residence were entered sometime late Sunday or early Monday. A purse was taken from one. Change was stolen from an unlocked vehicle parked at a Cobblehill Rd. residence sometime between Tuesday and Saturday. A \$200 stereo was stolen from a vehicle parked at a Storey Dr. Acton residence sometime late Friday or early Saturday.

School vandalism

Graffiti was spray-painted on portables and playground equipment at Harrison Public School on Rexway Dr. sometime over the weekend. The clean up cost about \$1,000.

Backyard Touch

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