

# Markham's first mayor

## Heartache a part of her life

By NANCY HOSKIN

"Death is a horrible word, especially when relating to your own children," said Alma Walker. "Children are suppose to bury you, not you them."

With the loss of her two eldest children, John and Jill, both in early adulthood to heart disease, Mother's Day is a reflective time, but not always in happy one for the veteran Markham politician.

"Accepting my children's death has been the hardest thing I've ever had to face. You never really let your children grow-up, they're a part of you, and you always think of them as children, even when they're grown and gone," Mrs. Walker said.

"I am a busy person and am very active," she said. "Mother's Day is never a holiday I look forward to. I work around the sad feelings that continually tug at my heart when I think of my losses. I didn't lose just one child, but two of my four, at such early ages."

Though her losses have been great, Mrs. Walker's strength may lie in the fact that she has maintained a close knit family with her surviving two children and 10 grandchildren ranging in age from three to 26. Her son Jerry lives in Kitamat, B.C. with part of his family, and daughter Judi lives with her mom, accompanied by her 18-year-old son.

Mrs. Walker noted that there are many differences with women today and their roles as mothers in comparison to when she started her family.

"Women have choices now. There is much more freedom. There is marriage, the work place and motherhood and most of the time a combination of all three. Today you can set your mind on anything and accomplish it. In my day the paths young women are now taking were beyond comprehension. I knew I was going to become a mother and housewife. There were no questions."

Mrs. Walker was married during the Depression when worldly

goods were at a shortage, but old fashion team spirit remained high. Standards were less materialistic. Mrs. Walker explained that everyone helped each other. Neighbors passed clothing down to youngsters on the block, for example. Friends and acquaintances were always there when you needed them.

"In many ways you miss out by being married young in this day and age, it was okay years ago, because that's what women were expected to do, get married and have a family. Now there are so many opportunities out there, including the opportunity to become a more mature adult with time before settling down," Mrs. Walker added.

Mrs. Walker lost her husband when her four children were still young, but didn't have any problems in raising them.

"The children were all helpful, and so busy themselves I had a hard time keeping track of all their activities," she said.

Being one of 13 children herself and being raised in the Markham area the Walker children didn't come up short when finding playmates. The family remained close and the Walker children had loads of cousins to play with at all ages, all living nearby.

Alma Walker was never career oriented, and felt her place was at home where she shared her time with her children, but when one by one they began moving away she wanted to embark on new activities and interests. Unexpectedly, a fire that destroyed a house on Princess St. in 1952 (she's lived on that street for the past 45 years), changed her life and Alma Walker started her political career.

"After the fire a group of us got together and decided something needed to be done about the fact that we didn't have any town water available on our street. Some of us had our own wells and there were a few natural springs, but it wasn't enough to save a neighbors house," reflected Mrs. Walker.



Alma Walker, here with photos of her family, has known heartache in her lifetime, but the resilient former mayor is still active as a Markham Hydro Commissioner. — Nancy Hoskin

"My friends convinced me to run for a council position. I became the first women councillor for the Village of Markham and have been involved in local politics for the past 33 years," said Mrs. Walker.

Alma Walker has held various political positions, including, the

Town of Markham's first mayor. She has worked in Social Services, has been a Ward Councillor, Regional Councillor and has remained on the Markham Hydro Commission since 1980.

Her involvement with the Markham Museum, the Markham Fair and the Chamber of Com-

merce, to name a few local interest groups has kept Mrs. Walker active in the community. She has been a recipient of many awards, being honored by many local service clubs including, Rotary and the Kinsmen and received a Markham Women of Distinction award in 1983.



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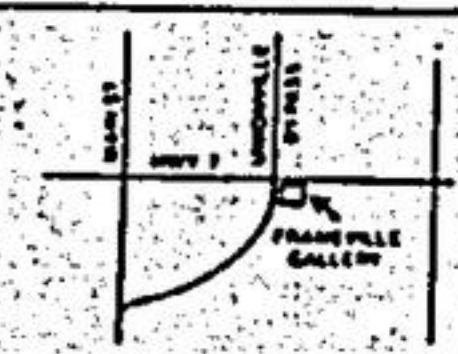
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