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# *A Smile for Ma:* **Remembering** Honesty and Passion

**A**s I enter the second year of my term as president and have the pleasure of writing an article for *The Scrivener* yet again, I am looking at my most daunting topic to date: **Pink Power**—women making a difference in our province.

I advance toward this theme with the greatest respect and trepidation . . . one false step . . . even with the best of intentions . . .

When I asked for some direction, the general consensus was I should look to something personal . . . an individual who has made an impact. *Your grandmother*, it was suggested, or *another family member* or *perhaps a teacher*.

It finally came to me! A woman of influence, strength, and integrity from the history of our great province—and she had a great sense of humour to go with it all, something I value and appreciate.

Who was this woman, you ask? Well, first a little story. I met this lady in 1971 when I was a grade 7 student at F. W. Howay school in New Westminster. My teachers



had organized a field trip to incorporate Geography and English but, really, it was a day away from school for adventure!

We boarded the train at 5:30 AM at the North Vancouver station and travelled up Howe Sound to Lillooet. We were greeted on the platform by our host for the day, Margaret “Ma” Murray, British Columbia newspaper pioneer. We had been prepared or should I say *warned* that Ms. Murray was a bit of a task mistress. I was, however, ill-prepared for what followed.

**...I have come to fully appreciate not only the life she lived but the times in which she lived them...**

There in a flowerprint dress was a woman that would do any drill sergeant proud—barking orders and leading us like the Pied Piper on a tour of the town and finally to the newspaper offices for a lecture on the merits of free press and human rights. And, of course, the importance of speaking one’s mind. I was speechless and enthralled. Ma Murray was like the Eveready™ Bunny—animated and passionate and 84 years old at the time!

As I started to write this article, I went back to look at Ma Murray’s life. She died in 1982, 11 years after my grade 7 class meeting with her in Lillooet. Some 34 years later, I have come to fully appreciate not only the life she lived but the times in which she lived them and the manner in which she lived them.



Proof of the respect Ma Murray garnered throughout our province can be found in *Hansard*. This is part of what Premier Bill Bennett said in the Legislature the Monday after her passing:

All members of the House and, indeed, all British Columbians I am sure will join me in paying tribute to the memory of Ma Murray, who died on Saturday at the age of 95. For 70 years, her witty and often acid pen kept many public figures in this province on their toes. She was blunt, forthright, and opinionated, but never malicious. Some of her most notable targets, my father among them, admired her honesty and integrity and referred to her as a friend. Although Ma Murray—I say “Ma” because nobody ever called her Margaret—was born in Kansas and did not come to British Columbia until she was 24, to my mind she portrayed the true British Columbia pioneer spirit, a spirit that built this province.

There are a lot of experiences in life whose impact you never truly realize for days, weeks, months, and sometimes years. What I remember most vividly about Ma is that she was truly passionate about her beliefs. Once she started engaging you, it became evident that she was not a woman to mess with, on many levels. She was focused and forthright and had done her homework on the issues.

Even to this day, I smile to myself when I see or read something about Ma Murray. ▲