

Marilyn MacDonald



# Powell River Grandma is a Rare Bird

**S**ome people don't have large lives, yet they manage to make big contributions. Peggy Bird of Powell River is such a person.

Peggy was born in 1923 in Edmonton and spent her girlhood there with her parents and two brothers. After high school, she worked in the Alberta Treasury Branch.

An avid letter-writer—a habit that continues to this day—she did her part by writing to many servicemen during the Second World War. Peggy had a friend whose brother was in the Navy. Peggy remarked one day that she didn't have a seaman to write to, only soldiers and pilots. Her friend showed her a photo of her brother's shipmates. Peggy spotted a handsome sailor in the front row and wrote him a letter. His name was Duncan Bird, from Powell River, BC. Little did she know she would end up marrying him—a marriage that has endured more than 60 years. "I thought I was marrying a dashing sailor," she says, "but really I was marrying a farmer."

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*Peggy in 2007*

Peggy and Duncan met in person when Duncan travelled by rail back to Powell River with a stopover in Edmonton to meet her. Peggy soon moved to Vancouver and began working for the Bank of Nova Scotia. In December 1945, the couple married and Peggy moved to Powell River. In 1947, they welcomed their first child, Bill, who was followed by twins Richard and Marnie, then by sons Peter and Tom.

With five children, Peggy had her hands full, but joined the PTA when Bill began school and soon became the president of that organization, coordinating an "English for New Canadians" program. Once the children were a bit older, she went back to

work as a bookkeeper. She joined the Chimo Toastmistress Club and learned to express herself in public—becoming president of that organization also.

In 1972 Peggy became a school aide at James Thomson, the neighbourhood elementary school, a job she loved for 14 years. She remembers playing with the children during recess, when she would have 3 under each arm as they swooped around, pretending to fly to Australia and other faraway places. Unfortunately, she lost her job when all school aides were let go by the government in 1986.



*Peggy and Duncan in 1945*



*Peggy and Duncan today*

In 1982 she joined the Powell River Museum and was its president for 10 years; she still volunteers there every Tuesday and has put together over 100 scrapbooks from old newspaper clippings. The scrapbooks are housed in the Peggy Bird Gallery. Along with Karen Southern, Peggy wrote a book about Powell River, *Pulp, Paper and People*.

In 1987—missing her contact with children—she became “School Grandma” at James Thomson Elementary and works there every Monday, reading one-on-one with the children. Her involvement has endeared her to generations of youngsters and every trip to town is met with choruses of “Hello, Grandma Bird” from kids and adults everywhere.

In 2005 her volunteerism was recognized with the creation of the “Grandma Bird Scholarship.” For the last 53 years, she has attended nearly



*Peggy and Duncan's brood: Richard, Tom, Peter, Bill, and Marnie*

every May Day at the school and organized the “Wildwood Grannies” to serve the Tea Room. Peggy has also been active in her neighbourhood and was Secretary of the Wildwood Ratepayers Association for 14 years.

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Peggy and Duncan will celebrate their 63rd anniversary in December. They have been partners through good times and bad and have always been there to support each other. They are the proud grandparents to 10 wonderful grandchildren.

Every Wednesday, Peggy hosts a dinner for her family, a gathering that usually includes 14 people—it's no big deal for this 85-year-old to whip up a dinner for that crowd. To this day, she keeps up with friends and family by writing a letter a day, then takes her daily walk to the mailbox to post the letter.

An unassuming woman, Peggy has not bought-in to the consumerism of our culture. She uses a toaster usually found today in a museum and proudly shows off an old Frigidaire she's had for 50 years.

She actually wore a hole in the linoleum of her kitchen over the decades, making meals for her family. Her remarkable red hair remains untouched by dye or old age and she always wears a dress, usually covered by a well-worn apron.

She always has time for a friend, with a cup of tea and a bit of home baking to offer visitors. She is active in her church and gives freely of her time to visit friends in care homes or the hospital.

This generous, kind, and energetic woman is an inspiration to all who are lucky enough to know her. ▲

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*The 10 grandkids: Mickey, David, Elmer, Stephen, Charlie, Michael, Bryant, and Andy Front row, Kristin and Katie*