

The Life *and* Times of **Alice Caddell,** *Leta Best's Mom*



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Leta C. Best, Notary Public and accountant, is a busy, capable lady. A longtime member of the Board of Directors of The Society, she was President from 2002 to 2004. She sits on the Notary Foundation's Board of Governors and served as its Chair from 2004 to 2006.

Leta owns two businesses in Victoria—Frank L. Kitto Registry Services Ltd. and Kitto & Best Notaries Public. Her extensive volunteer and community work includes active membership in Zonta, at the local and international levels, and the United Way. A Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year, Leta won first place for BC in Lifetime Achievement.

This interview with Mother and Daughter is a tribute to their strong love and devotion for each other.



Alice's mother, Lillian Kilgour Styan

Alice Caddell is 94. Born and raised in Victoria, she was the 8th of 10 children—her twin brother Ernie arrived 4 minutes earlier. The family lived in a beautiful home on Craigmillar that Alice's father built.

Leta: My grandfather was a wonderful carpenter. That house is now a designated heritage home. My mother attended Cloverdale School. When she was 9, the family moved “way out” to Tanner Road in Central Saanich.

Alice: Tanner Road. Yes.

Leta: They lived across the street from the Tanners—farmers out in the valley. They grew apples, strawberries, loganberries, and raspberries.

Mom's father also built the house on Tanner. It's now a bed a breakfast. When the family farm was subdivided, they named the road after my mom's family—Styan Road.

Alice: My dad learned his trade in England.

Leta: Was your dad in the Boer war, Mom?

Alice: I think so because he was always talking about South Africa.

Leta: My grandmother Styan was very forward-looking. All 5 of her girls—she had 5 boys and 5 girls—graduated from high school. Two went on to normal school . . .

Alice: Yes.

Leta: Two became teachers. And 2 were telephone operators. The eldest daughter got married and had a child. Back then, women couldn't work once they had a family. They could work if they were married, but they couldn't work if they had children. Definitely, if you were pregnant, you had to leave the work scene.

Alice: Yes. Um-hmm.

Val: That's interesting.

Alice: I think so, too.

Leta: Do you remember a little bit about your family?

Alice: They lived in the Village of Whitley in England.

Leta: Mom's great-grandfather designed the Town of Whitley. It was formerly the Styan Estate. Mom, was your mother an artist's model before she married Grandpa?



Alice's father, Charles Leopold Styan

Alice: I wouldn't be surprised, Leta, because she was beautiful. And she always had a pen and pencil to sketch things; it was some kind of cute.

Val: Alice, do you have the gift of drawing like your mom?

Alice: No.

Leta: What was the little joke you used to tell us when we'd ask you to draw something for us? Do you remember? You would say, "I can draw an airplane out of sight." Then you'd draw a cloud.

LAUGHTER

Leta: For all my school years, Mom and Dad were both involved in the PTA at McKenzie School. Mom was always involved with us kids. She was very active with the school band. She was always on the committee and would often be our chaperone on the band trips.

Alice: Uh huh.

Leta: Were you on the committee on Mount View, Darling? I can't remember that. But definitely, at Colquitz.

Alice: Oh, yes.

Leta: Even I forget.

One of the things we should mention is that Mom was a wonderful basketball player. She travelled all up and down the Island playing basketball in the 30s. And you played tennis.

Alice: Yes.

Leta: And you were a marvellous golfer.

Alice: I got a hole-in-one.

Leta: You got a hole-in-one. Besides being a basketball player, Mom was a really good badminton player and played golf. What was your lowest handicap? Did you get down to a 14?

Alice: I think so, yes.

Leta: She didn't even begin to golf until she was 50.

Val: Wow.

Alice: I was an old goat.

Leta: And from the time you were married until about 1990, what was the most weight you ever gained?

Alice: Oh, let me see. Was it 190?

Leta: No, Darling. It was 109. She only varied 4 pounds in her whole married

life and she was married for 50 years.

Val: How did you do that?

Leta: How did you maintain your weight?

Leta: Mom always watched what she ate. She was a very controlled eater.

Alice: They called me, "Hi, Scarecrow."

LAUGHTER

Leta: Can you tell Val about your dog Bob? What did you do to Bob one day?

Alice: Well, I put a hat on him, you know.

I wouldn't be surprised, Leta, because she was beautiful. She always had a pen and pencil to sketch things...

Leta: Did you squish the strawberries when they were getting overripe?

Alice: Oh, yes. Bob ate the strawberries.

Leta: What happened to him?

Alice: He just fell over.

Leta: He got drunk, didn't he?

LAUGHTER

Leta: Do you remember your two horses, honey?

Alice: Oh, yes. Queenie was one and

the other was Maude.

Leta: That's right. That was about 1922. Was the VNS Railway in at that time? Did you have a car? How did you get back and forth to church?

Alice: I think we had a car.

Leta: Did you like going to church?

Alice: Oh, yes. It was good. I liked the minister.

Leta: Which church did you go to at that time?

Alice: St. Mary's.

Leta: On Central Saanich Road?

Alice: Yes.

Leta: You were married on February the third, 1940, Dear?

Alice: Yes.

Leta: Dad was in the Royal Canadian Artillery at that time. Were you married in St. Mary's? I think you were. Or were you married in St. Stephen's?

Alice: St. Stephen's. Yes.

Leta: That's a very beautiful church.

Val: When you married, did you move into an apartment or a house?

Leta: After you and Dad were married, you moved right to Dunlevy Street in Oak Bay. You rented a little house there. In 1950, you moved to McKenzie Avenue in Saanich and lived there for 30 years.



Alice (fourth from left) and her basketball team

Alice: Wow.

LAUGHTER

Leta: Do you remember why you moved in 1980, Dear? They put the big extension through McKenzie and took our home. It was a very strong house so it was moved out to Colwood.

Val: Did you work, Alice?

Leta: Yes, Mom was a telephone operator all her working career. She worked as a BC Tel telephone operator at the Keating Exchange. She'd sit with a headset and plug cords into holes to answer phone lines on the nightshift. When the Keating Exchange closed—became automated—she worked on the switchboard at the Hudson's Bay Company.

Val: My mother was with Bell Telephone in Ontario around the same time.

Leta: Mom and I moved in together in 1990, after my dad passed away.

He died right in the middle of their 50th wedding anniversary party.

Val: Oh, my.

Leta: It was quite stressful.

Alice: His heart gave out, didn't it?

Leta: It did, Honey. From age 65, you had been blind in your right eye and deaf in your right ear?

Alice: Yes.

Leta: Then, about 4 days after Dad died, your eyesight went in your other eye.

Alice: Uh huh.

Leta: Mom had some peripheral vision for many years, but her vision's pretty well gone now.

Alice: It took 10 years to come to that, from 1990.

Leta: Yes, it did, Dear. It took 10 years for it to go.

Alice: I remember that.

I had my own house but it was easier for me to move in with Mom because she was familiar with the layout of her home.

Leta: I moved into Mom's home. I had my own house but it was easier for me to move in with Mom because she was familiar with the layout of her home. We lived together until you came to Beckley Farm in March of 2005.

Alice: Yes.

Leta: Mom had a stroke in March and required 24-hour daycare. That was in 2005.

Val: The original Beckley Farm facility is being renovated, I understand.

Leta: Yes, it is.

Val: Then you'll be able to have a nice, new home, Alice.

Leta: It will all be brand new and spiffy for you.

Alice: Un-huh. And it's all paid for?

Leta: It's all paid for, Honey. You don't have to worry. You don't have to pay anything, Darling.

Alice: Well, that's where I can live.

Leta: Yes.

Alice: Good.

Val: Is there lots of land around Beckley Farm?

Leta: Not anymore, but it was the Beckley farmland in James Bay. There were the Fairfield Farm estates, in the Fairfield area, and Beckley Farm. They were two of the major farms in the Victoria area. Several buildings in that area are still called Beckley.

Val: Is the food good here, Alice?

Alice: Yes.

Leta: They look after all of her care—3 meals plus 3 snacks a day.

Leta: Do you like your caregivers?

Alice: Oh, yes.

Leta: Have you got boyfriends here? Some of the boys that look after you?

Alice: Oh, they're kind of cuckoo.

Leta: Are they? Oh oh. Do you like the girls better?

Alice: No. They're worse.

LAUGHTER

Val: Delightful. Alice, what is your favourite part of the day here?

Alice: Oh, let's see. What did I do on any of the days?

Leta: Do they help you get dressed in the morning and comb your hair?

Alice: Yes.

Leta: And they make sure you've got your glasses on and everything.

Alice: Yeah.

Leta: They take you down to get your hair done every week at the hairdressing salon here.

Alice: Yes. Monday. Monday night.

Leta: Do you have somebody come in to give you manicures and pedicures?



February 3, 1940 From left: Alice's sister Leta, Alice's bridegroom Alexander Caddell, Alice, Alice's sister Nellie, and Jim Caddell, Alex's brother.

Val: Alice, I think you're having a manicure and pedicure this afternoon. I wish I were, too. It sounds great.

Leta: Yes. You are having your nails and your toenails done, dear. Katrina's coming to do them for you.

Alice: Who? Me?

Val: Yes.

Leta: Today.

Alice: Did I?

Leta: No, you're going to, this afternoon.

Alice: Oh, I guess so.

Leta: And your caregivers make sure your skin's nice and moist. They put cream on you.

Alice: Oh, yes.

Leta: And they put lipstick on you, if you want.

Alice: Oh, good.

Leta: The people who live here are well looked after. The dentist comes in. Mom's own doctor comes to visit her and there are doctors on call.

There is a central place for the pharmaceuticals. The doctor gives permission to the facility to order prescriptions. I am given a record each month of the prescriptions and vitamins Mom has taken.

Every month there is a family day where the families can visit. We can have dinner with our parents or friends and there is entertainment. This month, it was Valentine's Day. Last month, of course, was Robbie Burns Day and next month, it will be St. Patrick's Day.

Alice: Oh, yes. So many things. And a lot of people came.

Leta: And every day, except Sunday, you have a cocktail hour, Mom, and music, which you love. Volunteers come every day from 4 to 5 PM to play music for the social hour.

Val: That is so nice. Do animals come to visit?

Leta: Yes, people bring their pets. There are lots of dogs.

Not everyone has visitors. One of the nicest things I see is staff members sitting down beside those individuals to talk to them. That is

so much nicer. Rather than standing above someone to talk, they sit down beside them and hold their hand and talk to them. That social interaction is extremely important.

Alice: Yes. It is. Yes.

Leta: When visitors like myself come in, we get to know some of the other residents in the facility and take time to speak to them and say hello. That brings such a smile to their faces. It's wonderful.

I find the level of care here extremely good—the level of care and the level of caring.

Val: I noticed you were greeting a lot of people when we arrived, Leta, and calling them by name. They responded so well to that.

Leta: If you come to visit a fair amount, the staff and residents get to know your name and you get to know their names.

Alice: Oh, yeah.

Val: There was a movie today in the lounge today, Alice.

Leta: You were watching a movie, Dear?

Alice: Me?

Leta: Yes.

Alice: Well, I can't see anyways.

Val: What other entertainment or activities do you enjoy here?

Leta: There are mental exercises to stimulate the residents' minds and there's carpet bowling. There's always something going on. There are a couple of activities in the morning and one in the afternoon. Then there are social activities. They go on outings sometimes, on the bus.

Alice: Yes. And maybe in a car. We go way out past the Farm, around the Island.

Leta: And volunteers take you for walks?

Alice: Oh, yes.

Leta: Volunteers come in and take the residents for walks or visit with them.

Alice: Oh, yes. Yes.

Leta: Some volunteers come to visit family members. After residents pass on, the volunteers come back and visit with the friends they've made here.

I find the level of care here extremely good—the level of care and the level of caring.

Volunteers also come in from the CNIB to read to the residents. A CNIB volunteer reads to Mom on Sunday.

Val: How many residents live in this facility?

Leta: About 70. It's a very small facility. It's a not-for-profit society, as opposed to many care facilities that operate as a business. This is the Beckley Farm Society. It's run with a volunteer board of directors and, of course, paid staff and executive director. So it's very, very good.

Val: Alice, do you have a special friend here, a lady you like to sit with?

Leta: Don't you sit with Zeta?

Alice: I wouldn't know if I did.

Leta: Zeta is your special friend. She sits with you and holds your hand. And chats to you. I think Zeta is your closest friend here. The residents certainly form friendships here.

Alice: Yes.

Leta: That's encouraged.

Val: Let's talk a bit more about the animals.

Alice: Yeah.

Leta: Do you ever get to pet a little dog, Dear? Did Lorraine bring her dog here? Lorraine is in charge of social services for the guests.



At Beckley Farm Lodge, Gorge Road Hospital: Lorraine Gee (left), Director of Activation and Day Programs, her friendly little pooch Coco, and Jan Robertson, Executive Director

Alice: Her dog is quite yippie.

Val: Alice, I love your attitude and you have such a happy personality.

Leta: Doesn't she!

Val: Yes. Beautiful. And buoyant.

Leta: Did you like to tell jokes when we were at home? We used to laugh and laugh and laugh.

Alice: We'd laugh at nothing. Yes.

Leta: Do you still like it when I tell you jokes?

Alice: Oh, yeah.

Leta: What do you like best about my visits with you?

Alice: Oh, you're great. Yes.

Leta: What is it you like the best, Dear?

Alice: With you?

Leta: Yes.

Alice: "Hi, Darling."

LAUGHTER

Leta: Do you like the kisses?

Alice: Yes, sure.

Leta: Do I give you lots of kisses when I'm here?

Alice: Oh, yes, you do.

Val: How many grandchildren do you have, Alice?

Alice: Oh, I have five.

Leta: Do you know how many great-grandchildren you have?

Alice: Five, isn't it?

Leta: Four.

Alice: Four.

Leta: Wait a minute. Maybe you're right and I'm wrong. Hang on, Darling. You've got five. Yes, you do. I forgot about Aleda's child. You're right.

You like it when I bring my grandchildren, don't you dear?

Mom would spend hours, hours, and hours playing golf with my son.

Alice: Oh, yes.

Leta: We have a little girl and twin grandsons. They call my mom "Gigi." So does James, my brother's grandson.

Alice: Oh, he's a darling, he is. What is he, 14?

Leta: He's 14. You're absolutely correct, Dear.

Alice: Oh, he is marvellous. I think he's born an artist, too.

Leta: He's very talented. We have a lot of artists in the family.

Val: Starting with your grandma.

Leta: My niece—my brother's daughter—and my sister's son are all wonderful artists.

Alice: Yeah.

Leta: Mom and I can't draw at all.

LAUGHTER

Val: You were involved in sports, too, Leta?

Leta: Our whole family played golf.

Alice: I was 68 when I got a hole-in-one.

Val: No kidding.

Alice: Yeah.

Leta: Who was with you, Dear?

Alice: Let's see. I guess it was one of the girls that played with me.

Leta: No, it was one of your grandchildren. It was Gary.

Alice: Oh, oh, Gary. Oh, that's right.

Leta: That reminded me of something. Oh, again, family memories. When I first had my son Gary, my mom looked after him. You started Gary playing golf when he was 2, didn't you?

Alice: Yes.

Leta: My son started playing golf at 2. My dad built a 3-hole mini-golf at the back of their property. Mom would spend hours, hours, and hours playing golf with my son. By the time my son was 7, he could play on a regular golf course. By the time he was 12, he belonged to two golf clubs. Mom never got tired of playing golf with him.

Alice: No.

Val: How did you get clubs that were small enough for him?

Leta: Did Dad cut down the clubs for him, Dear?

Alice: I think so.

Leta: My dad would have cut them down and retaped the handles. They had a regulation head but short shaft.

Val: That's great. How is Gary's golf game today?

Leta: He doesn't golf as much, but he's still very good. I think he got down as low as a 7 handicap. Mom also played golf with my brother and he was down to about a 1 handicap. My brother's an extremely good golfer.

LAUGHTER

Val: They're a little noisy in the kitchen. It must be lunchtime.

Alice: Oh, good.

Leta: It is. It's 11:47, but who's counting?

Leta helps her mom into her wheelchair.

Leta: There we go, Darling. I'll take you to your lunch. When you have finished, I will dress you for our photo shoot. Your hair is still lovely so I won't have to do too much to your hair. I brought my curling iron, just in case. I've got you, Darling.

While Alice is enjoying lunch, Leta and Val continue to chat.

Leta: They put on a special dinner on Christmas Day at lunchtime and one



Leta's grandchildren: Kale, Alanna, and Sean Best

for New Year's. To dine with your loved one, you book ahead because they have to know the numbers.

I saw one of the nicest things this year when I came for lunch at Christmas. Somebody donated poinsettias to Beckley Farm for the residents to give their family members as a gift. Many residents never leave here, you know. They can't go shopping.

I can remember the smile on Mom's face when she was able to give me a gift at Christmas.

Val: Your mom is such a light-hearted lady. You must have had fun growing up in your family.

Leta: Mom had a wonderful sense of humour. She was extremely involved with us children. She didn't work from the time my brother was born until I was in Grade 5, then she went back to work part-time. Mostly she worked in the evenings or at night so she could be there for us in the daytime.

Val: And your mom did volunteer work, just like you do, Leta.

Leta: Yes, she did. She was extremely involved with the old Community Chest, as it was called back then.

Val: That was the precursor to the United Way.

If a person wants to volunteer, would he or she go to a specific facility or is there a central place for volunteers in Victoria?

Leta: Yes. You register with the Victoria Volunteer Bureau. If you don't know where you'd like to be placed, they give you an assessment to see where you would be best suited.

I worked with the Volunteer Bureau many years ago. They created a seniors' volunteer program close to 20 years ago—seniors volunteering to go into the community. It was the first such program in Canada. There is a very, very good volunteering network in Victoria. The Victoria Volunteer Bureau is part of the United Way Agency here in Victoria.

Val: Did your mom play a musical instrument?

Leta: No. Her sisters played piano. Mom loved sports. Her whole life was sports.

Val: That probably contributed to her never gaining more than 4 pounds!

Leta: As a child, she was heavy and she just hated it. She slimmed down after she left high school and never put the weight back on.

The whole time I was growing up, I can remember her going to badminton Tuesday and Thursday nights. At about age 50, she started golfing and golfed till she was close to 80.

Mom was extremely beautiful when she was younger, at least in my eyes.

Val: How did your mom feel about becoming a senior?

Leta: My mother has never become a senior.

Val: I like that.

Leta: If you ask my mother, she's not old. She would always say she was 39 and now she's down to 29. My mother never wanted to be involved in groups like Silver Threads because they were a bunch of old people.

Val: Her attitude is anything but old. If Alice has lost her vision, why is she wearing glasses?



Alice in California, in the '30s

Leta: She's always worn glasses, plus they have a little bit of tint. She has glaucoma and macular degeneration. Even though she's blind, her eyes are still light-sensitive.

The only regret my mother has with her blindness is she can't drive a car. She loved her car. She loved to drive because it gave her the ability to be with the grandchildren—she spent a lot of time with all her grandchildren. She babysat for us equally.

And she liked to go golfing and, earlier in her life, to play badminton. Her car was very important. That, to me, was the loss of her ability to look after herself.

We tried, you know. We went through all the tests. Had she lost her vision 10 years later, perhaps they could have reversed it. She had many laser operations. By the time the new technology came along, there was so much scarring, her loss of vision was irreversible.

Mom was extremely beautiful when she was younger, at least in my eyes. She never saw herself as beautiful. I have pictures of my mom and her four sisters and, to me, she's the most beautiful.

Val: I find it challenging to talk about losing sight.

Leta: Mom was very involved in the CNIB here in Victoria. Every week, until she went into Beckley Farm, a volunteer would pick her up and take her there. One week they would have music and tea; the other week—table bowling. They have table bowling for the blind, with volunteers helping. You think of people who are blind as being old, but there were young and old people alike at the CNIB.

Mom just loved it—whether she got the award for perfect attendance or the most improved or the highest average. Mom was a great bowler. Even that type of bowling was important to her because of her competitive spirit. Now well into her 90s, she has never lost it.

Val: How has your mom changed over the past years?

Leta: I actually see her as happier

now than she was the last few years at home alone with me. I think there's far more stimulation here. She did not want to come into a care facility. People all want to be at home. But I think she's happier. I have seen her go from crying and being depressed when she first came in, to seldom crying anymore. I see her smile much more.

I tried when she was at home to get her into different activities, to have people pick her up and take her out. The only thing I succeeded in was the CNIB.

She resisted going out. She would not take a taxi, so she relied on her family. Well, of course, we all worked. It was difficult, but somehow we were able to convince her she would really enjoy the CNIB. Now she has stimulation here all the time and I see a happier person. It works for her.

Val: What has having your mother come to live here done for you?

Leta: All my life, I have loved my mother. Toward the end of the time we were living together, it was very difficult. Our roles were reversed. I became the parent and she became the child and we would clash. I was beginning to not like my mother.

During the day, she would try to put her dishes in the sink. She had some peripheral sight. In the Fall, she



Alice with her trophies from her Blind Bowling League

was able to rake a few leaves at a time or pick up a few chestnuts.

She did have a life. She called it "walking around." She could walk around her estate. After she had that stroke, she was not able to do any of that for herself anymore. She couldn't even manage to get up and down the stairs.

...this has given me the opportunity to totally appreciate her all over again.

The day she had her first stroke, I was in Vancouver at a Society meeting. My secretary checked up on Mom at lunchtime from 12 to 1, to make sure she was okay. Sometime between 1 and 5 PM, when I got home, she'd fallen and was sitting on the floor.

We took her to the hospital right away. She was soon able to return home but, within a week, she suffered another stroke and, at that point, she couldn't be left alone. She required 24-hour daycare. We just weren't in a financial position to be able to pay the cost of around-the-clock home care.

At-home care really would not have been good enough. You know, there always are trained medical staff on site here and they have all the equipment for lifting people. They have the most marvellous bathing equipment; they put them in a little sling and place them in the tub for a lovely bath.

I believe they always have two nurses on staff here, registered nurses, and a doctor on call. I speak very highly of the care the residents receive here.

Having Mom here at Beckley Farm and being able to visit her, I really have fallen back in love with my mother and I really like her again. So this has given me the opportunity to totally appreciate her all over again.

Here, I'm no longer the caregiver; I'm her daughter and the roles have

reversed again. She's the mother and I'm the child.

Val: That outcome is so positive for people who fear taking their parents out of their home. It was so handy to have a "spare" facility ready and equipped for the residents of Beckley Farm while it is being renovated.

Leta: This facility was newly renovated and empty when they moved the residents from Beckley Farm to Gorge Road. This floor is strictly for Beckley Farm residents. The trauma seniors suffer when they're moved from one facility to another is huge. It's months and months and months before they can cope again. There was much planning and foresight so there would be as little trauma as possible, but when they go back to Beckley Farm, they will have to adjust again.

They like a structured life, especially those who have advanced dementia. They like things to be routine.

Val: What other services are offered in this building?

Leta: There is daycare for seniors, so you can bring in your parents for activities, if they're still living at home with you.

There's a less intensive care facility on the lower floor. One gentleman's wife lives on this floor and his room is on the lower floor, but he chooses to spend his days up here with his wife. He takes his meals in the main dining room because he's able to function at a higher level. His wife has her meals at the same place my mother does because they require much more assistance to eat.

When my mom first went into a nursing home, I was just a mess. I cried and I cried and I cried. It was awful. We lived together as adults for 16 years, you know.

My mom knows me because I come often enough. A lot of times, Mom will be on top of it. She was actually pretty good today.

Val: Your mom blossomed today, Leta. She is beautiful. ▲