

### AUDREY SULLIVAN WILSON, 1929 – 2013

The circle of life for Audrey, child of two pioneer generations on both sides, has been completed, a life fulfilled, and fulfilled well. With her heritage so deeply rooted in this community, it is no wonder she felt a sense of responsibility and understood the values that mattered.

Born in 1929, Audrey was the first child for Tony and Frances Sullivan. Tony had arrived in Sooke in 1919 with his parents Jeremiah and Frances Sullivan and grew up in Otter Point and Shirley, where he was initiated into the logging industry, first learning skills as a teamster.

Tony Sullivan began noticing the attractive young girl growing up at Sheringham Lighthouse, first daughter of lightkeeper Eustace Arden (2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Metchosin) and of Ann Sanderson, daughter of the Daniel Sandersons who settled on Sooke River Road in 1910.

The young girl growing up at the lighthouse, Audrey's mother, Frances, had begun her life settled into a basket on the store counter of the general store that was built by Eustace Arden at the intersection of Sooke and Otter Point Roads in 1909. Eustace Arden owned land in the centre of Sooke and drove a horse stage to Victoria, stabling his team in a barn up Otter Point hill. His wife Ann kept the shop, along with baby Frances.

When the news came that Eustace had been hired as lightkeeper at Sheringham Point in 1912, a whole new lifestyle was begun, with Eustace and Ann Arden's family growing up at that beautiful ocean location, isolated at first, before the road went through to the lighthouse. The village corner store and post office was left in the hands of Ann's "Aunt Carrie" Thrup.

After Tony and Frances married they settled into a home in Sooke, still standing just about across the road from today's post office, where Audrey was raised, along with brother Rodney and sisters Yvonne and Lynda.

As the big sister, Audrey grew accustomed to giving a helping hand with the family and the house, and also accompanying her mother Frances out to Sheringham to help with the household there, as Mrs. Arden suffered from delicate health.

While there were plenty of chores, it wasn't all work, and Audrey frequently teamed up with her friend down the road Merle Forrest, to go for a swim in the Sooke River, or bike riding or just hang out. Both girls joined Girl Guides and were among the first to enjoy meetings at the Brownie Hut at the camp on Sooke River Road. As 10-year old Audrey Sullivan in 1939, she and Merle rode their bicycles to the camp, a year after the hut was built.

During the 1960s, Audrey was back at the hut again, this time as a leader herself, when as Brown Owl, she supervised camping stays for Brownie groups. She recalled having all the youngsters seated in a circle around the fireplace, practicing their knots, before they settled into their bunk beds for the exciting weekend sleepover.

It was just a short walk for Audrey to Sooke Superior School, which she attended from 1935 to 1946, when Milne's Landing High school opened. At Sooke, she participated in sports and became an editor of Soo-Su Press, the school's little mimeographed quarterly newspaper. In the fall of 1946, when the first high school west of Victoria opened in the converted army training camp at Milne's Landing, Audrey was an excited student. One of the reasons for her happiness was she'd met her future husband, John Wilson, who had moved out from Victoria with his family.

In June 1947, Audrey took part in a ground-breaking ceremony, one of the five members of the new school's first graduating class. Though headed off to Provincial Normal School to train as a teacher, she found that her attraction to John was stronger, and the two were married at Sooke Harbour House in 1948, in the days when Madame Marie LaVertu was the chatelaine. At first they settled at Langford, then made a move to Sooke where they rented a cottage downtown, close by where her grandfather Eustace Arden held land decades earlier.

Before long, John, a carpenter and millwright, had built his growing family a fine new home on the brow of Charters Hill, overlooking Sooke Harbour. First son Glen was followed by their only daughter Wendy, then by Randy, Terry, Wayne and Gerry. While John was very active supporting his kids in sports activities with Sooke Athletic Association, Audrey contributed her efforts as well, but was also kept pretty busy as a homemaker and cheering section.

As a youngster Audrey learned the "old Sooke" family tradition of gathering the little wild blackberries that grew on spreading low vines, found particularly in the regrowth areas of burned out slash fires. People who haven't had the privilege of enjoying delicious blackberry pies made with those zingy little hard-to-find (just the right tartness) gems, have missed one of life's delicacies. Audrey's family enjoyed this blessing every year.

John Wilson quickly joined the Sooke Community Association, serving as president for a number of terms over a half-century span of service, and Audrey, true to her Sooke roots, took part in the same volunteer efforts, particularly in food preparation, helping with convention night salmon barbecue suppers and All Sooke Day.

As her children grew into more independence, Audrey finished her educational training and became a kindergarten teacher in our school district. She joined the Sooke Lioness, later becoming a member of Sooke Harbourside Lions. Her work in Lionism encompassed many fields, but particularly focused on humanitarian interests, kids in need, seniors and those less fortunate. She advanced to Zone Level, District Level, and was elected District President. Being a member of the Lions gave Audrey great enjoyment, not only in fulfillment of purpose, but in the camaraderie of many friends. One of her highlights was sharing with John their 1997 trip to Australia where John as past-District Governor renewed their friendship with Australian Lions George and Norma Barnard whom they had met the year before at the Montreal convention.

Her door was always open for a chat on community interest, and I noticed when I dropped by to speak with Audrey and John about history or a community project, brother Bill Wilson would generally be there for his morning coffee.

In more recent decades, Audrey and I and Mae Linell and Shirley Vowles spent several years working together on a series of community undertakings. These included raising funds to equip Edward Milne Community School with seating for the theatre (@ \$300.00 per seat) and organizing the EMCS 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion in 1996 for the opening of the new school. Another massive project was raising funds to purchase the land on which the historic Muir Cemetery is situated on Maple Avenue. We all enjoyed working on this and the Sooke Region Historical Society shared with the Sooke Lions and many other contributors the satisfaction of having a place of respect for our earliest pioneers that would now, with its recent transfer to the municipality, be cared for in perpetuity.

The really great thing about Audrey was that she knew what the real values of the world were all about and you could count on her – if her efforts would make Sooke and the world a better place, she would be right there giving her all.

Besides her husband John, she leaves her children Glen (Marie) Wendy (Wendal) Randy (Dawn) Terry (Marie) Wayne (Moe) and Gerry; grandkids Shane, Mark, Kendra, Paul, Trent, Stephanie, Danielle, Nicole and Brock; her brother Rodney (Myrna) sisters Yvonne (John) Lynda (Lorne) her in-laws Jim, Bill, Peggy and Vera; many nieces, nephews and a host of friends. A tea in her memory will be held at Sooke Community Hall, 2:30 pm, Saturday, January 4th.

Elida Peers, Historian  
Sooke Region Museum

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