

Poetry
Betty Tomlinson Anderson

November Sun

August, September, October,
rain, rain,
and still more rain.
Would you believe
a picnic
on November first?
The sun was warm,
and continues warm.
It is November fourth;
I sit in warm gold
and glory.

Early October

Late afternoon sun
smiling with me
as I crunch through cornflake leaves.

A WOMAN OF FIRSTS
BETTY TOMLINSON ANDERSON, 1923-2016
By Janine Harris-Wheatley

Betty Tomlinson Anderson is one of those people it is impossible to condense into a few words. People who attended her memorial service at Tottenham United Church, on a hot September afternoon in 2016, were struck by how many lives she had touched in meaningful but unrelated ways, relationships that she often never talked about. Her Tomlinson family, her Anderson stepchildren, her friends from this or that organization, each knew her in a different context so had a different story to tell.

In her professional life Betty was a women of firsts: first female broadcaster at CBC Radio; first female journalist to cross the Arctic Circle; first female anchor of a cross-Canada CBC Radio show, Trans Canada Matinee, a forerunner to programs like Morningside and Cross Canada Checkup. She took a direct route to achieve her chosen career as a broadcaster/producer. After graduation from MacMaster University, she walked into a Hamilton radio station and was hired to write advertising copy. Before long her voice became instantly recognizable to the many radio listeners who welcomed her into their homes. In an interview for the 2002 Alliston Herald Hall of Fame supplement, she said, "I've had a very varied, wonderful career in broadcasting." One of the highlights was in 1956 when she covered the Royal Tour, including a trip down the St. Lawrence River on the royal yacht Britannica, the type of choice assignment that you did not get unless you earned it.

Betty and her partner Allan semi-retired from broadcasting in 1975 and moved permanently from Toronto to Allan's old farmhouse on the fifth line of Tecumseth. The couple settled in and soon made the small villages of Tottenham and Beeton their own. Betty became a Noon Hour Supervisor and classroom volunteer at the

Tecumseth South Elementary School next door while Allan settled into creating books from his spools filled with oral histories.

Life began to follow a familiar pattern. Betty would feel the community was lacking a certain opportunity or activity, she would gather up a group of like minded people, and together they would fill the gap. She brought Al-Anon to the village to share support with other family members or friends of people with drinking problems. She faithfully continued to attend the weekly meetings for most of her life. Betty liked to sing but no suitable choir existed until she joined with other singers to form the Achill Choral Society. She joyously lifted up her voice in song for many years at the winter and spring concerts and on tours to Ireland and the Netherlands. When Betty and friends wanted to listen to top-notch Canadian music, they formed Tottenham Concert Goers, with Betty as its first President. Three to four times a year for fifteen years they brought big name Canadian performers to stages in Alliston, Beeton, and Tottenham.

Meanwhile Allan got busy forming a creative writing class. Betty attended every class. Other members recall that her role was to rein in Allan when he went off on an unrelated tangent. The three volumes of collected poetry called *Creative Mosaics* included *November Sun,, Dreams,,,and Why, Serenity, Anorexia, and Early October* by Betty Tomlinson Anderson. Betty used words with care and elegance to inform and convince, and as a call to action, to laughter, and sometimes to tears. Her previous professional writing had been on radio scripts for her broadcasts but in her author notes in *Creative Mosaics, Volume 3*: “She admits that creative writing comes less easily, but when it does, it is thoroughly satisfying.”

Betty collaborated with Allan on *Greetings from Canada : an album of unique Canadian postcards from the Edwardian era, 1900-1916*, published in 1978, giving her a taste for history. The same year Allan became a founding Director of Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society. Betty also joined the Society and served as President from 1984-88. It was a busy time for TWGHS and its President, with house tours, special events, and new publications, including the book launch of *Tecumseth Township, the Unforgettable Past : a Local History of Tecumseth Township, Simcoe County, Province of Ontario, Canada*, co-authored by Betty and Allan. A few years later they acted as consultants on *A History of Vespra Township : Pioneers and Settlements, Communities, Historic Places, People and Events*.

Betty excelled at planning and moderating lively panel discussions for TWGHS meetings, mostly on topics that explored the lives of women in earlier times, such as *Family Life on the Farm in Days Gone By* and *Women of Significance*. When the Society produced the award winning history video, *New Tecumseth: the New Town With a Long Past* in 1994, Betty was the obvious choice as narrator with her distinctive CBC trained voice. A fond memory from other times is Betty’s traditional rendition of the Stephen Leacock short story, *Hoodoo McFiggins Christmas*, which she read with verve and wry humour at the Annual Old-Fashioned Christmas Parties. In 2006 for her contributions to the preservation of our local heritage her portrait, alongside Allan’s, was added to the Museum on the Boyne Wall of Honour.

There was one more major collaboration from the Anderson team to come, Allan with the great idea and Betty with the organizational ability to pull it all together. Their brainchild, the Advisory Committee on Culture for the Amalgamated Town of Alliston, Beeton, Tecumseth, and Tottenham eventually turned into the New Tecumseth and Area Arts Council. Betty became the first President of the new organization and wrote the Preface for the second Cultural Resources Directory in 1996. Since then there have been many changes and enhancements, but the Arts Council still remains true to its early values of dedicated people working together to create “a vibrant and exciting arts community.”

After Allan’s death in 1994, Betty jumped headlong into a number of projects: Allan’s memorial, suitably held in the old Tottenham Council Chambers above the library, the deposition of the 30,000 plus books that made

up Allan's library, the selling of his accumulated garage sale finds and various collections, organizing his papers for the University of Guelph Archives, and creating the Allan Anderson Young Writers' Memorial Award which is now attached to the SSAC Creative Works Youth Writing Contest for the Teen Short Story category. She learned how to use a computer and frequently visited the library to access her emails. She wrote articles for Project Plowshares and long, beautifully crafted, heartfelt letters to the editor about the damage to our environment and the tragedies faced by people around the world. She wrote her memoirs, which she published privately and gave to her friends.

Eventually the hilltop farmhouse had to be sold and Betty moved to various places but always within her local community. Her favourite was probably the cute, cosy cottage in the woods near Piper's Hill. Her final home was in an apartment building in Tottenham, on the third floor and then in the easier to access first floor apartment. One of the unexpected joys of this final chapter was the deep, loving friendship she developed with her biological son John, the baby she gave up for adoption in England. For a number of years they took turns travelling across the Atlantic for visits. John was welcomed into the community here, for his own sake and for Betty's because her friends knew that he brought her much happiness.

Otherwise, these were not always the easiest of times. She stopped driving, then walking became more difficult when her Achilles' tendon was inadvertently severed during an operation. She did not complain, but she depended more and more on the kindness of friends for rides about town. Sometimes she could be seen pushing her walker with determination down the sidewalks of Tottenham. When her recurring bouts of depression became too deep to bear she checked herself into a hospital in Toronto for electric shock therapy. As she was with most things, Betty was very open about her mental health issues. The therapy left gaps in her memory so when people greeted her on the street or picked her up in their cars, she would say, "Now tell me exactly how it is I know you." Not as a sweet little old lady might, but confidently and matter of factly like the broadcaster she always was.

The word indomitable was invented specifically to describe Betty Tomlinson Anderson. Always interested, always interesting, broad-minded, compassionate, with a talent for organizing, delegating, and bringing out the best in others. A wise elder who gave years of her life to her community. After her memorial service, after all the separate parts of her life were assembled into a whole for all to see, many of us thought "I wish I had known her better, I wish there had been more time to talk and learn." But we can still learn from Betty every day. Betty did not waste her 93 years. She lived every one of them. Indomitably.

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