

Flo WHITESELL

NOMINEE: Flo WHITESELL

MEMBER SPOUSE: Orval WHITESELL, # 1525

DETACHMENT(S): Merlin 1955 – 1960

NOMINATOR: Spouse

SILENT PARTNER STORY

On September 20, 1955, Orval Whitesell was transferred to Merlin Detachment, and significantly, his wife Flo accompanied him. Cliff was the sole OPP officer assigned to the detachment until his transfer four and a half years later. Cliff, Flo and their two children quickly settled into the detachment residence, which had a secluded room at the back, with a separate entrance, that served as Cliff's police office.

Flo assisted with police duties at the office/residence. She would take the calls for service and then relay them to the one lady in town who worked as a telephone operator. She also worked out of her home. When required, she would connect Flo with Chatham OPP regional headquarters so that Flo could pass along information for dispatching to officers.

At that time police officers worked six days a week, with no overtime. If Flo and Cliff happened to be on their way out the door for a social evening and the phone rang, away went Cliff on the call and their evening out was cancelled.

There was one incident that stood out for the Whitesell family. It was the time an escapee from a mental institution in the United States came into the house. Flo was terrified, as she had their two small children in the next room. It would be over a half an hour before she was able to get to the phone and put in a call to dispatch Cliff, so he could return and deal with the individual.

There was also the night in 1959 when Cliff was seriously hurt in a motor vehicle collision. Flo took the call that there was an accident with a tomato wagon and Cliff's police cruiser. He ended up with a full-length leg cast for eight months.

One pleasant memory they had of their time at Merlin was at Christmas time. Each December they would find fruit and other items at the entrance to the office. Attached to the gifts was a note of thanks from an unknown person.

Looking back, Cliff said that Flo handled it all "like a real trooper" and yet received no pay for her service. They did not realize until years later the risk(s) that they would become involved in. Flo just carried on as if it was expected of her.

About Merlin

Located 5 kilometers north of Lake Erie in the municipality of Chatham-Kent, the town of Merlin is home to 750 residents. While this is primarily a farming community, dozens of windwills have been erected in the area over the last decade.