

Lois Muriel MILLER

NOMINEE: Lois Muriel MILLER

MEMBER SPOUSE: Alvin Eric MILLER, # 1883

DETACHMENT: Minaki 1961 – 1965

NOMINATOR: Merrilynn Frances OLMSTEAD (daughter)

SILENT PARTNER STORY

In 1961 my dad, Eric Miller, was transferred to Minaki from Kenora. Since he was to be the officer in charge of the two-man detachment, he moved into the detachment residence with his wife (my mom) Lois and their one-year-old son Greg.

I was born in February of the following year at the Kenora hospital. After a few days in hospital, mom and I were driven home to Minaki. It was fortunate I wasn't born a few weeks later as we would have been cut-off from our home, unless taken by boat down the Winnipeg River. Minaki is about 55 kilometres northwest of Kenora and the last ten kilometres of road was usually impassable for a month each spring. When the frost would leave the ground a muddy quagmire would appear.

In October of 1962, the scenario was repeated when the last member of our family, my sister Karla, was born at the Kenora hospital. Mom was kept busy tending three babies under four years of age; looking after the detachment in the absence of the two officers; and providing room and board for the second officer, since reasonable accommodation was unavailable.

Our home was a waterfront summer cottage that served as both residence and detachment. The single bedroom downstairs was shared by my parents and baby sister. Upstairs, there were two small bedrooms – one for my brother and myself to share and the other for the second officer (Maurice Lapointe, followed by Andy Maksymchuk). The tiny detachment office was actually the front entranceway leading to the living room.

As well as policing Minaki, the detachment was responsible for two nearby First Nation settlements (Savoyard Town and Kelly Town); two reserves (Whitedog and Caribou); and two tiny communities (Wade and Malachi) west of Minaki, which were accessible only by CN rail. My dad and the other officer would use a railroad speeder or ride the freight train to respond to complaints at these two places.

Communication difficulties

The detachment had a boat to patrol not only a portion of the Winnipeg River, but Sand and Pistol lakes. The boat was not equipped with a radio. Whenever the officers were aboard the boat they were out of communication.

There was no police radio at the detachment. If an officer was requested, Mom would have to telephone Kenora Headquarters and give the details to the radio dispatcher for relay to the officer(s), if they were fortunate enough to be in the car to hear it. The police phone number was 4, and that line was the only one into the detachment/residence. Mom was limited to the amount of time she talked on the phone in case of emergency. Whenever she called relatives or friends, her long-distance calls had to be logged and personally paid for.

The two officers were very busy and mom had to answer the door and telephone whenever the officers were on calls or in court in Kenora, which was quite often. She also provided meals for any prisoners in the jail located in a building a short walking distance from the detachment. Mom was also expected to keep the detachment and jail clean, and search female prisoners.

Mom was pretty well housebound and restricted in her leisure activities. She couldn't leave her three babies, even when dad was at home, in case he had to leave on a call. Mom occasionally entertained visitors from headquarters and usually fed them lunch. I can also recall her consoling grieving families when there was a tragedy.

When dad, mom and Greg first arrived in Minaki they inherited a black German shepherd named Sin, the detachment dog. Several owners had him in succession, but he was always loyal to the current family. We kids were not allowed to go near the water so whenever we strayed too close or attempted to check out the floating boathouse, Sin would bark, grab our clothes and pull us toward the house.

Sin was also protection for mom. For example, one day when she was alone with the kids, a man threatened to kill her because of an incident weeks prior. He showed up with a knife in his hand - his demeanour anything but friendly. Mom released Sin and he bit the man in the seat of his pants, just as dad pulled into the yard. My dad confiscated the knife and locked the individual in the jail.

About Minaki

Minaki is a small, unincorporated community in northern Ontario, about a 55 kilometer drive north of Kenora. Minaki is gateway to lakes and rivers of the Ontario portion of the Winnipeg River system, including Gun, Sand, Pistol and Roughrock lakes. Fly-in service is available to the English River and lakes farther north.