

With photo:

OPP command staff members present Margaret Thompson with a Silent Partner Award on Nov. 8, 2018.

Margaret 'Marg' THOMPSON

NOMINEE: Margaret 'Marg' THOMPSON

MEMBER SPOUSE: Bruce Everett 'Ev' THOMPSON, #2111

DETACHMENT(S): Whitney 1965 – 1970, Geraldton 1975 – 1980

NOMINATOR: Felicia BRYAN (granddaughter)

SILENT PARTNER STORY

Margaret Mary Thompson (née McLaren) was born on June 18, 1942 in St. Catharines, Ontario. At the age of 21, Ev Thompson, her future husband, joined the Ontario Provincial Police. He married Marg and whenever he was transferred, Marg and their kids, Anthony Glen (Andy) and Mary Vanessa followed.

In 1961, Ev's first posting was to Brockville Detachment, followed by a transfer to a two-man posting at Whitney Detachment in 1965. Ev, Marg and the family moved to Whitney where they stayed until 1970. When Ev was promoted to Corporal in 1975, he was transferred to Geraldton Detachment and again the family followed.

With a current population of just over 2,000, Geraldton lies 282 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay. During the years the Thompsons were in Geraldton, Marg and the children were not so intimately involved in the day-to-day operations of the OPP, however, circumstances during that period of time saw their lives change forever, one fateful day.

In 1979, their son Andy tragically died. Andy, along with six others, had been participating in a prescribed Ministry of Natural Resources fire that had gone wrong. Andy was one of four *Experience '79* students who were school chums from Geraldton. Also killed that day were two junior rangers and a summer forestry worker. Andy's body was located alongside the others in an area where they were not

supposed to be near - Esnagami Lake, northwest of Nakina. Following the tragedy, Ev was transferred to Midland Detachment, where the family stayed until he retired as a Sergeant in 1993.

At two of these more remote locations, Whitney and Geraldton, Marg, a teacher by profession, was called upon to perform many tasks on behalf of the OPP. These are some of Marg's recollections from 1965 to 1970 while posted with her husband Ev to Whitney.

When the extended family learned of the Whitney posting, their children's grandmothers were horrified and stated, "We'll never see the grandchildren. It's so far!" At the time, they lived in Belleville which was only one hundred miles away from Ev, Marg and family.

A few weeks earlier, Ev had been at the Ontario Provincial Police District Headquarters in Perth to write his papers. They were looking for a volunteer Provincial Constable to go to Whitney, a two-man detachment with a troublesome history, and Ev was hoping to get this posting.

Ev called Marg. She could tell by his voice he wanted to go so badly, so she supported his decision. Then she spent the rest of the day with a map trying to find out where Whitney was. She knew that if Ev accepted this transfer, the grandparents would have a much longer trip to visit with family. In a circular twist, Marg's dad had helped construct the first real road through Algonquin Park. He knew where it was. So, as it turned out, the posting to Whitney was a step back in time for everyone in the family.

Ev and Marg were struggling financially, mainly with their student aid loans from college. In August, they had lost most of their clothes and many other possessions in a tent fire. They decided this transfer would be a fresh start for them both, and the grandparents would learn to adjust.

Arrangements were made for Ev and Marg to rent a two-bedroom bungalow, which was adjacent to Whitney Detachment and owned by McCrae Lumber in Whitney. The house was meant for the lumber company's bookkeeper but he had a house of his own. The bookkeeper's house, like the house Ev and Marg rented, was one of the few in town that had a bathtub! This seemed perfect for the Thompson family as they had a dog.

Provincial Constable Ted Noack, Badge #1765 was the commanding officer who lived in the detachment house.

Given her sheltered upbringing under two very strict parents, Marg soon found out how ill-equipped she was for her new life. On her first foray into Macmillan's General Store, she encountered a formidable woman who challenged her, "You're the new cop's wife?"

"Yes, my husband is a police officer," Marg primly replied.

"Any time he wants to put his boots under my bed is fine with me," she said. Marg later learned this lady was one of the local bootleggers. She was shocked. Today, over five decades later, Marg is still not sure that she really understood the woman's meaning.

A few years later, it would be the daughter of that same bootlegger who hung their tall five-year-old daughter over the bridge above the famous rapids on her first day of school. That their daughter was later ever able to learn was considered amazing by a child psychologist.

Life in Whitney would prove to have many dangers for their family. Marg's knowledge of life in a small, isolated community continued to grow. She learned from the locals that her young children were safer if tied to the clothesline, along with the dog, when they played outside. The revelation came to her one rainy autumn day, after being shut inside their tiny house with two rambunctious preschoolers. Marg finally saw the light, "Good idea, to the clothesline!" she declared.

At the detachment, Ted Noack and his wife Iris worked as a team. There was no radio communication, no detachment secretary or custodian. They did it all. When they were off duty and away from town, Ev and Marg were expected to follow their example. Ev had to learn the ropes quickly. In December 1966, Ted was promoted to Corporal and transferred to Rolphton Detachment, leaving Ev in charge of the Whitney Detachment.

Marg was so dedicated to her duties that even if Ev was off duty, she would continue to answer the door and relay messages to her husband. They worked out a system so that Marg used the porch lights at

their house to warn him when there was a call for service, and whether it was serious or not. Although she can't recall how she did it, Marg would flash the porch lights to let Ev know if the matter was urgent.

Marg learned the names and phone numbers of the various little stores and "pop stops" that Ev would visit as he patrolled through Madawaska, Algonquin Park and the rest of the detachment area where he would catch up on the news and goings-on, particularly with the bootleggers.

Algonquin Park had an unreliable bush telephone that Marg would also use on occasion to track if Ev had entered or exited the park. This became important one night when, in response to a call of a motorcycle gang causing problems in a campground, he had disappeared for more than three hours. Marg walked the wax off the hardwood floor that night, then was given proper heck when Ev came home. Apparently, he had de-escalated the situation and had it under control when several cruisers appeared and tensions flared again. He thought Marg had called them in. She pointed out to him that she wouldn't have known who to call! She was just a wife and who would listen to her anyway?! It turned out that somehow Huntsville Detachment had heard about the gang and called Barrie (of all places).

In retrospect, one of Marg's chief roles was to entertain, provide tea and provide empathy to anyone in need of a band-aid. A visiting OPP Superintendent was one caller who caught her by surprise. Marg initially noticed him peering through her porch window through her suspended tatty legs while she was doing floor exercises. Well, she thought, "I gotta dress better!"

Tea and empathy? Many of the people who happened to die in the provincial park were from out of town. The Thompsons would settle their bereaved families in the living area, among all the toys, while Ev would answer their questions and perhaps return any personal effects. Meanwhile, Marg provided refreshments and small talk. Ev, hidden in the kitchen, would determine if they matched the pictures found in wallets, some of which on occasion might be pornographic. One winter they did this three times for the same deceased person! How was that? Yes... he had multiple wives.

Sometimes it was just tea, as the doctor/coroner Pete Smith would stop for refreshments before taking the bodies to Barry's Bay. Trying to keep inquisitive youngsters away from the driveway and the station wagon with visible ominous shapes, one times five, was no easy task as Pete was never in a hurry.

Band-aids? No Saturday night was complete without a brawl it seemed. If someone was arrested and was a little the worse for the experience, Marg would get to help patch them up and Ev would take care of the most aggressive ones. He was always mindful of the nearby presence of their two little ones.

There was no such thing as take out or fast food in Whitney, so when Ev called her late one night to be prepared for many men dressed as hunters showing up at 3 a.m., expecting food and hot drinks, Marg had to hit her freezer. Luckily, she had already made homemade donuts that time. Oh yes, their presence in town was a secret. Ev was directed not to tell her who they were or why they were in her kitchen at 3 am. A scruffy bunch to boot. RIGHT! It was fairly clear this motley crew was the liquor squad, as the local bootleggers found out when they were raided.

Another group of unexpected visitors, who happened to like spaghetti, were the abused children that Ev and the Children's Aid worker from North Bay would seize. In those days, police were allowed to take the children from school, so the Thompson household became their refuge while arrangements were made to transfer them to North Bay.

In some instances, the abuse was horrific. Once Marg had to testify in court as to what she had observed. Unfortunately, the father always seemed to get the children back and the abuse continued. One child had the imprint of the wood stove top on his bottom. These are images that have lived with Marg throughout her life.

One night Ev brought home an old lobo (wolf) he had accidentally killed in the park with his cruiser. He laid him out at the end of their driveway. Not long after, his thin-looking mate appeared. She had followed the cruiser all the way from the park. She lay down beside him and never left all night. Instead of tea she got a bone and some meat. Marg never forgot her, nor a powerful lesson of life... loyalty and duty to one's mate.

Perhaps one of the scariest tasks for Marg was answering the door of her own house. By this time Ev was Detachment Commander. He placed a sign on the office door to come to their house if help was required. One night as Marg got to the door (but before she had opened it) their German Shepherd crouched beside her in the narrow hallway and rumbled. No barking or growling... just rumbling.

Marg got the message from the dog that this was danger and she did not open the door but rather spoke through it. It was the only time she ever did that. The message and the incident the person described did not ring true, but Marg agreed to let her husband know. It was many hours before she got through to him and when he got to the address, it was obviously a phony call. When Ev came home, he realized that their car in the driveway had been rendered so it couldn't be driven. Marg would well remember that night a year or so later when Ev was jumped by three men on a lonely stretch of road.

On a positive note, there was a bonus or payment to being Ev's wife, especially when he became Detachment Commander. The detachment had pavement and the Thompson household next door did not. The kids were now allowed to ride their tricycles at the detachment. However, if they saw a police cruiser coming, they knew to pedal fast for home! They were too young to read of course but they became adept at spotting any kind of police vehicle.

Answering the door got Marg in more trouble one Sunday afternoon. A man had come to report he had been involved in an accident and the other driver had been seriously or possibly fatally injured. Other people had taken him to the hospital. There were no ambulances. Marg told him she would call her husband who would need to interview him but he refused to wait. He said he was going to Toronto. Despite her best efforts, the man would not listen and did not stay. So, against all the rules and her better judgement, she tried to remember what Ev would ask and then requested a report and wrote it all out. It did turn out to be a fatal motor vehicle collision and she did get chewed out for doing her first and only police report.

One knock at the door was to notify that one of Marg's students had shot another in the stomach. Fortunately, Ev was home at the time, so he immediately drove off with the injured 12-year-old at a very high rate of speed to the hospital in Peterborough. The doctors said the child wouldn't have lasted another ten minutes. Ev's immediate action, lifesaving manoeuvre and superior driving skills in saving the boy's life were never recognized. In fact, the father of the boy who was shot became angry when Ev refused to return the gun and wrote a complaint to headquarters.

It was a tense time in Marg's classroom thereafter. She was trying to keep her role as teacher and police wife separate as they waited each day for news from the hospital and prayed for his survival. Meanwhile, the shooter was in the classroom all during this time.

There was no police radio reception in Whitney for some time but Ev could reach Pembroke Detachment from one location if at a high elevation. They figured they needed to improve the porch light system. However, when Marg would call Pembroke with an occurrence to relay to Ev, sometimes they would so massacre the pronunciation of the Polish names that he couldn't determine who they were talking about. On these occasions, she asked them to hold the telephone with her on the line next to the radio microphone and she would shout the info directly to Ev. It worked!

Eventually, they had radio! There was one receiver with no transmitter. It followed Ev from the office to the house. As Marg recalled, it made a charming centerpiece for Christmas dinner. After the Christmas break, she no longer dared to ask her colleagues at school about their holidays. She knew such things as the teacher next door had chased her son-in-law around the table, carving knife in hand, or had ploughed the car into a snow bank while totally drunk.

To the Thompson family, Whitney is where the tradition of fondues for special meals originated. It was a meal that could be easily stopped or started depending on Ev arriving or leaving the table. Mongolian hot pot was the favourite with the kids being little.

The annual Christmas parade was an example of the many times the OPP families of Whitney Detachment came together to participate in the community. It was the wives and children who represented the OPP on the floats each year as the guys stayed in the background. Over the years, there were various themes that mainly had to do with law enforcement, such as the perils of operating a snow machine while impaired.

Teach too? From the moment they landed in Whitney, the local school board started the guilt trips on Marg. Qualified teachers were in short supply and here she was, doing nothing in their eyes. They would get Marg a good housekeeper, whatever she needed, so she could teach. She thought, "Right!"

Every bootlegger in town (of note for Marg, they were all female) was clamoring to become their housekeeper. The first time Marg tried teaching their new housekeeper met her at the school to drive her home. Thoughtful right? Her licence was under suspension!

They did finally get a wonderful, trustworthy, loving lady. Ev would work a split shift, often one to nine and Marg could cover the rest. During one of these times, Ev took the kids to a Hallowe'en party at Marg's school. Tradition dictated that she provide the food and treats for the whole village of Sabine. While there, someone drove up onto their yard and through the children's sandpile where they played trucks every day. They killed the family dog sleeping there. Later they would learn that this was a deliberate act. Whether it was the same person who had previously forced Marg off the road on another occasion they would never know.

As the detachment grew to three men and radio, contact began to spread. Marg's role would lessen. She was very happy to report that she got through those years with having to wash only one or two police cruisers! And, she never had to guard any female prisoners, so speculates she got off lucky in that regard, too.

In summary, Ev Thompson spent about a third of his career in northern Ontario at Whitney and Geraldton, and Marg and their two kids had followed. While posted to Whitney, she was called upon to perform many tasks on behalf of the OPP.

While living next door to the detachment in Whitney, Marg was often left alone with her family while Ev was on patrol with limited means of communication. She was expected to answer the detachment door when people knocked. She acted as nursemaid for injured prisoners and made meals for various visitors, sometimes burly types at 3 a.m. At times, their house was refuge for battered children. She received no compensation for her services, but would gladly do it all again... performing the duties of a Silent Partner.

Located six kilometres east of Algonquin Park's east gate on the Trans Canada Highway (Highway 60) Whitney is now part of the township of South Algonquin. Starting as a lumber town in the late 19th century, South Algonquin is now home to 1,096 residents (2016). In 1983, the Canadian National Railway (CNR) Renfrew subdivision was abandoned between Whitney and Renfrew.

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