

Myra MAKSYMCHUK

NOMINEE: Myra MAKSYMCHUK

MEMBER SPOUSE: Andy F. MAKSYMCHUK, # 2599

DETACHMENT: Central Patricia 1967 – 1969, 1974 – 1976

NOMINATOR: Spouse

SILENT PARTNER STORY

When we arrived at Central Patricia – the most northerly OPP detachment – my husband Andy was to be one of three Provincial Constables; however, one officer, Tom Varga, had already left to prepare, train and serve at Expo 67 in Montreal. He was never replaced. My husband was in charge and the only other officer was Neil Vingerhoets, who was replaced after a couple of months of our arrival by Robin Russell.

There were no medical facilities for the non-First Nation and non-treaty First Nation people. (Many reserves had a federal nursing station but for treaty members only.) Word soon got out that I was a registered nurse. The telephone seemed to ring both day and night for either police or medical services, or both. With two towns (Pickle Lake and Central Patricia) and 14 Indian Reserves and settlements to police – only one of which (Osnaburgh) was accessible by police car – I was frequently left alone. Sometimes it would be for days at a time. Our residence was attached to the office and cell block. The phone inside our house was an extension of the police phone and I was instructed not to use it for lengthy personal calls, but I was expected to answer it or any knock on the door, day or night, when both officers were away. I would take and record the calls for non-emergent police requests and, if I couldn't contact the officer on the police radio (which was practically always), I would give the caller as much advice and direction as possible, whenever I could.

With court being a two-day and sometimes three-day affair at Sioux Lookout – over 400 km away – it almost seemed as if the police officers were away more than they were at the detachment. I eventually became used to it, but I must say it was an eerie feeling, especially at night. I was alone in a large,

threebedroom home attached to a police office and cellblock in an unfamiliar and isolated community, where I knew no one.

Compassion for others

One night around midnight I was home alone and asleep when I was awakened by a knock at the detachment door. A poorly-clad battered woman and her young barefoot son were at the door. She had been evicted from her home by her intoxicated husband and was seeking help from police. Both officers were away on duty and the best I could think of doing was to administer first aid and put the complainants in the empty cell for the night. The following morning I sent them on their way with spare personal clothing, including a couple of pairs of woollen socks for the little boy from my husband's dresser drawer.

When prisoners were brought to the detachment cells, I was usually asked to search the females before they were incarcerated. For each meal I provided for the prisoners I was paid a dollar. That hardly covered the cost of the food that far north and certainly didn't compensate me for food preparation and clean-up!

There were times during the two years we spent in Central Patricia when abandoned children would be brought to the detachment. There was no Children's Aid Society representative in the community, so I would be tasked with providing the dear little souls with a warm bath, hot meal and a place to sleep until they could be transported to Dryden or Sioux Lookout. I remember one child, a mere babe-in-arms, that I personally held all the way to Savant Lake in the paddy wagon and then on the train to Sioux Lookout. I would have done it anyway, but for this I received a small cheque for "matron duties."

While at Central Patricia I became pregnant with our first child. Just before the due date arrived, my husband drove me the 290 kilometres in the paddy wagon to the Trans Canada Highway at Ignace. There, he put me on a Greyhound bus to Kenora (250 kilometres) where I stayed at the home of my sister.

A week after our baby daughter Lesa arrived, my husband picked me up at the hospital in the same paddy wagon. When we returned to Central Patricia, it was back to the same routine with the added burden of caring for our newborn – maternity leave was non-existent!

The most frightening part of our two-year stay at Central Patricia was when my husband and I both contracted the Hong Kong Flu. Our daughter was only a few months old and the second Constable was away on vacation. We were both too weak and feverish to get out of bed. An officer was flown in to handle the many calls for police service (many due to the flu), but the temporary officer (Cy Wood) was unfamiliar with the area and was constantly walking to and from our sick room to get details and directions. Our main concern was for our baby, but a compassionate and sympathetic neighbour came and took her into her own home to care for her for a few days. Fortunately, our daughter did not come down with the illness.

We did enjoy the infrequent times when company came, so it was more of a pleasure than a task to occasionally provide dinners for work-related visits from senior officers and other officials. We transferred out of Central Patricia in 1969.

Our return to the community

Along with promotion to Corporal in April of 1974, my husband was transferred back to Central Patricia with a promise of four Constables to be under his command. The increase in personnel was necessary due to a new mine being constructed at nearby Kapkichi Lake, resulting in a massive population increase at Pickle Lake. Since the miners and construction workers took up every inhabitable place in the area, there was no place for additional police officers to live. We again had to make do with only one Constable (Dennis O'Sullivan) until new police homes were constructed. This took well over a year.

I found myself reliving the same lifestyle we had left behind five years earlier. This time, however, I had the added responsibility of our five-year-old son, Wade, and our six-year-old daughter, Lesa, who were adjusting to – among other lacking amenities – no television!

Adding to the police responsibilities were the antics of boisterous construction workers and single miners which took the police officers away on calls and frequently left me to answer the telephone, detachment office door and police radio at all hours.

A medical clinic was now in place, and court was being held at Pickle Lake in an abandoned Hudson's

Bay Company building. This meant trips out to court by police officers were not as frequent. On occasion, out-of-town court officials were fed and housed at the detachment residence when hotels were fully booked.

During this second posting to Central Patricia, female prisoner searches and prisoner meals were (again) provided as necessary.

About Central Patricia

Central Patricia dates back to the discovery of gold on the Crow River and at Pickle Crow in 1928. By 1935, mines had also been established in Pickle Lake. From 1928 to 1995, over 2.5 million ounces of gold were produced in the area. While Central Patricia still has a few buildings and residents, Pickle Crow has been almost entirely abandoned. The Township of Pickle Lake now encompasses both of these communities and listed a total population of 425 people in 2011.



C/Supt. D. Smiley, Myra Maksymchuk, Commissioner Hawkes