

**Noreen ROBERTSON**

**NOMINEE:** Noreen ROBERTSON

**MEMBER SPOUSE:** Cal ROBERTSON. # 1533

**DETACHMENT(S):** Ear Falls 1959 – 1963

**NOMINATOR:** Spouse

**SILENT PARTNER STORY**

We were sent to Ear Falls Detachment in early January 1959 immediately after Provincial Constable Cal Fulford was shot and killed on-duty on Christmas Eve 1958. Ear Falls was a one-man detachment and the new building had just been opened and occupied by the Fulford family only a couple of months earlier.

We had been in Dryden for about three months when I was selected to replace Constable Fulford. Noreen and I and our three children, ages one, three and five years, were relayed to Ear Falls in a department auto as I did not own a car at the time. I do not recall a single complaint from Noreen, but I am sure she was quite uneasy with the whole situation. At any rate, we survived the posting and remained there for the next four and a half years until June 1963. The one year old child at the time we moved to Ear Falls is now a member of our Ontario Provincial Police Veterans' Association, retired Sergeant Don Robertson # 9163.

While in Ear Falls, Noreen not only did most, if not all of the duties of a Silent Partner, in her spare time she also acted as the Secretary/Treasurer of the local school board.

Because the Ear Falls area was a great hunting and fishing spot, cooking for unexpected guests was not a problem. The freezer was stocked with fish and moose meat and because Noreen liked to bake, there was usually a pie or cake available. The Crown Attorney and the Judge's clerk were frequent visitors and many others have surprised us, over the years, by remembering meals shared around our small kitchen

table. Senior officers dropped in periodically but rarely stayed for a meal, sometimes coffee, since it was only another hour to Red Lake.

Few prisoner meals were provided because there was no court facilities in Ear Falls and most prisoners were transported as quickly as possible to Red Lake or Kenora.

Visitors who rang the doorbell in the middle of the night to ask where Ear Falls was were not always as welcome, but were treated politely and told "this is it." The sign on the side of the road was less than 50 feet past our residence.

The telephone system was in the home of a local woman and she was the only operator. Sometimes she became "incapacitated" and Noreen had difficulty getting through to the Red Lake Detachment. At those times, she called the local Hydro Control Room and they were able to make a connection with the Red Lake Detachment office.

The only time Noreen was not enthusiastic about being an unpaid employee was when the District Inspector decided that I should skip a curling team at the newly initiated Canadian Police Curling Championship. This meant several days somewhere in Northern Ontario and, if successful there, up to a week somewhere else in Canada at the National Playoffs. Noreen thought at first that she and the children would take the opportunity to visit her parents, but the District Inspector vetoed the idea with the announcement that the building could not be left empty in the middle of winter and she would have to stay and look after the furnace, the waterworks, etc.

This was particularly annoying because we had no vehicle of our own at the time and the nearest grocery store was more than a mile away. Thank goodness for helpful neighbours!

The Inspector then announced that he had a set of curling sweaters for the team and since there happened to be five sweaters, he would go along as cheerleader.

This went on every winter, but it was not quite as difficult after we bought a car and Noreen was not confined to our home with the children all the time.

On rare occasions, Noreen was called to the office because I or another officer had a female prisoner. This meant a quick search of pockets and patting the person down, but little else.

### **About Ear Falls**

Located approximately 480 kilometers northwest of Thunder Bay on the English River, Ear Falls “was once known as Otahwaka Powitek to the Ojibwa people. This area was believed to be haunted by the spirit of a giant beaver which lived between the upper and lower falls. It was said that when the beaver was swimming, its ears could be seen rising and falling in the foaming water. It is from this myth that the name Ear Falls was adopted.” <http://www.ear-falls.com/visit/ear-falls-history>

A lot has changed since the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company united to set up posts in the Ear Falls area almost 200 years ago; however, hunting and fishing continue to draw many to this town of approximately 1,000 people.

Only once did Noreen incur my wrath. The telephone operator called to say the wife of an elderly man had come to her for help because the woman's husband was lying on the floor and could not get up. From what she knew of the man, Noreen believed this could be a legitimate medical problem so she called a neighbour who was a nurse. Since the nurse did not drive, Noreen picked her up and they both dropped their children with another neighbour and proceeded to the telephone office to get directions to the man's home. When they pulled up, the telephone operator and the wife came out each carrying a bag which clinked loudly. That was the first clue. When they arrived at the home and entered, they saw two men, one lying on the floor, giggling and the other in a chair fast asleep. The nurse gave the man on the floor a cursory look and then they left the four of them to party. When Noreen told me what had happened, I scolded her for going on a "police call" until she convinced me it had sounded like a medical emergency. She believed she was providing the only available medical help.

Our closest support was Red Lake detachment, 50 miles to the north, and Vermilion Bay detachment, 65 miles to the south. Also, in those days we did not have police radios, but only a radio/telephone system which in remote centres like Ear Falls was not a very reliable system. Noreen became very adept at contacting me either through local phone calls or phone calls to Red Lake detachment to have them call me on the radio phone. If calls she received in my absence required immediate assistance, Red Lake members were very supportive of us.

The officers at Red Lake were wonderful help when needed and most of them have remained good friends all these years later. Noreen will never forget the many times during those four and a half years that she answered the phone to hear the friendly voice of then Corporal, later Superintendent, Dick Bender say, "Good morning Deputy! Is the boss around?" Knowing that at least one person in authority recognized that she had value, made up for a lot of inconveniences.