

Linda DuHAMEL

NOMINEE: Linda DuHAMEL

MEMBER SPOUSE: Norman DuHAMEL # 2205

DETACHMENT(S): Still River 1965 – 1968

NOMINATOR: Self

SILENT PARTNER STORY

Norman and I grew up in a small northern Ontario town and we were school sweethearts. Norm had a dream to be a police officer but at the time he was working as a welder for the pipeline. The local town police were a great influence on Norm and when they found out he would like to be one of them they assisted him in any way they could so he wrote the exam for the OPP.

In June of 1962 he received word that he had passed and that the OPP would contact him in the near future. On July 23, 1962, at the age of 22, Norm received his OPP badge and reported for duties to the North Bay District Headquarters. In October of that year, we were married and moved to North Bay but not for long as Norm was sent off to police college for six months and I went back home to New Liskeard. When Norm completed training, we moved back to North Bay and spent three years there. Our first son, Brian, was born there.

In 1965 Norman accepted a transfer to Still River Detachment on Highway 69 in the Parry Sound District and moved his family there. The detachment consisted of a residence for the Detachment Commander along with the office and cells. There was also a garage and a second residence which was to become our home for the next three years.

The community consisted of a garage and restaurant up the road and the small town of Britt down the road. This is when I realized what isolation meant. Shopping, doctors, hospital, banks, etc., were in Parry Sound, about 75 kilometres south, and we went there by cruiser as the officers were always on call. Our

doctor would give OPP wives extended appointment times so we could talk and he could make sure we were coping with our new environment. Our doctor became the coroner for the area and spent many a night along with investigating officers sitting around our dinner table. He delivered our second son, Andre, in 1964 and remained friends even after we moved from the area.

At the detachment, Grant Sleep was the Corporal-in-charge and Norm was the Constable. Grant and his family live in the residence that was attached to the office and cells. We wives were always available to assist where needed. We answered phones, took messages and complaints both by phone and at the door, fed and kept an eye on prisoners and ran the radio. We also fed officers from other locations that would be in the area on an investigation or inspection.

Many times, I would go to hang out laundry and there would be a transient sitting on my back stoop waiting for the officers to return. There were also a couple of Indigenous communities in the area. One thing I always remember was the road signs that said "DO NOT PICK UP HITCHHIKERS" as we had Burwash Correctional Institute to the north of us and there was always the potential of escapees, so we wives were always extra cautious about opening our doors to strangers.

One incident that stands out in my mind even today is the time three prisoners escaped from Burwash and were on the run in our area. Norm and the other officers had been gone most of the morning and when they returned mid-afternoon, they had one of the prisoners in the cruiser and put him in the holding cells. He came home to tell me he had to go back out and search for the other two and told me to lock the doors and stay away from the windows as he had a feeling that they were close by.

That meant I would be alone at the detachment with two small children. I knew this didn't sit well with Norm. He left and came back with the young garage attendant from up the road to stay with us. On his way out the door, Norm put a gun on the kitchen table and said use it if you have to. This had both me and the young lad wondering what we were up against.

Later that night when the officers came back with a second prisoner, they spotted the third hiding in the shrubs under the window at the front of my house. God only knows what would have happened if the officers hadn't returned when they did.

In 1968 a young officer posted in Mattawa wanted to do a switch to Still River and Norm was approached about the transfer. I think I accepted before Norm had a chance to think it over. A month or so after we left, a young officer died by suicide in his residence at the detachment. So sad, but that is another story.

I must say that our stay in Still River was a learning experience for both of us. We made very good friends and returned for the closing of the Detachment. Norm served a great nine years in Mattawa. In 1977 he was promoted to Corporal and transferred to Casselman where he was again promoted to Sergeant then Detachment Commander. He was later promoted to Detective Sergeant at the Long Sault DHQ. He retired in 1994 after 32 years of service and passed away in 2010.

About Still River

Located 101 kilometers south of Sudbury on the Trans Canada Highway (Highway 69) Still River is now part of Henvey Township, which includes Britt Station as well.