



Lorraine Bennett

(1908 -)

Lorraine was born in Vancouver February 2, 1908. She contracted polio at two years of age, at a time when the word 'polio' did not exist and there was no treatment. There were challenges in the school yard: "There were bullies in those days, just like there is today. They called me 'limpy' and imitated me – you had to be quite hardboiled."

When Lorraine was 12, her father, anxious to try anything, agreed to two experimental surgeries over two years. She refused the third surgery. Her parents were devoted Salvation Army members, and she didn't feel sorry for herself, due to their faith.

Her father passed away when she was 14 and she and her mother came to Mission. Lorraine had missed 1 ½ years of school, due to hospitalization. "I gave a lot of thought to my future because if I lost my mother, I would have nobody. In Mission, everybody worked in the cannery. I couldn't because I'd have to stand all day. Then one day, this man from the telephone company came and said, 'How would you like to learn the board at the telephone office?' I got on, and worked myself up. People were dissatisfied with the telephone service stopping at 10PM. So for 25 cents a month extra they put a night operator on and I got the job!"

BC Telephone bought the Mission Telephone Company in 1929. Part of the agreement was that the staff had to stay, which raised an issue: "If you had any kind of handicap, you were swept under the carpet. They didn't know anything about me until they took over, then they found out I was lame, and that changed the whole picture. But they couldn't get rid of me, so I stayed".

She met her future husband on the phone: "There was a big basketball game, and everybody went. I had to go to work, so I didn't see the end of it. That night, I got this phone call and the man asked what time it was. The next night he phoned again and asked what time it was. Finally, he said to me, 'How did you like the basketball game the other night?' That was the beginning of that". His name was Dick Bennett. They were married in 1934, and built a house on the corner of 3rd and Murray. Women couldn't work once they got married, so Lorraine had to quit her beloved job. Lorraine consulted a doctor about pregnancy dangers, and was told she would just have to take her chances. They were blessed with two children: Janice in 1938 and Vernon in 1942.

Lorraine never had to ask her children to help: "They seemed to know that things weren't exactly right with me, so they helped me to do everything. Lorraine feels that her most worthwhile accomplishment is getting married and having a family. "What would I do without my family?" She now has 9 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren.

Lorraine's volunteer work began with a 20-year membership in the Comet (Count On Me Every Time) Club, a group of young women who raised funds for needy children in the community by putting on a dance or concert. Anything from surgery funds to shoes would be provided.

She volunteered as an "information gatherer" with the Red Cross Blood Bank and the TB x-ray van, stuffed envelopes for Easter Seals, and worked at election polling stations. She is a Charter member of the Mission District Historical Society, and a life member of St. Andrews United Church.

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