

Memories of St. Paul's United Church by Joan Bush

163rd Anniversary Service, September 18, 2016

Looking back on my 87 years, some of my fondest and most cherished memories are of time spent with the community of St. Paul's United Church. So many important milestones from my past are connected to this wonderful place. It is part of the threads that weave my life together, and I can not imagine what I would have done without it.

As a young teenager, I was ready to start at Stirling High School, but there were no school buses, so Dad or Mom would drive me to Stirling on Monday mornings. For the week, I boarded at Eliza Donnan's home on Edward Street along with the three Robson girls, and then was picked up on Friday night for home. The four of us decided to join St. Paul's Young People's Group. Harold Hagerman was the leader at the time and a favourite game of mine was "Huckle Buckle Beanstalk"—a game that involved hiding and seeking an object. We had a lot of fun and I met a lot of wonderful people.

Meanwhile, a family on River Valley Road was trying to solve an interesting mystery: their son, Jack, started faithfully walking, biking, or skiing into town every Monday, rain or shine. If it was too stormy, he would stay at Walter Elliott's, where he had worked some in the summer. Quite soon after, at Jack's 16th birthday party, the puzzle was solved: the family met Joan, the love of Jack's life.

Exciting times still awaited me: after five years of high school, I went on to Teacher's College and then taught for two years at Wellman's School. Jack and I married on July 8th, 1950 at the little white stucco church at Hoard's Station. Jack was busy building our new home on the shores of the Trent River, and we moved in for Christmas, with still a lot of work to go. I started teaching at Glen Ross, and then worked at Riverside Structures with Jack.

After getting married, I transferred my membership to St. Paul's. Sixty-five years ago, I was asked to join the UCW, where I served as President as well as in many different offices. I also had the opportunity to go to Edmonton as our Presbyterial Representative for General Council. The structure of the UCW changed; we became Units in local districts - River Valley, Carmel, etc., but remained members of St. Paul's UCW. We are an important part of our community: we cater weddings and funeral luncheons, and the Christmas Bazaar and Tea is always a popular highlight

The Church gave Jack and I so many great opportunities to take part, and to make a difference. Jack joined the choir at the age of 15 and sang in it for 65 years. He was also in the AOTS men's group. They sell Christmas Trees and do

the Pancake Breakfast where Jack flipped many a pancake and was known as “Flap Cake Jack.”

Both the UCW and AOTS combine forces and raise money for Church repairs and for various organizations such as sending children to Camp Quin-Mo-Lac. A few of their popular annual fundraisers include the Harvest Supper, the Auction Sale, and the Strawberry Social held every summer. Everyone works together to make events

such as these very successful. That’s what being part of a church community is about: working together to achieve common goals.

When I sat down to think about what to say today, I thought, I have had so many great memories involving St. Paul’s throughout my whole life. I remember a trip to Ottawa to see the tulips, Sunday School Teacher Training at Five Oakes, and hearing about how the Men’s group had such a great time out at Geneva Park, near Orillia. Changes throughout the years were many: when Rev. Baker and his wife came to St. Paul’s, there was the closure of West Huntingdon, Eglinton, and Carmel Churches, and their memberships were transferred to the St. Paul’s Member Roll. Mrs. Baker started the Junior and Senior Choirs, which grew quickly in popularity and have had many members throughout the years. They started the Festival of Sacred Praise, and it has continued for over 50 years. I am sure my daughter, Jane, remembers the year she had a small fish bone stuck in her throat and Jack had to remove it right before they both went on to perform. Several hours after that concert, I headed to the Belleville Hospital and delivered our son, Rob.

Christmas Traditions are an important time at the Church and in our family. The Cantata was always a highlight. One year, the members decided it was time to try something new, very new. So much work went into the Singing Christmas Tree. It was a beautiful sight: the choir gracefully walking down the aisle, disappearing as they climbed up those stairs to take their place, white shirts, red ties, and smiling faces filled their spots. The very first year, Kim Carter was the angel at the top of the tree. This was all made possible by volunteers, who didn’t think twice to give up their spare time, to put their hearts and souls into an event that would bring smiles to every face in the bursting crowd.

Being involved with the church was also an integral part of our children’s lives and helped them develop their faith. There were many trips made into Stirling for Junior Choir, Christmas Concert practice, and Youth Group. Sunday School taught them so many important life lessons. When getting the weekly offering ready, we always stressed that the one side of the envelope was for our church and the other side was to help others. One year, in the Santa Claus Parade, our Sunday School Float embodied this life lesson: half of the wagon had well-

dressed, excited children, dancing around a Christmas Tree, and on the other half, children huddled in a culvert to keep warm. We should never forget those who need our help.

Memories of St. Paul's bring smiles to my face, and laughter in my heart. Since Sunday School was always held before church, and Jack was in the choir, our kids eagerly joined me in the balcony, which we shared with the Wells, May, and Martin families. The kids sure did have a fun time up there. A hymn book was never dropped over the front row of the balcony by the Bush kids, but there were many close calls! But to be sure, check with Ted Reid to see if he knew of anyone dropping books. A favourite game was to put a book on the pew and when someone sat on it, everyone snickered! One Sunday morning, my sister, Doris sat in the gallery in her new muskrat coat. During the service you could hear little boys whispering while running their fingers down the muskrats. Since Uncle Ernie and Jack always did a spring muskrat trap, Dougie thought he knew where they had been caught and whispered if they were a swamp rat, a river rat, or a creek rat! Rev. John May always said he wished he could sit up there so he would know what was going on!

Sundays were always family days. Picnics packed and memories made. We hosted many church services at the river followed by potluck picnics. These were fun filled days with swimming, boating, horseshoes, and visiting with our church families.

St. Paul's has been so important to our family throughout the years. It has brought joy and happiness, faith and comfort through the sad times. Cards and letters we received after Jack's passing highlighted the fact that he was the first person they had met when they joined St. Paul's, and the impact his welcoming smile, hello, or solid handshake had, making new members feel immediately a part of this great community

I feel so blessed and proud to be part of a place that makes each and every person feel special. Thank you.