

PROFILE ON:

The Heritage of Music at Zion

It has been written in a tourist promotion brochure that Zion in Carnarvon is known as “the singing church.”

Where did that all begin?

In the 1940's a young man moved into the area to become the County's itinerant music teacher. He visited all the elementary schools and brought choral music to a new level in the lives of young students.

This man's name was Ralph Hussey – he and his parents moved into the house next to the bowling alley. His Dad worked at Allcorn's store (now known as the Hitchin' Post) and they owned and operated Strathcona Lodge during the summer months (located at the narrows between 12 Mile Lake and Little Boshkung).

Ralph became the organist and choir director and Sunday School Superintendent at Zion. He was blessed with a group of about 12 young people who lived in the area. All of us liked to sing and looked forward to the many excursions we made to the Kiwanis Festival in Toronto, where we always placed either first or second. Our reward for hard work was a trip to such places as Niagara Falls. We needed a second car to accommodate everyone (seems a lot of people per car in this day and age), so my Mom, Hazel Gregory became Choir Mom.

We used to have choir practice and young people's on Sunday nights. During the summer, we would go to 12 Mile Lake Church, bring the pump organ out on boards and watch the sun set as we sang. Over the years this grew to become a hymn sing (somehow we worked in our practice as we went along.).

The choir tackled more and more challenges and the practice of presenting Cantata's and fun musical evenings grew.

Ralph taught us how to read music, how to follow direction, the importance of sharing whatever gifts you have with others at Zion. He taught us to work together, play together and care about other people. He was an inspiration to all of us and we became better people because he was a part of our lives.

As well as his work in the schools and at Zion, Ralph loved and participated in coaching sports. I remember many trips with my parents and Ralph as we followed the Minden teams around the area and being warned to not yell so loud, or I wouldn't be able to sing at church the next morning!

Ralph held minor hockey together for many years and was the first president of the Minden Minor Hockey league. He insisted that players/singers always act like “gentlemen” and practice good sportsmanship.

When Ralph became too ill, with a severe heart condition, to carry on his duties, he passed the torch at Zion to Marilyn Stouffer (who also took over as music teacher for the county). Marilyn carried on the tradition and Zion choir grew to become a group of adults. Attention to detail and dedication to learning were a part of Marilyn's heritage to us. After 11 years, Ruth Gorrie took over the helm and gave great leadership and friendship to her choir family.

When Melissa Stephens agreed to be Musical Director at Zion, I am sure she fulfilled a dream Ralph would have had-that music at Zion would be nurtured, choir members challenged, the joy of music cherished. Her commitment and dedication to the ministry of music at Zion is a fitting tribute to the man who started it all, so long ago.

Written by Joan Chapple

