



REMEMBERING **Celia Sanderson**

April 21, 1921 - June 19, 2016



Amy Celia Sanderson was born on April 21, 1921, in Shafton, Yorkshire, England. She died on June 19, 2016, in Duncan, BC. On every step of her journey from a small, impoverished coal mining village to the Cowichan Valley she showed her quiet strength of will and strength of character. Those, her intelligence, and her skill with her hands helped impress her onto the memories of all those around her.

From the start of her life, Celia needed her strength. Her mother was unkind and valued external appearances above inner worth. Rather than support Celia's education, she made cruel comments about Celia's need for glasses. Her father was killed when she was nine years old, in an accident at the open pit coal mine. Celia watched from the window of the school as the police went in the direction of her home, but it wasn't until someone came to the classroom that she knew it was her family tragedy had struck.

Celia did have those in her life who cared for her, however. Her paternal grandfather would have the family to Sunday dinner after church, and sometimes offered her the rare treat of grapefruit, as he had read citrus was good for children. Her maternal grandmother also lived in Shafton, and as Celia walked past on the way home from school, she would rap on the window to let Celia know she was invited in.

It began with kneading the bread: Celia's grandmother found the task increasingly difficult as she aged, so Celia helped her with it. From there, her grandmother taught Celia to cook and knit and sew, skills she excelled at and practiced for the rest of her life.

The contrast of the gifts Celia's grandmother gave her with Celia's mother's treatment of her is apparent in what happened after her grandmother's death. She had promised that Celia would have her sewing machine, but sadly her husband,

Celia's grandfather, had been knocked down by a motorbike, which affected his mind. Celia's mother was able to turn him against Celia, and the sewing machine went to Celia's mother instead. She did not sew and the machine sat, unopened, in her front room until she died. When Celia married, the first thing she and her husband did was save up to buy her a treadle Singer of her own.

Celia's intelligence also drove her to excel in school: she passed the Eleven Plus exam, allowing her to continue on to Grammar School on a scholarship, rather than leaving school at age 14 as her sister did. She was the only child in her village to pass the exam that year! In a way, schooling also led her to her future husband. She chose to take a night school course on shorthand in addition to her regular classes, as she enjoyed learning so much. There, she met Kenneth Sanderson. They were drawn to the spark of intelligence they recognized in each other, and their shared determination to make something of themselves despite difficult childhoods. Neither had much money, so their courtship flourished through long walks together.

In Kenneth's memory, the moment when he first saw her stands out. She was small and wearing her school uniform, making her seem absurdly young to be in the class, though she was only two years younger than him. Perhaps those things should have made her fade back, but the dark, intense red of her hair caught his attention. Through the rest of her life, that red shade stayed with her, delighting her when others assumed she must dye it.

Against the backdrop of World War II, Celia attended teacher training college. She had her choice of jobs on graduation, as the country was desperate for teachers during wartime. Her stepfather blithely assumed she could get a job in her home village, live at home, and give up her paycheque to him in exchange for an allowance. Celia didn't even consider it, and took a job well away from her village, teaching elementary school. Not only did her success steadily grow in teaching, by then "she could make her sewing machine sing." She was so talented, several women had her make their wedding dresses.

Kenneth joined the RAF and the two married during the war. Her new in-laws didn't care for her, because she continued to work even after marriage, and also because Kenneth's allowance now went to her instead of them. However, her in-laws were shocked to discover that while she seemed a quiet, agreeable person, she could stand up for herself. During the rationing of the war, Kenneth sent her tea from India, where he was stationed. It went to his parents' home, and they opened it, but once Celia discovered it was addressed to her, she calmly took it away from them and took it home with her! Even when Celia tried to make peace by sewing her hard-to-fit mother-in-law a dress at Kenneth's request, the mother-in-law refused to wear it. In the end, when the mother-in-law died, the family offered the dress back to Celia, and Celia used the good wool to make a coat and hat for one of her children.

After the war, Celia had her two girls: Olwen and Lorna. Not long after, in 1953, Kenneth saw an ad in a farming paper asking for people to move to Canada. When he suggested they answer it, she accepted willingly. She never guessed what a shock it would be when they finally arrived at the railroad station in Duncan and

took the gravel road to Fairbridge, where they had housing. For someone used to life in England, even a smaller village, it must have seemed like the wilds! But she threw herself into this next chapter of her life with a will. Far from what the ad had promised, for a couple of years her husband had to work the night shift at the sawmill in Honeymoon Bay. Celia kept the baby quiet during the day so that he could sleep.

Finally, Kenneth was able to get his teaching papers from England and got a job teaching. Even better, Celia was also able to take up the teaching she loved again. Miss Denney at Queen Margaret's School heard that she was a teacher and hired her to teach math to senior girls.

Together, she and her husband were able to buy 65 acres of land that came available in Cobble Hill. By then, her husband was having health problems, so he left teaching and built them a house while her teaching supported the family. Celia and Kenneth lived in that same house from the early 1960s until they recently donated the land to the Nature Trust of BC for an ecological reserve and park.

To Celia's happiness, her two greatest areas of skill, her teaching and her sewing and baking, came together when Bonner School in Cobble Hill opened and she got a job as home economics teacher. She never stopped learning herself, however. She took night school courses and spent summers at UBC until she got her official degree in teaching. She was also extremely proud of her boys' cooking class, which she created entirely herself, conceiving the idea, writing the curriculum, and teaching it.

Celia truly touched the lives of her students, and remained in their memories. Even when she had been retired for years, she could hardly go to the grocery store or even for a walk along the road without someone stopping to talk and tell her she taught them and sometimes their daughter and granddaughter. After retirement she also continued to be an important part of her community. She was active in such groups as the Home Ec Teachers Association, the University Women's Club, the Women's Institute, and the Heart Club.

Throughout her life, Celia liked creating things with her hands. It might be easier to say what she didn't do rather than what she did! Early on, she took courses in book binding and leather work and made Kenneth a wallet with his initials embossed on it. When he saw it, he said, "it's so big I'm going to need a bloody wheelbarrow to carry it!" Unbothered by her husband's sense of humor, she took the wallet back and used it herself for the rest of her life.

She also had a large garden and experimented with grafting fruit trees, and then canned or froze much of her produce herself. For several years she kept a quilt frame in her living room as she hand-quilted several quilts she had pieced. She hated to sit and do nothing, so she would almost always have some knitting on the go, whether it was a sweater for one of her daughters, or for one of her grandchildren. When she went into the nursing home she carried a bag of knitting hanging from her walker. Her hands remembered how to knit even when she could no longer recall the patterns.

Her four grandchildren were a special pleasure for her. She had never been one for hugging, but she learned for them. She was always ready to talk about what they

were up to, and how proud she was of them. For their part, her grandchildren's sweetest memories include the things she made: for Rhiannon, the oldest, it was the dress for her senior prom, much more flattering than anything off the rack would have been. For Nicholas, it was a cake depicting the phases of the cell cycle for a school project, which they baked and decorated together. For Rowena, it was the giant, molded chocolate Easter eggs she created with each grandchild's name in icing. And for Ewan, the youngest, it was a teddy bear with hinged joints made from the tops of lemonade cans. Celia even put a squeaker inside, so it would protest when turned upside down!

Celia did the difficult crossword puzzle daily. In fact, she and her husband shared it, with Celia doing it on graph paper and Kenneth on the newspaper. It was one of life's small tragedies that her memory, which had been one of her greatest assets, failed her when she became very old. She used to say she could read the textbook in her mind's eye as she wrote an exam. Even in her 80s, she could still recite a passage from *Les Misérables*, which she read for pleasure as a teenager.

As her memory failed, Celia finally had to go into a nursing home. She was fortunate to be a resident at Cerwydden Care Home, where she passed the last few years of her life surrounded by kindness. Her family is very grateful to everyone at Cerwydden who took such good care of her.

If you would like to hear more stories from Celia's life, join us for a Life Celebration at the church hall of the Anglican Church of St. John in Cobble Hill on Sunday Aug 14th at 2:00pm

In lieu of flowers, Celia would have been very pleased for you to donate to the Nature Trust of BC in her memory, for the support of Sandersons' Royd, which is the name of the park to be created from their land at Cobble Hill.

