

A Tribute to Mrs Margaret Cruickshank at her Funeral, October 21, 2019
By Susan Watt O'Reilly

Among the pictures displayed at the back you may see a portrait of a smartly dressed lady with four young girls clad in matching wool coats and hats. The year would have been about 1912, taken in Dover, Kent, England.

The lady was my grandmother, Bessie Driver, and the girls were Grace, Bess, and, the two smallest, my mother, Mercy, and Margaret, my aunt, later my godmother.

The voyage in the summer of 1913 from England to Canada, was, for the mischievous small ones, a jolly adventure, playing games with crew members on the deck. The family landed at Montreal, and took the train to Kingston, arriving at the Grand Trunk station two blocks from here, where they were met by my grandfather, Robert John Driver, known as Bump. He took Margaret on his shoulders to carry her along the boardwalk of Ontario Street to West Street where a house awaited them.

Thus began Margaret Cruickshank's life in Kingston.

They moved downtown to Brock Street where the girls grew up.

Granny, homesick for the England she'd left, found solace in the familiar liturgy and music of St. George's Cathedral, and Sundays would find the family, dressed in their best, walking to this very church, for Sunday school and for morning and often evening services. Bump joined the choir, eventually serving 27 years in the bass section.

The choir, which was a men and boys choir in the English tradition, later became a very important part of Margaret's life, when her boys reached eight years old. In those days, two or three services every Sunday plus practices, required full attendance. It was a discipline which Margaret undertook happily, for the sake of her children.

As a summer visitor I sat with Mother, Granny and my aunts, somewhat awed and a bit envious of the boys!

All four sisters eventually married at St. George's, men who, like them, had emigrated from Britain or Ireland.

Margaret's husband, Uncle Tim, had been a boy soldier during the First World War, serving as an ambulance attendant, but eventually joining the Vimy band as a clarinetist, having been trained at Kneller Hall in England. When he retired from the army he taught music at several high schools.

Margaret had worked as a trusted Nanny to several families in the city in her youth and she had also helped Granny care for her widowed sister Bess's two children. So caring for people was a vocation for her. She not only raised three sons but helped look after all of her sisters in later years when they returned to Kingston.

Not only family but those without someone to care for them benefitted from Margaret's generosity. She, with the Reverend Margaret Rogers and some like-minded friends, began to offer sandwiches and coffee in the Great Hall, an endeavour which grew to become Outreach St. George's Kingston, known as Lunch by George, which serves meals and offers fellowship every weekday, with wide community support.

The stained glass window over the RMC Gallery was given some years back by the family to honour Margaret. It shows St. Margaret of Scotland ministering to those in need, a fitting tribute to Margaret Cruickshank.

What I shall remember about her is her interest in her children, nieces and nephew, and their children. She attended the weddings of my two daughters, the latest only 11 years ago. The venue was a conservation area which had cages of recovering birds, including a snowy owl. Margaret was fascinated by that beautiful owl, gazing at her. She enjoyed the trip to Guelph too, telling the waiter in a pub that she was 99 years old. He said, 'you must come back when you're 100', and she said she would love to do that. She was always game for a trip, and now she has embarked on the last trip of all.

I shall miss her and smile with many memories of a life of a good woman my Auntie Margie.