

A Remembrance of  
Norma Janet Isabella Nicholson Thompson  
August 26, 1937 – May 15, 2019

By Elouise Roane

Norma passed away peacefully in Toronto on May 15, 2019. Norma is lovingly remembered by the love of her life, her devoted husband of 53 years, Powell River, BC born Donald Thompson, O.C. Also, remembering Norma are her sister Jessie Roane, nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews and many friends.

Norma, youngest of three daughters of Elsie and Malcolm Nicholson, C.M. was born in Vancouver, BC. Norma began piping and highland dancing at an early age although the love of piping became her passion. During her high school years at Britannia High, Norma also excelled in sports.

In the late 1950s Norma began touring for a couple of years throughout the U.S. singing and dancing at shows. In 1960 and 1961 she performed exclusively as the lead dancer and singer of the dance troupe at The Cave Supper Club. Norma opened for performers such as Della Reese, Mel Torme, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Nancy Wilson and Louis Armstrong. These were top notch Las Vegas bound shows.



Norma and Malcolm Nicholson, C.M.



Norma was a member of the Vancouver Ladies Pipe Band at the age of 13 and also a member of her family quartet. Norma would become Pipe Major of the Vancouver Ladies and in 1964 the band travelled to Scotland for the first time, winning the European Pipe Band Championship in Grade 4. Upon returning to Vancouver, the band made a record.

Norma, an exceptionally accomplished piper, won the most coveted of the BC Pipers' Association trophies; the MacCrimmon Memorial Cairn Trophy for Open Piobaireachd in 1964, 1965 and 1966. I can still see this cairn trophy sitting on the piano in the living-room of her family home on Triumph St where it resided for three years. Later on, after the Burnaby Ladies Pipe Band (BLPB) was formed in 1967, Norma wore many hats - director, teacher, choir leader and piper in the band. Norma was a very strict piping teacher and on the odd occasion when my Grandfather was out on a band turnout, Norma would take my lesson. She was a tough teacher. BLPB travels included California, Idaho and Scotland. We also



held an annual St Patrick's Day dinner and dance fundraiser. On many Saturday mornings closer to March 17, under Norma's direction, members of the band gathered at the Nicholson's home to learn Irish songs. The BLPB 'choir' sung a selection of Irish songs at our St Patrick's dinner and dance.

All this and she still had time to work as a model in Vancouver. Norma was a knock-out. One day in my Grade 8 Home-Ec class, the teacher asked if we knew someone special that could come and speak to the girls in the class. My hand shot up as I volunteered Norma!! It was so exciting that day when she came into the room to speak about all the possibilities that await us ladies after Grade 12.

Norma has lived in a few of the world's most exciting cities. After marrying on April 12, 1966, Norma and Don moved from Vancouver to San Francisco where they lived for a few years, followed by New York and Montreal. Eventually, Norma and Don moved to Toronto where they both immediately became fully immersed in the music scene. I remember that summer's day in 1969 when Norma headed out from Triumph St in her white and turquoise car on her road trip - destination Toronto.

In Toronto, Norma did a lot of studio work on her pipes. She was the 'first call' piper for TV and Radio commercials because of her ability to sight read any music that was put in front of her. She played on a lot of CBC TV shows including The Friendly Giant, Mister Dress-up, Wayne and Shuster and Anne of Avonlea. Norma also played on a few major movie soundtracks.



Don Thompson, O.C. and Norma

It might surprise you to know that Norma also played kit drums for years in The Swing Sisters Jazz Band. Nothing should be a surprise though about Norma. She was an incredibly friendly and gorgeous lady with a dynamite personality! Not only was she incredibly talented, but she was surrounded by incredibly talented musicians, two of which are recognized by Canada. Norma's husband Don Thompson, O.C., three time Juno winner, was inducted as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2010. Don, a jazz musician, composed the magnificent bagpipe suite "Journey to Skye" performed by the 78th Fraser Highlanders Pipe Band on their famous "Live in Ireland" recording in 1987. Norma's father, PM Malcolm Nicholson, C.M., was inducted as a Member of the Order of Canada in 1978. Norma might be the only person with both a husband and a father invested into the Order of Canada.

Aunt Norma was not only my Aunt, but Norma was my dear friend...my girlfriend. We were very close and enjoyed many travels and adventures together in Canada and the States. At the North American Pipe Band Championships one year, Norma even travelled on our band bus!! What a sport she was. She was ready to try anything.

Aunt Norma, we sure did have lots of fun together and shared loads of laughs along many miles and years!! Uncle Don....I am so sorry for your loss. Norma was the love of your life, your Queen. Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything.

The Skye Boat Song, Norma's favourite song, will forever be a reminder of wonderful times shared.