

DEPARTMENTS

RECALL OF THE WILD

Louise Guy: Intrepid Soul
(May 26, 1918 – September 30, 2010)

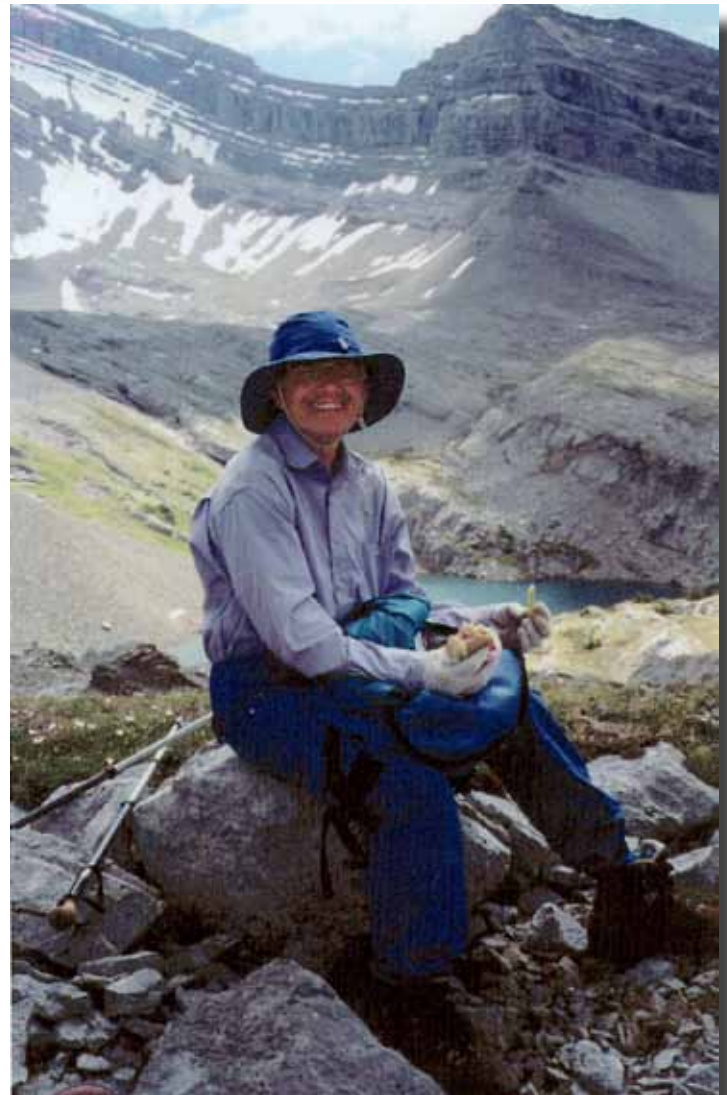
By Polly Knowlton Cockett

Celebrating Louise Guy's magnanimous and energetic longevity drew more than 400 friends last fall. All sang her praises, her kindness, her generosity of spirit, and were ever in awe of her physical stamina and humble, ever smiling nature. Louise and her husband Richard, now 94, renowned in the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) and Calgary Mountain Club circles and longtime supporters of the Alberta Wilderness Association, were also legendary as the most senior couple climbing the Calgary Tower's 802 steps in AWA's Climb and Run for Wilderness for many a year.

I like to tell the story of the first year they climbed the Tower together in 2002 at ages 83 and 85. For a few years, Louise had sponsored my family's climbing efforts, but this year Louise thought she'd take her annual donation directly to the event herself and perhaps give the Calgary Tower's 802 steps a quick whirl and, of course, Richard went along with her. Along the way Louise found herself taking a short respite on one of the stair landings with the equally intrepid Phyllis Hart. After finding out Phyllis had climbed five times at age 86 the previous year, Louise was inspired to keep going herself. After one climb she and Richard felt pretty good, and so tried another. Somewhere along the way they got separated though, and when inquiring at the top or bottom as to whether anyone had seen the other, they were told, "Oh, I think he/she went up again!" And so, thinking, "Well, if she/he can do another climb, so can I!" Seven climbs later they finally caught up with each other and only then rested their legs with a refreshing beverage in the observation lounge looking westward over the splendour of their beloved Rocky Mountains, reminiscing about their own climbs on many of the peaks.

Subsequent years always had the Guys in attendance on Climb Day unless

they were visiting their homeland in England. After raising their family of three children, and by way of various postings in Singapore and India (climbing any and all mountains within striking distance), the Guys eventually immigrated to Canada in 1965 for Richard to take a job as a Mathematics professor at the University of Calgary. A bit like their first time climbing the Tower, they came for just one year, and then tried another, and before they knew it, the lure of the mountains beckoned them to stay for the rest of their lives. They settled straight into the fledgling northwest community of Brentwood, close enough for Richard to commute by foot or bus to the U of C, nearby to all necessary amenities, and with easy access to the mountains. From there they became tireless activists for the preservation of nearby Nose Hill Park, where they often walked. Further afield, often in the Purcell Mountains of British Columbia, Louise at one point took on the entire management of the ACC's General Mountaineering Camps, which had gone into a period of decline until Louise resurrected them by organizing an outfitter for the event. She managed to accomplish the impossible – she generated a profit while she kept the prices as low as possible. These Camps – still a vital part of the ACC's activities – attract dozens of ACC members. They have grown from one to two week affairs



to today's six week camps and bring people from all over the world to our mountains. Louise and Richard rarely missed attending them over the last thirty years.

Aside from the Tower Climb, I knew Louise in two other main capacities. One is through the U of C's Faculty Women's Club (FWC), where I first met her, and through which we each enjoyed a warm welcome to Calgary when immigrating from abroad. Louise was involved in many of the interest groups the Club runs, and twice served as President. In fact, in April 2010, when no one else stepped forward, she volunteered – just shy of age 92 – to serve for a third term as President confident in the knowledge that "all the



Louise was a driving force behind the “Thursday Hikers” of the Faculty Women’s Club.

young ones would help her.”

The main FWC group that Louise was involved in was the Thursday Hikers. For several decades, Louise hiked and skied with other hearty souls from this dedicated assemblage and for most of that time she was its stalwart leader. The best way to describe this is in Louise’s own words, excerpted from “Golden Threads: Women Creating Community” (2009), in which Louise is mentioned many times by other contributors to this anthology of women’s voices about fifty years of place-making in Calgary:

“Many of the Faculty Women’s Club members have always been enthusiastic outdoors people. In fact the proximity to the Rockies was quite a factor in bringing many staff to Calgary! In 1976 Verna Sorensen started the Thursday Hikers. I joined the group two years later at Betty Schofield’s suggestion. I had gained a certain amount of experience in the backcountry with the Alpine Club of Canada, and since Verna was very busy with her three little

daughters and the Girl Guides, she asked me to take over the leading of the group. This soon became one of my major preoccupations, and the source of great friendships.

Over the years, we climbed most of the hikable peaks and passes within a day’s drive, in sun and rain, in winter on skis. Perhaps because we were a very chatty lot, we had very few encounters with wildlife. A couple of times we detoured or ran from menacing looking moose in the rutting season, or retreated carefully from a grazing bear. In the spring, we greeted the emerging flowers as old friends, reminding each other of the names we had forgotten. In the winter, we marveled at the glistening peaks, the glittering flowers of the hoar frost, the ice formations in the almost frozen streams. In summer, we occasionally had a cooling skinny dip in remote lakes ... but as Verna reminds me, still with hats on!

When Gilleen Daffern began

publishing her hiking guides, Betty would pore over them suggesting new places to go. We started making a wish list at the beginning of each summer season, old favorites and new hikes, to which everyone contributed. I would be teased about taking them on shortcuts up steep cutlines (I’m sure it only happened a couple of times), and it wasn’t a really exciting day unless there was some bushwhacking. I sometimes carried a rope if there was some exposure on the route, but really only used it seriously once when we did a circuit over Ribbon Falls. This involves a short climb up an exposed cliff, where there is (or was) a chain, but no holds. So to be quite safe, Jean Pawson tied each person in turn to the rope and I belayed them up.

We would occasionally plan a two or three day trip, to an Alpine Club hut or a lodge, which were great fun. We started celebrating important birthdays (decades) on

the trail. Someone would carry up a cake, rush ahead and surprise the birthday girl with a, "Happy Birthday!" Probably the most memorable one was when Marjorie Taylor became the first of the group to reach 80, on Burgess Pass, above Emerald Lake. (Sadly, Marjorie died recently at the age of 92.) Word of that birthday reached the late Peter Gzowski and we were invited to take part in his morning talk show. This was great fun; four of us sat in a studio here and chatted with him in Toronto. He reproved us for all talking at once! We were astounded at the number of people from across the country who happened to hear our brief moment of fame."

Louise gave a magnificent spirited reading of "Ode to the Thursday Hikers," also in "Golden Threads," at the Book Launch in November 2009, in which Louise is decidedly the "nameless leader with curious needs."

The other main way I knew Louise was as a fellow Brentwood resident. Many were the times I'd see her riding her bicycle home from fetching groceries or see her at the local Farmers' Market on a summer Tuesday. She and Richard could always be counted on to stop by community events such as Mural Celebrations and Street Parties, or be

there in the early mornings when the spans of Whispering Grasses Walkway were swung into place over John Laurie Boulevard providing safe passage to Nose Hill Park from the residential area. Louise and Richard would also come to the summer Stewardship Bees I run in Whispering Woods, a small outlier of Nose Hill right in the community. No one could haul out thistles with more gusto than Louise at age 91, and it was with reluctance that she might let you carry her bag of weeds to the corner for her when she could of course do it herself. But then, she could pull more weeds while you were carting off the bag!

Louise would ride her bicycle the few blocks – all uphill – to Whispering Woods, with her potluck offerings tied down to the rear rack for our post-weeding community brunches or wine and cheese gatherings. Her treats were always homemade, always wrapped in recycled bags or trays – never was a thing ever wasted if there was another use to be had for it. "Well, we are interested in the outdoors, and we have an interest in preserving the environment," said Richard in a recorded conversation I had with them both in August 2010 partly about why they participated in the Bees. "Yes!" agreed Louise. "We saw the notice in the *Brentwood Bugle*, and thought it was a good thing. Let's do that; I was

really interested in that. And so we went from the point of view of doing anything to make things nice. And it is jolly good up there! I keep telling my friends it is a good place. It is a very good resource for the schools, too."

Louise will be missed at our future bees; she was missed in the Tower stairwell this April, and in so many other ways for so many other people, and especially, of course, by Richard. My husband, Robin, will miss giving her a ride home after the Awards ceremony, when she and Richard were always laden with prizes for being the oldest and the most energetic. He used to joke that she was the "bionic woman" with her knee braces, hiking poles, and a piggy valve in her heart. "This hid my complete admiration for her pure grit," said Robin. "She was never to be put off. I recall one journey back from the Climb and Louise was bubbling with life. She was commenting to Richard that it was "such fun growing old" and both were joking about life and death as we barrelled home to Brentwood. Our children sitting in the back could hardly believe their ears! It was truly a Louise moment." In the mountains, on the stairs, or in the park just around the corner... Louise was certainly a soul who knew how to seize the day. ♡

ODE TO THE THURSDAY HIKERS

By Betty Schofield

It was September '76
We met at Maya's house.
We thought we'd like to hike a bit,
Tho' we hadn't got much nous.

Marg Oliver instructed us
Because we were so green,
And Peg Magee came out with us
To help us set the scene.

Our hikes were pretty modest –
Skogan Pass and Ribbon Creek.
The Larches of Larch Valley
Caused stiffness for a week!

And then we took up skiing-
We found it rather hard,
Although we only skied the verge
Of John Laurie Boulevard.

But fifteen summers later
Our hikes are not so tame.
And some have left, and some have
joined,
And some have stayed the same.

We've climbed up steepish mountains
And come down slippery rocks,
Crossed icy streams on tree trunks
Or doffed our boots and socks.

Our leader, who shall be nameless,
Fulfills some curious need
By leading us up cutlines
Where none have walked or skied!

We've had some overnights as well-
O'Hara and Skoki,
But best of all is Windermere
With Ollie and Marjory.

We've seen some glorious wildflowers
And learnt a name or two.
Of goats and marmots, sheep and elk
We've seen more than a few.

We've all of us had sorrows,
And some were hard to bear.
But as a Thursday Hiker
We knew the group was there.

We've shared so many joys too,
And every week rejoice
That we live in this wonderful country
That gives us so much choice.

So when the last trump soundeth
And St. Peter at the Gate
Asks, "And what did you do?"
And you tremble at your fate ...
You say, "I tried to do my best,
And though not free from sin,
I was a Thursday Hiker."