



100 years young and still able to celebrate

by M E Boudreau

It was a very special Birthday Party. The petite French Canadian lady with the charming manner and quick mind was loving every minute of the song, music, food and drink shared with over

came as a bride (for the second time) 65 years ago, Marie Louise smoothed her pink-blue floral dress and chatted about her life...

Aches and pains? "Oh there is something, sometime, you know, but



100 Candles and a Cuckoo Clock for Mary Louise Meilleur on her Birthday. Daughter Reta Gutzman makes the presentation.

one hundred members of her family. Marie Louise Meilleur celebrated her 100th Birthday on Friday, August 29. The kinfolk gathered from far and near on Saturday, August 30 to honour her on this memorable occasion.

No one at the celebration had a better time than Marie Louise.

First there was Mass at Deep River. The beautiful rendition of 'On This Day O Beautiful Mother' by Elizabeth Du Manoir Dawson brought tears to the eyes of Marie Louise.

Then the informal and fun party at the Byeways.

Seventy-three years young daughter, Gabrielle made a speech. As did sons Freddie and Christie.

Freddie read a poem composed for his Mum. Someone yelled "Stand up Freddie" and he replied, "I'm already standing on the chair."

Next Christie sat on the edge of the table and with foot step-dancing on the nearby chair; he serenaded his Mom on the mouthorgan.

"Play the first tune you learn" said Marie Louise and she hummed a few bars.

All her remaining children were there. Gerrard and Gabrielle from her first marriage and Olive, Reta, Ernie, Freddie and Christie from the second, plus numerous descendants of these two unions.

As 100 candles flickered on her Birthday Cake, she listened to congratulatory messages from the Pope, the Queen, the Prime Minister, the Bishop and on down the line.

There were gifts. Roses from the Townships of Rolph, Buchanan, Wylie and McKay and the Village of Des Joachims. Prayer beads blessed by the Pope. And a cuckoo clock from the family so Mary Louise can "hear the time"; sometimes her eyesight gives her difficulty.

The week previous, in the cosy kitchen of the log home to which she

not to cry and lament. I'm alright. Sometimes you're sick because you make yourself sick." Marie Louise is in good health. She no longer smokes, but on occasion enjoys a glass of wine with her dinner.

She spryly jumps up to let the cat out. 'Smokey' the cat is more of a pest than a pet to her. But her dog, Beebee...

"She's a beautiful thing." "No, she doesn't sleep with me but with TuMan (her son Ernie) and he's raising hell

David Irving tends a litter of very young kittens with an eye

Letter to the editor

Some welcome su

Recently one of the "Welcome to the Good Life" signs erected by council was mutilated by persons unknown. This is a very grave matter indeed and should not be let passed by lightly. If public properties are allowed to be wantonly destroyed what will it be next? Public figures?

Personally, I think the welcome sign is a good thing. It reminds the hundreds of passersby that a life on the street is not the way to live; it is a commendable make-work project; it brightens our environment with colourful bold letters; and so on.

If there were anything less than perfect about the sign, it could be the message in two parts; "welcome", and "the good life"; (attempts to further partition the second part, led to absurdities like "welcome to life".

Let us try to understand what is the good life. Is the good life of your neighbour also your good life. Is the life of the PM a good life? Is that of his wife supposed to be a good one? The good life of Guccione is strangely perceived by many as being evil. In the pursuit of good life, do we follow the advice of Billy Graham or Rev Moon? Are we talking about the goof life of Anita Bryant or that of her adversities?

because Beebee is losing her hair and he has to change his bed two, three times a week and shake his — you know, the bag that goes to camp" (Sleeping bag).

Marie Louise, who often switches into the French language, was born in Kamouraska, not far from Rivieres du Loup. Her father was a cordonnier — shoemaker.

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"WE GOT EVERYTHING HERE NOW, SON, THE CURBS, STORM SEWERS..."

100 years young

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School? "My God, I went to school until I was 20 years old." To the Convent of La Congregation de Notre Dame de Montreal. Marie Louise never did go to Riviere du Loup to write for her Diploma, but she still remembers all her prayers in French and Latin.

Her education is revealed in what she says and how she says it.

At age 21 she married Etienne Leclerc. Within ten years her husband and two of her six children were dead. So she came to live with her sister at a stopping place on the Dumoine Road in the bush above Des Joachims.

Here she found the clear, northern air better for her health than the sea air of her home country.

Hector Meilleur was a widower with four children living in Des Joachims village. A logger, log-driver and portager of supplies to the Eddy Company bush camps, he and Marie Louise, who was then 35 years of age, married in 1915.

The couple made their home in Hector's log residence, which is still Marie's home. No one knows how old the house is because many years before, it had been a stopping place run by the Dufoe family at the mouth of the Dumoine River. It was dismantled, floated down the river, log by log and re-built at Des Joachims.

Six more children were borne by Marie. Of her total of 12, seven are living, plus numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

It was a good life, she says. Coal oil lamps. Wood stoves. Pigs raised for meat. Vegetables a-plenty, produced from long hours of garden work. Work she did mostly alone as Hector was away most of the time.

"And we have everything. Donuts for Christmas and always some kind of bird. Chicken or turkey. But once I have a goose. I didn't like it. My God, I went to pick it and the grease flew, but Hector liked it because it a was fat." There was no refrigerator. The milk-house kept produce cool.

And card-playing. Marie Louise still enjoys a game of Auction 45.

"I often let them play and keep making tea and lunch. We play almost every night. I never see people drink (booze) like they do today. So many die young with 'wheeksy'".

Her man: "He drink, but he look for his living. He could be really drunk. He walk straight. He sit. He won't speak more. Me, I take a long time before I find out he was drinking. But he didn't drink every day. He work".

A devout Roman Catholic, religion has played a very important part in Marie's life. In the days of packed churches, her fine voice was heard in the choir for 25 years. She knows all the masses but her favourite is La Messe de Sixieme Ton.

She is discouraged at the trend today away from religion and when her daughter told her there is no religion, she replied:

"God gave the law. And that law is there. It's not the religion who

disappear. That's the people who don't practise no more. That's the people. That's true, too".

And house parties. "I remember one night. That was the night before the first of January. We were invite at Pierre Mathias, des sav-age. Indians, Algonquin, but good people. I went with Hector there. They play the fiddle. The old man and the son. All play. And we dance. We have lots of fun. But when the time come, we hear the bell (church bell). We hear the gun all around. We got to shake hands and kiss everybody and I kissed old Mr Mathias. I never forget that".

Hector passed on eight years ago at age 92. But Marie continues her interest in life and retains innumerable facts in her keen mind.

On politics. She likes les Canadiens and doesn't believe Quebec should separate "because Quebec would be too small after that".

Politicians? "I don't care. Because them people don't bother about us. They look after themselves."

"But I'm going to tell you what I like the best of the government now. That's the help they give to the old people and the poor woman who is left with a big family. In the old time I saw lots of people in need and no help. Oh my God yes, and at that time everyone had a big family".

"I don't know if the Government can keep on giving. They may go bankrupt." And today, "Too many depend on welfare and Unemployment Insurance. They don't want to work and we know that."

TV programs she finds now are not as good as 15-20 years ago. "Now only foolish stuff". she keeps up on world news via the radio.

At age 92 she went to the dentist and asked him to make her a new dental plate. Her own teeth were gone long ago. She said:

"He look at me. I think he believe I was going to die in a couple of weeks. So he said to me 'I won't make plate for you because at your age you never get used to it. That's going to hurt or something else, I know. Give me your old plate. I'm going to fix them up'. And that's them yet".

When I called her home, I was surprised when Marie Louise answered the phone. "Come anytime. We don't go out much".

She does go out to visit her friends. To see her Doctor in Deep River. And, a couple of weeks ago, to dance at her granddaughter's wedding.

And she danced again at her Birthday celebration at Byeways. Great Grammaw Marie Louise danced and clapped her hands when the kinfolk rose en masse to sing HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

She is the beloved First Lady of the Clan. A lady, who, as Guy du Manoir said has been always a leader and who "still has the ability to straighten the kids out".

And a voice from the rear confirmed that statement with "Right on"