

Shirley Wieseahn

(1934 -)

Shirley was born March 8, 1934 in London, England. During her school years, Shirley was in the choir and “as many plays and ballets as possible”. She spent a year at Liverpool College of Art, followed by secretarial school.

Shirley met her husband, Wim, on a sailing course in Holland. Wim was the translator for the sailing instructor. Her parents insisted that she try living in Holland, before becoming officially engaged. Apartments were scarce, so she stayed with Wim’s parents in Amsterdam. She slept in his bedroom when he was away at Delft University, and on an airbed under the dining room table when he was home. His parents spoke no English, so there was a lot of “smiling and arm-waving”. They wrote down all their language problems and Wim would solve them.

Wim and Shirley were married August 31, 1960 in a civil ceremony at Amsterdam City Hall. Later that day, they flew to England for a Service of Blessing at the Anglican Church. The newlyweds lived in Delft on a houseboat, which Shirley describes as a converted barge with no running water. Wim could not continue postgraduate studies at Delft, and so they applied to England, United States and Canada. They have been thankful ever since that Canada said yes first. Arriving in 1962, they lived in Toronto for over seven years, then moved to Vancouver, where their two children were born - Menno in 1970 and Fenna in 1972.

After 17 years of secretarial and translating jobs, Shirley loved being able to stay home with the children. Her parenting advice is to explain the reasons for the requests and rules as much as you can. She says, “Treat them, in a way, as if they are people from another planet who haven’t quite learned the rules yet.” Shirley says that motherhood enriched her life, and “I very much enjoyed my children always... I’ve been lucky enough that they’ve both grown up to be great people. I’m very proud of the way they have achieved all the things that they have”. Shirley also has three grandchildren, who live in Alberta.

The Wieseahns built their McConnell Creek house as a vacation home in 1981, and it became their retirement home in 1992. Shirley had spent her childhood living in small rural communities, and became involved with Women’s Institute activities as a child and joined at age 18 in England, picking up membership again in Vancouver, where she had been President of the District and a member of the Provincial Board before moving to Mission. Unfortunately, the Women’s Institute was failing by the time the Wieseahns moved here, but Shirley also joined the McConnell Creek Farmers Hall, whose events she had been participating in since 1982. Shortly after joining, she became Secretary, then President, Secretary again, Newsletter Editor and now books rentals for the hall. Shirley is also an active member of Opening Nite Theatre, the Mission Garden Club, and Friends of the Library.

When asked what she likes the most about her individual volunteer activities, there is a general theme to her responses, indicating the benefit of good fellowship when you’re doing practical tasks to make events go well. “It’s fun doing things together... helping each other....this is how I have friends.”

Courtesy of Mission Community Archives