

## Alec Campbell - Eulogy

Dad was born here, on August 26, 1923. And when I say here, I literally mean here, it is a very short walk through the forest beside us to the farm house where he was born - we could walk there in a few minutes. Dad was the youngest of 4 children – Marshall, Ruth, Helen and Alex. His parents were Colin Campbell and Ella Marshall.

Dad left us some memories from those early days on the farm, he writes – “I remember riding on top of a load of grain bags while accompanying dad to the chopping mill at Kinghorn, This was a noisy place inhabited by a number of dust covered men who always had time for a little joke. Sometimes on the way to the mill he would drop me off at Aunt Merle’s and Uncle Henry’s home in King..... There were many interesting things to look at such as a crystal set , model airplanes, kites and boats. Cousin Bud readily demonstrated these to a very attentive audience. Aunt Merle would then produce a pitcher of ice cold buttermilk. The sound of the team arriving announced it was time to climb back up and head home.

Sometimes on a Sunday, Dad and I would go for a walk down the back lane through the flats, into the cedar swamp and bush. Leaving the bush we arrived at Uncle Earl’s house where Aunt Hazel would extend the warmest of welcomes. There would be the usual foray out to see the silver foxes in their pens or whatever else was new and interesting. These little tours would be in the company of a number of friendly and sometimes shy girls..... the Campbell Sisters.

Dad goes on to tell us that Hazel always insisted they stay for lunch,----- the big kitchen table they all sat at was special – a wedding gift from Colin Campbell, the material for the table came from a towering white pine that grew on the corner of Jane Street and the King Side road. We have one of the 28” planks from the table back at the center – a single pine board.

Our Grandfather, Colin, died in 1930 – Dad was seven years old. Ella was left to raise the family with the depression looming. They all survived those tough years – we can only imagine how difficult that was,

One of dad’s tasks during this period was to walk the railway tracks with his wagon picking up pieces of coal that had fallen from the coal tenders – this heated the rented house they lived in.

Later, with WW2 raging, Dad enlisted in the Royal Canadian Airforce. According to his log book he took his first flight in a Tiger Moth on September 28, 1942,

Dad completed his training as a pilot at Brantford, receiving his wings and commission in April of 1943. , it was here he found our mother - Hazel Morrison – Hazel grew up in the west - a daughter of the Peace River Country.

19 years old and now a full fledged RCAF pilot, Dad told me he took one of the new 660 horsepower Avro Ansons for a spin and decided to put on an air show for his home town. Flying north above Jane Street he peeled off at the town line and with engines screaming he buzzed the town, waking King City. Unfortunately he flew too low and clipped the top of a large elm growing beside Crawford Wells’s store, luckily the only damage was to the rear wheel – he removed the trapped branches from the wheel after

landing, before his superiors saw the damage – this type of flying was forbidden, but considering that they were all young men it was impossible to control.

Next came Europe, Dad arrived overseas in July, 1943. The events of the next few years are worthy of a movie, rather than trying to relate all that happened, we have created a web site that tells much of this story. You will find cards with information about accessing the site back at the center.

This is the short story.

Many of you will know that Dad flew into combat 24 times, concluding when his aircraft was shot down on July 28, 1944 over France. His escape from the flaming aircraft was heroic, .... And if he had failed to escape we would not be standing here today.

This is Dad's account of his last flight, --- at midnight on July 28 a German night fighter attacked, igniting the fully loaded Lancaster, Dad managed to control his flaming aircraft until all the crew had escaped, he says:

“Alone now in the plummeting aircraft I was buffeted from side to side as I attempted to reach the forward escape hatch. Lunging head first I became firmly wedged in the partially closed door of the hatch. Believing that escape was now impossible I just gave up hope. Childhood experiences flicked rapidly through my mind – bacon and eggs, the spruce trees at home..... then suddenly I was filled with rage at the thought of giving up. I began twisting and thrashing – then possessed of a strength greater than I thought possible, I forced the door back far enough to wriggle out into the fierce slip-stream”

Dad had escaped. Mum tells us that Dad shared with her that he felt a presence, a hand on his shoulder during this escape.

Details about the people and events of July 28, 1944 continue to be revealed. My brother and sisters recently travelled to France and actually met some of the courageous French freedom fighters who, at great danger to themselves, helped dad to escape. .

They returned from France with artifacts from that night – including parts of dad's parachute – they are on display in the Seniors hall and you will find images from this visit on the website.

Dad evaded capture, eventually being liberated by the advancing American 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. He returned to Canada in September of 1944, where he reunited with Hazel. , Mum and dad were married October 28, 1944.

After the war, Dad worked at a number of different trades and professions, as an aircraft mechanic for DeHavilland aircraft, then a plant mechanic for Purex Corporation next he became “Mr. Fix it” for King City Hardware, travelling King Township and using his skills to fix everything from refrigerators to lawn mowers finally dad became a teacher, starting at Waterford and finishing at Huron Heights secondary school in Newmarket.

The years following the war centered around King City, Four Children, eight grandchildren and the twins – Hazel and Finley.

For more than 60 years, the Campbell home on William Str was open 24 hours a day, filling roles as a hotel, hospital, psychiatric ward, band rehearsal studio and general safe haven for any person or animal in need of a meal or a place to stay. Mother with her big heart would turn away no one - she always had a place at the table, or a place to sleep, for anyone who showed up. There are many here today who have ended up on the living room sofa, or floor, after a late night game of cards with Dad, he was often the last one standing.

The stories and memories from that period are endless and I think best left to be shared back at the center, we will set give everyone a chance to share their story.

I know Dad would approve of this event, he is surrounded by friends and family and we are here to say adieu, - until we meet again - to an exceptional man, husband, father, grandfather and friend.

Dad leaves us with an enormous legacy of courage, honesty and fidelity to friends and family.

Farewell Dad but this is not goodbye, you will be with us back at the center as we have a beer and reminisce and you will be there through the coming years as we all move through our lives.

Your's has indeed been a life well lived.