

Dorothy “Dusty” Catherine Cunningham

“The Hostess with the Mostest”

Dorothy Catherine Cunningham, lovingly known as “Dusty” or simply “Mum,” passed away peacefully on Saturday, January 17, 2026, in Victoria, BC, after a long and courageous journey with Parkinson’s disease. She left this world with a tummy full of her favourite fish and chips, a cup of Earl Grey tea close at hand, a strawberry milkshake for good measure, and a heart brimming with love.

Mum was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in January 1938 to Dorothy Sewell and Thomas Albert Miller. The middle child, she grew up with her older brother Joseph and younger sister Josephine in a close and loving family that endured the bombings of the Second World War. From these early years, she learned resilience, compassion, and the value of joy, music, connection, and community, lessons she carried throughout her life.

From a young age, Mum had a deep love for children and volunteered at a local orphanage. She attended La Sagesse, a private girl’s school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on a full scholarship, and later earned a Bachelor of Education degree from Durham University, after which she began her career teaching elementary school. During her university years, a mutual friend introduced her to a handsome, athletic young dental student named Joseph (“Joe”) Cunningham, marking the beginning of a remarkable love story.

Before settling into married life, Mum fulfilled one of her biggest dreams: seeing the world. She joined BOAC (British Airways) and worked as a flight attendant for several years while Joe completed dental school. Ever adventurous and

stylish, she even purchased her wedding dress during a trip to Japan. On her wedding day, she was featured in a full-page newspaper story titled "The Hostess with the Mostest," a phrase that captured her essence perfectly and stayed with her for life.

Mum had a lifelong love of music and an instinct for being close to where life was happening. As young newlyweds in Newcastle, she and Dad were devoted fans of a local band they once saw playing in a pub – The Beatles – long before the rest of the world knew their name. Years later, she delighted in the coincidence that when they left England to begin their new life abroad, they did so at the very moment history was shifting.

In 1964, with two young children and Mum pregnant with Paul, they emigrated to Canada on February 14 – exactly one week after the Beatles first arrived in North America. Travelling by ship from Newcastle to Halifax and then by train, in the depths of winter, to Watrous, Saskatchewan, they were greeted at the station by the entire town. Drawn by the opportunity for much-needed dentists (and the promise of running water!), Mum and Dad quickly discovered the warmth and kindness of Saskatchewan people, a community they grew to love deeply. Paul and Freya were born in Watrous, and the family later moved to Saskatoon, where Julia was born.

Together, Mum and Dad built a full and joyful life, blessed with five children: Andrew, Sean, Paul, Freya, and Julia. The family later grew to include five treasured grandsons—Kyran, William, Pierre, Jasper, and Quinn—and her newest blessing: great-granddaughter Adeline.

Mum was an extraordinary mother, endlessly encouraging creativity, music, and curiosity. Growing up was joyful and busy: we created art, practiced instruments, and were ferried endlessly to lessons and activities by Mum, our devoted full-time taxi driver. Music filled our home, and gatherings often

ended with friends and family crowded around the piano player, singing late into the night. Mum's laughter could fill a room and lift everyone's spirits, and oh, how she loved to laugh!

True to her title, Mum didn't just host; she created experiences. She designed and sewed costumes, wrote murder mystery scripts, staged medieval banquets, and produced "fashion shows through the ages." While Dad was the quieter presence, with a wonderfully dry sense of humour, Mum was undeniably the life of the party.

Her love of music extended into the community, where she directed a local veterans' choir and led a British choir in Saskatoon called The Georgians, who performed in beautiful Georgian-era costumes she made herself. Despite having five children of their own, Mum and Dad also welcomed numerous Rotary International exchange students into their home, filling it with diverse cultures, laughter, and lifelong friendships.

Mum was always reinventing herself – never one to sit still. While the children were still at home, she earned a second degree in Early Childhood Development from the University of Saskatchewan, further fueling her love of learning and teaching. Later, once most of her children were grown, she took on a bold new challenge as Sales and Marketing Director for the Saskatoon Ramada Renaissance Hotel, earning the title of Sales and Marketing Superstar for Western Canada. Not one to stop there, she founded her own business, Can-Plan Conventions Inc., planning major events throughout the city, including one of the thrills of her lifetime: coordinating a royal visit to Saskatoon in 1989.

When Dad was diagnosed with cancer, Mum cared for him with extraordinary devotion, ensuring he remained at home, surrounded by love, until his passing in 1991. Though heartbroken, Mum's zest for life endured. She later fulfilled a shared dream by moving to Victoria, where, to no one's

surprise, she launched into yet another exciting chapter.

In Victoria, Mum worked in global marketing for Pro-Soya, developing the name, branding, and logo for “So Nice” soy milk, a product still sold in stores today. Her role also took her overseas for two years to Edinburgh, an experience she loved and often spoke about with enthusiasm. Later, she found one of her greatest joys as administrator for CFX Santa’s Anonymous, where she threw her heart and energy into raising funds for children and families in need, a role she loved deeply and approached with all her characteristic warmth, humour, and determination, a fitting culmination of a lifetime devoted to caring for others.

Even after her Parkinson’s diagnosis, Mum remained determined to live fully, taking up boxing at the Parkinson Wellness Project and facing each day with grace, humour, and gratitude.

With declining health, Mum moved to Mount St. Mary Hospital in Victoria in December 2021, where she remained gracious, positive, and appreciative to the very end. The family extends heartfelt thanks to the exceptional nurses, doctors, caregivers, and staff who provided not only outstanding care, but compassion, dignity, and peace during her final years.

Mum lived a life rich in love, laughter, music, and service. She met each chapter with curiosity and courage, leaving behind a legacy of kindness, creativity, and joy that will continue to ripple through the lives of her family, friends, and all who were fortunate to know her.

Our darling Mum, Dorothy “Dusty” Cunningham will be deeply missed and forever loved.

A memorial donation in Mum’s name may be made to one of her favourite charities, including CFX Santa’s Anonymous, the Parkinson Wellness Project, or Mount St. Mary Hospital.

Alternatively, Mum would be delighted if you enjoyed a cup of

Earl Grey at your favourite café, treated yourself to something sweet, shared a few stories about the unforgettable Dusty Cunningham, or simply raised a glass of Amarone in her honour.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

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