

Edith Sylvia Gutemar (nee Pylvänäinen)

Born March 20, 1921 in Mikkeli, Finland. Passed away peacefully April 25, 2013 in Victoria, BC at the age of 92. Pre-deceased (2002) by Sven, her husband of 52 years and sisters Toini and Marjatta and brother Leo. Edith is lovingly remembered by her family: sister-in-law Kirsti Pylvänäinen; children: Jyrki (Joanne Robertson), Rita, Gunnell (Scott Borge); grandchildren: Christian Zarry (Yoko), Kajsa Gauld (Christopher), Stefan Borge, Mieka Borge (Damen Caskey); great-grandchildren: Ebony Shortreed, Autumn Caskey, Seija Zarry, Toby Zarry, Julian Gauld, Ethan Caskey, and Oscar Caskey born April 29/13; many nieces and nephews and devoted friends including the Olanders, Gaulds, Loggins, Maude Virolainen and Paul Cocco.

Edith, the “Suvun Vanhin”, matriarch and “Queen” of the Pylvänäinen and Gutemar families, lived up to her name. She spoke with an authority that few ever dared to question. She was dedicated to a life of service and volunteered with the Lotta Svärd in the secretarial pool which took her right into the Russian Front during the Second World War. While in the Lotta Svärd she also became a decorated war veteran and received nurses’ training. The war left a lasting impression on her, grieving for the innocent people and animals that suffered needlessly and were maimed or killed. It bound her decision to choose Canada over the United States for the family’s new homeland. Canada did not have the military draft and was dedicated to peace-keeping. She was determined to see her family live without experiencing the horrors and ravages of war and was very disturbed by the direction Canada had headed in the past few years.

In Victoria she nursed at the Jubilee Hospital and several rest homes where the care and comfort of her patients was

foremost. She took a personal interest in each and every one and would come home with many interesting stories from the pioneers of early Victoria and surrounding area.

Edith, herself was a pioneer in women's rights and equality and after a serious back injury Edith retrained as a realtor working for Rithet's, J.H. Whitton's and H.W. Dickie's becoming the top realtor not only in each company but also in the Victoria Real Estate Board. She helped many first-time home buyers get their foot in the market by donating her own commission or purchasing appliances for them. Once she took in a dog from a divorcing couple and another time had a family of five stay in her home before they relocated to another province. It was all in a day's work for Edith. She was a shrewd but always fair, honest and caring businesswoman and always went that extra mile, to not only close a deal but just because it needed to be done. She was instrumental in saving the thunderbird and other paintings on the ceiling of Emily Carr's "House of All Sorts" from being removed and sold to private collectors. Also in the 70's, through her efforts, her listing of the unique pristine and bio-diverse Botanical Beach property was saved as a Provincial Park and kept out of the hands of land developers. Edith could make things happen.

In the early 60's Edith brought the Swedish smorgasbord and Sankta Lucia celebrations to Victoria and the Scandinavian community. For many years the photojournalist, Jim Ryan would come and take pictures of the Lucia celebration in her home for the Victoria Colonist paper. The many white robes she sewed from the family's cotton sheets and linen table cloths for Lucia and her attendants are still in use today. She had unending energy and time to share unselfishly.

Edith was hospitable to all: a fun and a gracious hostess. Once she invited twenty-five Swedish merchant seamen for Christmas diner. There was always enough and no one was ever turned away from a meal or a helping hand. Thirty people for lunch and dinner was quite common on the weekends at the

Shawnigan Lake cottage. Edith just loved to cook up great feasts for family and friends and many will fondly remember her Finnish blueberry pulla, Swedish bullar and fish-head soup and the constant invitation to "Have some more." "No thank you Grandma" which would be followed by Edith heaping more food on your plate and saying: "Eat, you eat, eat some more." You never said no to Grandma.

"Everywhere that Mother goes a flower blooms a garden grows" was written on her Mother's day card one year. Truly, she was a pioneer and master of the flower basket bedecking her homes on Gotland and Kärnön, Sweden; Blackwood Street and elsewhere in Victoria; Larkspur on Shawnigan Lake; and Casa Dos Mares, Cabo Bello, Cabo San Lucas with cascades of colours in numerous baskets and planters. She dressed up her home and yard as she did herself: in pure, simple elegance that looked absolutely regal. Gold was her colour. The simple, white and gold daisy was always her favourite flower, ever since childhood, when she would make daisy-chain garlands to wear on her head.

"Good enough construction...it's better than nothing" was a phrase developed in the 70's as yet another one of Edith's homes was remodelled. Edith always needed a change and if she couldn't change it she would move! She always longed for an exciting new challenge which saw her living in at least 20 residences during her 50 years on Vancouver Island. She forever kept her family busy packing. She loved to have an attractive home and worked hard at decorating and remodelling to make her home comfortable and inviting for family and friends. Her home was indeed her castle.

Edith also loved her four legged friends and had a special affinity to the "susikoir" (wolfdog) and "susi", the wolf. Abandoned, lost and neglected animals would always find a helping hand, a meal or even a home with her. She often paid for neighbours' dogs to be treated for parvovirus, spaying or whatever their needs just because it needed to be done. Her

generosity was unending. In May, 1959, shortly after arriving in Canada, Edith went on her weekly Saturday shopping trip to the Hamilton market to buy a bushel of apples for \$5.00. However, she came home with a five dollar coyote-cross pup instead. Her explanation to Sven was "The children miss their friends and need a dog "and that was the end of that discussion. Terry had the cunning, intelligence and tenacity of a wolf and now was part of the Gutemar pack.

Years later, Roja, a pup born on Fisherman's beach on the Southern Baja and saved from the arms of a hurricane, became her constant, loyal companion. Edith also loved her many grand-dogs and cats and was always ready to pet sit or help with the care of an animal, veterinary bills or other expenses. She was an ardent supporter of the SPCA and the World Wildlife Fund. Grandma was devoted to family. She adored her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, taking great pleasure and pride in their efforts, accomplishments and company. She was determined that her kids and kids' kids and kids' kids' kids would spend the summers by the water as she had done on the lakes of her childhood home, "Metsola" in Mikkeli. She was happiest at a beach with her family and passed on her love of nature, swimming and water sports. She also loved to pass on her many family recipes and would go to great lengths to make sure you got it right. Nothing was better than having family by her side; it made her whole and fulfilled. Even watching a movie was made more enjoyable with family. The family was her pack.

Edith was an adventurer. While living on the historic island of Gotland, Sweden she met Sven and they were married in the Hanseatic city of Visby in 1949. She lived her life to the fullest while exploring with Sven and her family on the shores of Scandinavia, Europe, Russia, Canada and Mexico. When Edith first moved to Vancouver Island, she would take her family on weekend adventures to China Beach for camping, Leechtown to search for Billy the Kid's buried boot full of gold,

Goldstream for gold panning and other exciting destinations written about in the Sunday Colonist's "the Islander Magazine." Life was never dull with Edith.

Edith kept her sense of humour and creative approach to problem solving even through the most trying times. Like the Energizer Bunny she kept going and going and going... On one incident, as recent immigrants to Canada, the family had purchased an old Studebaker car only to have it break down a half block from the dealers. They pushed it back but were firmly told that there was no warranty or refunds available. With hardly any funds left, after furnishing a new home and the costs of relocating, the young family was at a loss, but not Edith. She had a plan. The following Monday she packed lunches for the three children and herself and headed to the car dealership where she promptly asked for a refund. The answer was a stern "no". But that did not deter Edith. She calmly sat down with the children in the waiting room and after a while said "Children, are you hungry?" and proceeded to pass out sandwiches and drinks. After several hours of this passive resistance, the manager of the dealership broke down and wrote out a cheque. He had more than met his match; he had met Edith!

Edith's generosity, enthusiasm for life and love of nature and animals combined with the tenacity, inner strength and determination of Finnish "Sisu" inspired all. With Edith, every day was an adventure! She will be dearly missed.

It was Mom's wish to be laid to rest at Shawnigan Lake, a place that holds many family memories. Please join us in honouring and celebrating Edith's Life on Friday, May 24th from 1:00 – 4:00 pm at Norway House, 1110 Hillside Ave., Victoria.

Heartfelt thanks go to the staff of Glengarry Hospital for their loving care. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made on her behalf to the BC SPCA or the Heart and Stroke Foundation at canadahelps.org. Condolences may be offered

below.

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