

Orchard View

GARDENS
BY THE MISSISSIPPI
ALMONTE

The Monthly Review

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219 Paterson Street
Almonte, Ontario. K0A 1A0
613-963-5000

www.orchardviewmississippi.ca –



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Resident of the Month: Cynthia Stewart

Written by: Elizabeth Turner

On a cold and miserable January day, longing for sunshine and warmth, Cynthia Stewart laughingly laments: “it’s because of L-U-V I’m suffering with snow”. While her husband George takes a mid-morning nap in his armchair, I visit with Cynthia in their 4th floor Orchardview apartment. As bleak as it is outside, Cynthia’s gentle hospitality, Caribbean lilt, and self-deprecating humour brightens my day. Cynthia, it turns out, is a wonderful story-teller.

Cynthia (nee Burke) Stewart was born on April 12, 1938 in St. Andrew’s Parish, Jamaica to Herbert and Mary Burke. She was the fifth of six children—Marjorie, Barbara, Herbert, Lawrence, and Sheila. Cynthia grew up in comfortable circumstances. Mr. Burke was a Manager responsible for compensation for the railroad. Her parents were not rich but they were wealthy enough to hire a maid, cook, and gardener. As a young woman, Cynthia was accustomed to coming home from her job as a legal secretary at the courthouse to a meal prepared by the family cook and to clothes cleaned by the maid. Cynthia’s radiant beauty as a young woman shines through old photographs and the Cynthia of today.

Cynthia’s Catholic faith and that of her 5 siblings was nurtured from an early age by her devout parents. So it is not surprising that, “the highlight of (Cynthia’s) life” was the opportunity to meet “the boss”-- Pope John Paul II-- on June 30, 2000 on the occasion of her brother Lawrence becoming the Archbishop of the Bahamas (he was also to later become the Archbishop of Jamaica). On the way to the Vatican that steamy summer day, Cynthia and her brother narrowly avoided being robbed by shameless pick-pockets — as one robber rummaged around in Lawrence’s cassock, a fellow bus passenger warned Cynthia: “Lady in Yellow, watch out, they’re picking your pockets”. Before and after this momentous visit Cynthia was an active participant in the Almonte parish—Holy Name of Mary—and in the Catholic Women’s League.

In 1964 Cynthia met George Stewart, in Kingston, Jamaica through a neighbour who was a receptionist at the Canadian High Commission. George was on assignment with External Affairs (now Global Affairs Canada) and was posted to Jamaica for 2 ½ years. During that time George and Cynthia fell in love, got engaged, and met one another’s family before tying the knot on March 5, 1966. Cynthia tells me that she “robbed the cradle” when she married George as he was 26 and she was 28! When she married George, who is a Presbyterian, he agreed that she could raise their children in the Catholic faith, though she and the children honoured their George and his faith by attending the Presbyterian Church with him on special occasions.

George and Cynthia’s marriage led them and their loved ones far from their comfort zones. While Cynthia teetered her way down an Ottawa airport tarmac in high heels in the depths of winter on her first visit to Canada, her in-laws ventured outside of North America for the first time in their lives to attend their son George’s wedding. Many happy memories were made that trip: Grandma and Grandpa Stewart (Kinburn dairy farmers accustomed to land not sea) enjoyed a dip in the Caribbean wearing bathing suits borrowed from Cynthia’s brother while the newly marrieds gobbled up the delicious lobster salad lovingly prepared by Cynthia’s Mum for their honeymoon. The enjoyment of that special day and the marriage that followed remains evident to this day. “I did well when I picked him”, Cynthia shares.

George and Cynthia spent the first few years of their marriage in Jamaica. After their first child Sharon was born there in 1967, the Stewarts moved to London, England for a 3 ½ year posting. Their second daughter, Jennifer, was born in London in 1968. In Cynthia’s words, the time in London was “lovely” (“there was hardly any snow”) though prejudice did rear its ugly head. For example, some landlords refused to rent to George and Cynthia once it became clear to them that they were a mixed race couple. Thankfully, George and Cynthia were treated with much more respect and kindness by their fellow diplomats among whom they found friendship. And, George’s posting at the Canada House in the heart of London came with some wonderful perks including access to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party and the Royal Ascott. Decked out in a top hat and tails (George) and a big floppy hat (Cynthia), George and Cynthia sat in the same enclosure as the Queen at the Royal Ascott. When their time in England came to an end, the Stewarts decided that it would be best for the children’s sake to forego further foreign postings. They spent 36 years in their Church Street home in Almonte (where their son Michael was born) before down-sizing to a bungalow on Metcalfe Street where they lived for 16 years. And happily for Cynthia, four of her siblings—Sheila, Marjorie, Herbert, and Barbara— eventually followed her lead, settling permanently in Toronto.



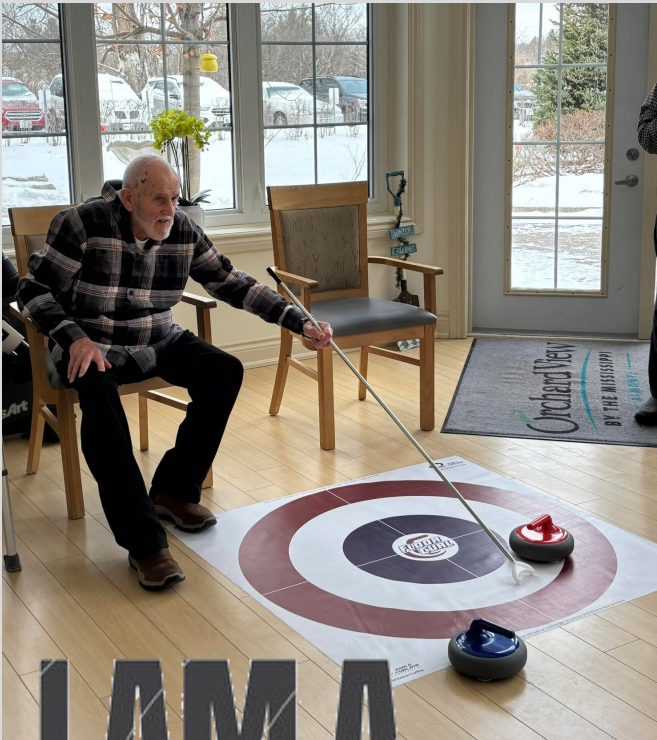
Looking back, Cynthia marvels at the turn that her life took when she met and married George. Growing up somewhat pampered in Jamaica, she could never have imagined that one day she would be renovating the basement of their first home—a red brick Victorian on Church Street in Almonte—alongside George after he came home from work in the evenings. Painting, dry-walling, and sanding were not part of her upbringing and yet, here she was, having fun while doing it! In time, Cynthia also became a great baker, winning prizes at the Almonte Fair for her butter tarts, pies, and cookies.

With some notable exceptions, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a marriage between a Canadian man and a Jamaican woman would have been highly unusual. Indeed it is highly likely that Cynthia was the first woman of colour that many of her Lanark County neighbours had ever known on a first-name basis. It must not have been easy for Cynthia to be the object of her neighbours’ curiosity but Cynthia persevered with grace through the awkward reactions she initially encountered and came to be part of the community in spite of these challenges.

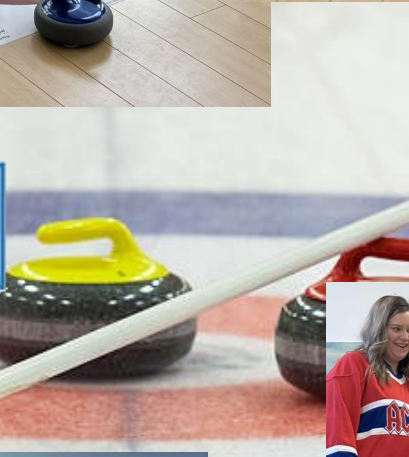
Thus it was that when Cynthia moved into Orchardview in December 2023 with George she found herself among familiar and welcoming faces. As a long-time Almonte resident and a part-time RBC employee, Cynthia recognized former RBC customers and even her former boss Ernie Preston among her new neighbours. And, along with these community connections, Cynthia is comforted by her 3 children’s love and practical support. Her son Michael lives down the road---“when I need anything Michael goes and gets it for us”. And even though her daughters Sharon and Jennifer live far away (Sharon in the Cayman Islands and Jennifer in Toronto), they have helped their parents through various moves, keeping in touch through daily “FaceTime” and regular in-person visits.

Cynthia and George also have 7 grand-children---Mackenzie, Meghan, Matthew, Sophie, Jacob, Madeline, and Ben (who sadly passed away some years ago). When I compliment her on family photos, Cynthia responds in faith and gratitude: “The good Lord blessed us with a beautiful family”. Just like the Jamaican fern in her Orchardview apartment which began as a sprig snuck into Canada in the 1970s by Cynthia as a reminder of home, Cynthia bloomed where she was planted...though she still hates the snow!





**I AM A
CURLING
LEGEND**



Employee of the Month: Jenna

Jenna has worked in the environmental services department for over a year and has recently taken on a new role as maintenance assistant. She has embraced her new role with confidence, and both residents and staff have been impressed by her attention to detail and professionalism. On April 10th she will celebrate her 2nd work anniversary here at OVG. Thank you Jenna for all that you do, Congratulations!



Amenities & Services

- 24-Hour Nursing Staff
- Theatre & Chapel Services
- Wellness Centre—Physio
- Multi-purpose room for games & gatherings
- Library, Tuck Shop
- Outdoor Raised Flower Gardens
- Duck Pond & Atrium Pond
- Gazebo and outdoor activities
- Emergency Response System
- Full Service Dining Room & Snack and Beverage Bistro
- House Physician, Foot Care Nurse, Hearing Aid Clinic, Hair Salon, Esthetician, Dental Hygienist
- Wheelchair Accessible Bus
- Weekly Bus Shopping/Lunch Trips
- Weekly live entertainment
- Full recreation programming
- Weight & Blood pressure clinics

Testimonial ~ Employee ~Teigan

Coming into work is not like a job, but coming to my 2nd home. I love sharing my days and chatting with the residents and colleagues. No matter the department, we are a big team that thrives together under the leadership of a phenomenal management team. I never thought I would have a job like this so early in my life that I have such a big connection with everyone I work with. I am always excited to meet new faces in the dining room and welcome them to their new home! I love it at Orchard View Gardens.

Open Activities

- Bistro • Puzzle Tables • Joe on Piano
- Wellness Centre Bike and Walking Bars
- Adult Colouring • Reading • Quiz booklets • Pool & Shuffleboard Table • Massage chairs (Wellness Centre / 2nd Floor Lounge / 3rd Floor Lounge)

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GARDENS
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SAINT PATRICK'S DAY

OPEN HOUSE

MARCH 16, 2025

MUSIC BY

ROBIN AVERILL

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2 - 4 PM

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