

Annual Murphy Family Baseball Tournament in South Beach, Gimli

Written by Ron Harman and Kathleen Coe, December 2020

In South Beach, every summer since 1984, with just a couple of exceptions, members of the Murphy family have held an annual baseball game; culminating with the presentation of the Doris Murphy Summertime Baseball Trophy. For better than 35 years, the Murphy family has engaged in this annual ritual.



Recently the question was asked: how did this event, which has lasted for decades, get started and what keeps it going?



Eileen Pennycook, Fran Thompson, Isabel Harman, Stan Murphy, Jean French, and Grace Stephen

Below is an attempt to answer that question. But to do so, one must provide some background on not only the game, and why is it held in Gimli,* but of the person named on the trophy; Doris Murphy. This preamble may not seem to address the baseball game, but it is essential to understanding the significance of the game.

Walter and Catherine Medgett, the adoptive parents of Doris Alma, lived in England. Prior to WWI they moved, with their daughter to Souris, Manitoba. There they ran a boarding house. Residing in that boarding house was James Cecil Murphy, who had come to Canada from Ireland and was working with the Canadian Pacific Railroad. In 1916 Doris married

James to become Doris Murphy; the future matriarch of the Murphy family.



Doris Murphy and her grandchildren in 1962

*L to R Back Row: Bryan Thompson, Ron Harman, Rick Harman, Shirley French holding Randy French, Allan Stephen holding Moira Pennycook
Middle Row: David Pennycook, Douglas Stephen, Patty French, Jim Thompson, Stirling Pennycook, Joan Thompson, Sherilyn Murphy
Front Row: Kathleen Pennycook, Marilyn French, Stanley Murphy, Doris Murphy holding Christopher Pennycook, Margaret Pennycook, Phyllis Murphy*

Walter Medgett was ex-Royal Navy and had enlisted in the Canadian Naval Reserve; along with his new son-in-law James Murphy. Both were subsequently assigned to the naval port of Halifax; Walter on the Nairobi and James on a mine sweeper. Going with them to Halifax were Catherine Medgett, Doris Murphy and Doris's infant son Stan. In the [Halifax Explosion](#) of December 1917, the men were on their ships and both

survived. However, the blast killed Mrs. Medgett and Doris lost an eye as a result of flying glass.

Following the war, they returned to Souris where the family grew with the arrival of Grace, Isabel, Frances, the twins Jean and Jim and lastly Eileen. After moving to Winnipeg around 1937, the Murphy family connected with the family of **John and Jean Stephen**, who also had seven children: five boys and two girls. A boy and girl from each family inter-married: Stan Murphy to Jessie Stephen and George Stephen to Grace Murphy.



L to R: Doris Murphy, Eileen Pennycook, James Murphy, Grace Stephen, Jean French, Fran Thompson, Stan Murphy, Isabel Harman, Jim Murphy

John and Jean Stephen, referred to by everyone as Mom and Pop Stephen, had a place at South Beach: **Dorrery Lodge**. This became the central summer place for both families. Over time, six of the seven children of Doris Murphy acquired land and built cottages all around the Stephen compound. Stan and Jessie had two cottages directly across Benedict from **Dorrery Lodge**. Every year, Doris Murphy would spend her entire summer in one of these. Grace and George had their cottage, the **Baltimore**, on Hansson, just a few lots west of **Evan's Store**. Jean Murphy who married Cec French had a place directly east of **Dorrery Lodge** called **Galway Bay**. Isabel Murphy married Bud Harman and for years they rented **The Nook** and the boy's Veranda from Pop Stephen. Later the Harmans

had a 16 foot travel trailer that the French's graciously allowed them to park at *Galway Bay*. The Harmans eventually acquired a lot directly west of the Stephen property at what is now the SW corner of Benedict and Anna, and built a place in 1975. Francis Murphy married Ernie Thompson and they bought a place on Benedict, adjacent to Stan and Jessie's lots, and directly across from *Galway Bay*. Eileen Murphy married Rod Pennycook and they built a cottage on the corner of Ethel and Anna, immediately south of the Stephen compound.

Except for Jim Murphy, who, in 1967, had moved to Alberta and then to BC, all of Doris's children had summer places within a few hundred yards of one another, essentially surrounding the Stephen compound. Grace had two sons as did Isabel. Jean had four children, Jim and his wife Sharon (nee Tighe) had five, Frances had three and Eileen had six. Spending summers growing up in this family environment was quite unique. Everyone was either your cousin, an uncle or an aunt. It was the ideal set up for young children; lots of freedom, open spaces, sandy beaches, pounding surf, and a ton of playmates. In those days, the vacation period wasn't just a couple of weeks. Families (consisting of the moms and their children while the dads commuted to work) stayed for the entire summer; 7 – 8 weeks. Every day, for a couple of months, you saw the same people. As this cohort of "cousins" grew up, the activities changed but the connections remained.

Even when the "cousins" themselves married and moved away, there was a strong pull to return to this area. If you had moved away, and you wanted to see most of your relatives 'in one fell swoop' – just go to South Beach, preferably during the *Icelandic Festival*, and they'd all be there; from Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and all parts of Winnipeg.

With that lengthy preamble, let's talk baseball.

There was always some form of baseball being played even back in the early 1950s. Doris's children and their spouses, whom we'll refer to as the Aunts and Uncles, played a lot of horseshoes. From the mid 1940s to the late 1960s horseshoes were the prime venue. So many pairs, complicated double knock out schedules, with tournaments lasting days, and sometimes so late into the summer night that cars had to be driven onto

the lawn of *Dorrery Lodge* so that their headlights could provide light onto the sand pits.

Baseball was more of a 'cousins' sport. The kids from a couple of families could link up and you'd have enough bodies to form a couple of teams. Initially games happened on the grounds of *Dorrery Lodge*. But as the players got bigger, more room was needed. For a time we played on the grounds of the school that was close to the present Dr. George Johnson Middle School. As the popularity of the annual Icelandic Festival increased over the years, parking anywhere near the park was problematic. Around the late 80's or early 90's the baseball venue moved to the Gimli High School grounds.



As the cousins got older, they'd invite their city friends to the lake for the day or the weekend. Soon these folks became involved in the baseball game. Not always with good results. The game morphed from a family affair into a more competitive event.

Doris Murphy, our grandmother, died in March 1983, at the age of 85. Our grandfather, James Murphy, had died in 1957, at the age of 62. Most of the cousins weren't even born when James died, and those that were around were really too young to remember him. It was Doris that they knew. She

was at her cottage every summer as they were growing up. Doris was the head of the Murphy family. At the time of her death Doris had 22 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren.



Doris at *Jesta*

Her death had an impact on many people. During the summer of 1983, while the families gathered for the Gimli August long weekend, usually around a crackling bonfire with sufficient adult beverages, there was talk of Grandma Murphy and that maybe we should do something to honour her memory. That “something” would have to be something that all the

families could get behind, and participate in, regardless of age, and of course it would have to happen right here, in Gimli, preferably on the August Long Weekend. And thus the notion of reviving a family baseball game was hatched.

A trophy was commissioned; entitled the Doris Murphy Summertime Baseball Trophy. The word Summertime was included because, for most of us, that was when we'd see Grandma.



Rules were created to ensure that the baseball game would be, exclusively, a family affair. Copies of the rules were sent to all the families, with the plan to have the inaugural game(s) on the August Long Weekend of 1984.

There are copies of these Original Rules still around, stuck in the bottom of cottage drawers. Printed on two sides of green card stock, they make for interesting reading. But a few of the highlights are;

Rule 1: the game follows Slow Pitch rules – it was felt that slow pitch enabled virtually everyone to have a chance at hitting the ball.

Rule 2: Eligibility to participate was key. You had to be family. Participants had to be direct descendants of Doris Murphy or married to a direct descendant of Doris Murphy. And the player must be at least 9 years of age and preferably older.



This Eligibility rule may seem straightforward; but it wasn't. As we progressed into the 21st century, the definition of marriage was up for discussion. Unfortunately, the original rules did not have any dispute resolution mechanism. Also, the age of 9 can cause problems since some the great grandchildren are playing community league baseball well before the age of 9.

Ron confesses that as the author of the original rules, the initial age limit was set at 10. A nice round number. When reading the rules to his own children, before he sent the rules to the other families, his daughter Christen said that the age rule had to be revised – to 9. She reminded him that she would not be turning 10 until August 26; which is after the Long Weekend. The age limit was revised.

Rule 6: The original rules had a section called the Average Age Advantage. It was specifically included so that there was a distinct advantage if you had members on your team that were over the age of 35. The older they were then 35, the greater number of points your team collected. And these points could be converted into “runs”.

The night before the baseball game teams would try to recruit those aunts and uncles who were old, but still nimble enough to play. **George Stephen** was a much sought after player, well into his 70s.

In practice, the Average Age Advantage rule was never seriously applied. But it served its purpose. In the early years of the of the revised games, and to this day, there are seniors playing alongside their grandchildren.



Also, as part of Rule 1, there was a statement concerning the umpire’s rulings. It stated that these rulings shall be final regardless of how strange

the umpire's calls may be. This rule was specifically included to recognize Cec French. Uncle Cec had acted as the umpire for most of the past ball games. As in any quasi competitive situation, controversies can arise and the Umpire has to make a ruling. We were never sure if Cec made these controversial calls because he had completely missed the play, if he wanted to inject some humour or was trying to 'level' the playing field. The younger the player, the more favourable the call.

The actual mechanics of the game are very simple. All the eligible players, those who actually want to play, are identified, and assigned to one of two teams. There is an attempt to keep family members together, but not strictly. Given the wide variations in skill levels (remember some of these people are professional athletes and some actually play competitive baseball, while other have never swung a bat) consideration is taken to provide some sense of 'equality'. Each team may have from 12 to 14+ players. In each inning, the entire team gets to bat; no such thing as three outs. There are three innings. Score sheets are kept. Post game team photos are taken. Usually there are as many spectators as players. The whole event probably lasts 2 1/2 hours.



In 2016, the rules were revised. Printed on two sides of yellow card stock. Now there is an overseeing Senate, consisting of a representative from each original family, to handle interpretation issues and procedural matters. The Average Age Advantage rule is simplified; but still rewards those teams who have player who are seniors.



But Rule 10, the last rule, remains unchanged.

Rule 10: This rule involves the responsibilities of the winning team. They must get the plaque made and affixed to the trophy. They must keep the trophy safe and make it available for presentation the next year. And here

is the big one. The winning team must provide suitable post game refreshments for the other team.

This last rule has morphed into a gigantic BBQ. It takes weeks to plan, and hosts not only the players but the spectators and other family members as well. It's a massive family affair that involves rehashing any embarrassing on field performances, testing one's memory concerning the names of an ever increasing number of young relatives, and simply catching up on events that have transpired over the past year. This family get-together lasts longer than the actual game.



The senior members of the family are recruited to identify the game's MVP. Each player signs a new softball, and this signed baseball is presented to the MVP. There are more than a few of these prized keepsakes to be found, safely tucked away.



Finally, as the gathering come to a close, there is the presentation of the *Doris Murphy Summertime Baseball Trophy*; usually followed by a gracious but light-hearted acceptance speech.



From 1984 to the present, there have been 32 games with 3 postponements. One cancellation occurred during a particularly wet weekend (2001) when the playing field was underwater. Another, in 2012, when a medical emergency forced an entire family to withdraw. The most recent cancellation was the extremely hot and humid summer of 2019 when nobody wanted to be out in the sun, let alone play baseball. Although the games were cancelled, the family BBQs were held.





As you have gathered by now, the Doris Murphy Summertime Baseball event was never really about baseball. It was the perfect opportunity to pay respect to a very special lady and provide a means of staying connected with a special family.