

WORK THROUGH TIME

Cape Breton Stories of Land & Sea



Terry MacLellan, First Lady of Cape Breton

The Ann Terry Outreach Project

She was known as Cape Breton's "First Lady," an enthusiastic supporter of all things Cape Breton. As a student, Terry MacLellan began a radio and television career that would span two decades, and allow Cape Bretoners to become familiar with the personality behind the words. When she died on June 15, 1985, Cape Breton Island felt the loss of Terry MacLellan.

Terry MacLellan was one of two children born to Bridget and Charles MacLellan. Although her mother was a trained singer, Ms. MacLellan chose to study speech training with Olive Guthrie MacDonald while at Holy Angels High School where she graduated in 1941. She was extensively involved in school drama groups, usually playing a male role due to her height, and was given the outstanding individual trophy the first time it was awarded in the Cape Breton Festival of Speech and Drama.

While attending St. Francis Xavier University, studying for her Bachelor of Arts with a major in English and Speech, she began her broadcasting career at CJFX with Terry Tales. She moved on to CBC as a radio reporter where she adapted the name "Ann Terry," by which she was known for the remainder of her career. Though originally considered too young to conduct a program for homemakers, Terry MacLellan returned to the Island in 1954 to replace the retired Betty Brown on CJCB's Women's Morning Program.

Her popularity as a radio and television personality made her much in demand as master of ceremonies for community events. Until the early 1970s, she did special television shows, interviews, commercials, coverage of royal visits and several guest appearances on CBC's Front Page Challenge. In pursuing her outside interests, she emceed fashion shows and was the hostess-narrator for concerts by the Cape Breton Chorale. She also actively participated as a founding member of the Federation of University Women and the Cape Breton branch of the Canadian Club; she was the first female member of St. Francis Xavier University's Board of Governors; she was also an honorary member of many Cape Breton organizations, and was chosen as Sydney's Woman of the Year by the members of the Business and Professional Women's Club. In addition, she was a self-described "spasmodic hobbyist" and an avid traveller.

Terry MacLellan left her career with CJCB in August of 1972 for a position as Director of Tourism with the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO), an area in which her experience in the broadcasting industry proved to be a great asset. She saw tourism as sharing in the progress of Cape Breton and her many projects exemplified this ideology. She worked on the development of Inverness as a tourist attraction, making maps, planning chowder houses, preparing and distributing tourist literature, and promoting "Bed and Breakfasts." Her work culminated in her promotion to Director of Corporate Affairs in 1980, a position she held until her death in 1985.

What was it that brought Ann Terry as far as any performer could hope to go in the affection of her listeners? She was a communicator par excellence and could take highbrow or mundane topics and make them interesting to everyone. Her magnificent voice and unmatched flair for description brought a touch of class to countless events. On the Women's Program, she took the opportunity to expand and explore beyond conventional programming. Topics of interest to both women and men garnered Ann Terry a loyal audience and made her name a household word.

The genuine warmth of her personality was felt by people in all walks of life. Credibility was something that she strove for in all that she undertook. She loved people, loved a good conversation and always shared what she enjoyed herself. She had a great sense of humour, but the two things that did anger her were malice and willful negligence. It was through her feeling for the island and its people that she became Cape Breton's "First Lady." Terry MacLellan sincerely cared about the people and the events in her community. That concern lives on today in the efforts of the Ann Terry Outreach Project.

The staff of the Ann Terry Project provide free counseling services to meet the needs of women who are seeking employment, particularly those re-entering the workforce. By assisting women of the Industrial area of Cape Breton Island in finding gainful employment, the Ann Terry Project is indeed carrying on Terry MacLellan's concern for the island and its people.

This portrait of Terry MacLellan's life was provided to us by the Ann Terry Project.

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