

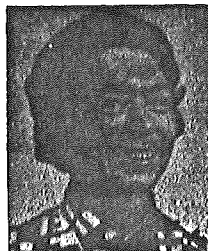
MAY 16, 1973 C3

V.I.P. and me

(very interesting person)

By KATHLEEN A. HICKS

"Two years ago, I had a nasty fall and hurt my hip, and I was off work for a month. But I don't mind the weather, because we are dressed for it. Our uniforms are supplied so we are equipped for all kinds of weather. So it's never really been a problem except having to walk on ice."



By KATHLEEN A. HICKS

JOYCE FIRMAN:

Canada's First Woman Letter Carrier

Past President: Port Credit Legion Ladies' Auxiliary

ME: You were the first woman letter carrier in Canada when you started in 1965. What ever prompted you to take on such a laborious task?

JOYCE: I'm pretty sure I was the first in Ontario to take this on as a steady job; I don't know about the whole of Canada. But I do believe through the war years there were some women delivering mail in Vancouver. I don't think they continued after the war though. Now in 1965, I merely went as a helper at Christmastime, then again in '66. It was October of '67 when I went on staff full time. Actually, my children were almost grownup by then. My daughter, Bonnie, is now 18, and the only one at home. I found there wasn't enough to keep me occupied. I took this particular job because I didn't want to sit in an office. I can go crazy at home; I don't have to go into an office and go crazy. The more I thought of sitting on a chair and pounding a typewriter all day and probably putting on an awful lot of weight, the less I desired that. I've always loved to walk and exercise. I thought this would be a real challenge, and I would be out in the fresh air, and getting paid for something I like to do.

ME: A letter carrier totes an average of 30 pounds of mail in relays for many miles. How did you feel after your first day or so?

JOYCE: After my first day, it wasn't too bad because my supervisor went out with me. He showed me where to go and he carried half the load. The only thing that bothered me was that my legs were extremely sore and tired. At that time, we covered about 12 miles. I didn't find it too difficult though. I was home at one o'clock those days, but then when I got on my own it was a different story. It took a little longer to find the places; but I've always enjoyed the work, every bit of it.

ME: Do you know if there are any more women taken to the streets to deliver the mail since you broke ground for them?

JOYCE: Yes — at last count there were 36 in Canada. There is one station in British Columbia where they are all female except for the supervisor. There are nine or ten carriers and one male supervisor. I am still the only one at our office.

ME: A postie has to defy bitter cold, snow storms, pelting rain etc. Has the weather ever been a problem for you?

JOYCE: Not really. The only time it has been a problem is when there have been ice storms. Two years ago, I had a nasty fall and hurt my hip, and I was off work for a month. But I don't mind the weather, because we are dressed for it. Our uniforms are supplied; we are well equipped with uniforms for all kinds of weather. So it's never really been a problem except having to walk on the ice. Most of us get the spikes that fit on our boots to prevent us from sliding around.

ME: Speaking of uniforms, did they have to get you a special outfit or did you just fit into a men's small?

JOYCE: No — they had my uniform tailor made; especially designed for me. I have skirts and slacks, and a special hat was made because I don't like the peaked cap.

ME: Tell me about a funny incident that has happened in your travels.

JOYCE: Not too many funny things happen. But there was one thing — let's face it, I'm not a young woman to start going out to work. I was 46 years old when I started this job. We had a young lad of about 19 start. We had to drive to our beat in a cab; and one fellow said to this boy, "When Joyce gets out of the cab, you have to pinch her." So when I got out, I could hear them all laughing. So when they picked me up to take me back, I asked them what they had been laughing about earlier. And they told me that after this fellow had told this young boy to pinch me, he said, "What, that sweet little old lady?" Well, I laughed — I thought that was funny. I do meet some nice people, and I find the older people intriguing and I love to chat with them. Also, most of the time the children call me Mrs. Mailman.

ME: When you started this job you encountered some resentment from the male opposition. Give me a few details on this situation and how you handled it.

JOYCE: Well, it wasn't too bad for the first few days, because I knew several of them from when I was a helper. But they did talk, saying that I would only last a couple of weeks. The more I heard about this, the more determined I was to last longer than that. After about six weeks, they had a union meeting and they discussed not liking a woman in the office. Hearing this, I was ready to quit, but to prove a point I decided to stay on. After I had proved that I could do the job

without the help of any of them they started to come around. went to the union meetings after that. I had been there maybe nine or ten months when they elected me as their secretary for the local in the union. By this time, I knew I was in. I have been their secretary ever since. I'm just one of the boys now.

ME: Seeing as how you are a woman doing a man's job, do you have any women's lib opinions?

JOYCE: No, not really. I do agree with equal pay for equal work. I go along with that. As for being a woman doing a man's job, I don't expect to be treated like a woman, and I am not treated like a woman. Sometimes the language gets a little rough, but I have learned to put up with it, because I am in a man's world. But when I leave the office, I expect to be treated like a lady; I still want a man to respect me as a woman.

ME: What has this experience as a letter carrier done for you as a person?

JOYCE: I would say that it has made me perhaps a little more alive. A woman's life has to be spent looking after her family, but they don't need you 24 hours a day, especially when they are in school. By being home all the time, you do become dull, because the only conversation you have is concerning your family. I have always liked people, but I have come to like them more and more. Dealing with the public, we do get some who get a little uptight on certain matters, and on the whole, I have learned to respect people's wishes. For instance, if they don't want me crossing their lawns, I don't do it. I have come to understand men a lot now than I ever did before, but mailmen are a breed unto themselves. Through such experiences, I have learned that people are pretty wonderful.

ME: Many people are discontinuing sending Christmas cards because of the price increase for stamps. Have you noticed any drastic change over the years?

JOYCE: Oh definitely. — yes. When I was a helper we had string bags that might weigh up to 60 pounds each, and we would have one bag for each street. Now, I can honestly say we wouldn't get one of those bags full for four streets. There definitely has been a great difference in the amount of cards

See WONDER, Page C27

REEL B106.

FIRMAN, JOYCE

MAY 16, 1973.

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"I look back and wonder how I did it"

Continued from Page C3

sent out, so the mail isn't as heavy as it used to be. It's a pity in a way.

ME: Are people still giving Christmas tips, and if so, how well do you do?

JOYCE: Yes, but it depends on the area and how long you've been on it. When I first started out in Lorne Park, I did very well — the people were very generous. Then in February of '71, I changed over to the area where I am now, and I was serving these people for nine months when Christmas came around; I wasn't known that long so I didn't do well. I often get gifts such as chocolates, gloves, homemade cookies, cosmetics — all kinds of things. People are very thoughtful; if you give them good service they show their appreciation, even if you do kick their dogs.

ME: You have two sons, George and Robert — both married now. When Robert was born he had club feet. The first thing a mother does when she holds her new baby is look at its hands and feet to count the fingers and toes. Elaborate on your astonishment when you saw Robert's feet.

JOYCE: It was not really astonishment, believe me — horrified would be more like it. He was my second son, so I never unbundled him to look him over, and on the second day, the nurse said the doctor would be in to talk to me about my son's feet. I said, "What's wrong with his feet?" she said, "Haven't you looked at your baby?" I told her no I hadn't, and she unwrapped him and I was horrified. I got terribly upset and started to cry, and I cried for a whole day until the doctor came in. Doctor George Pennel is a bone specialist, and when he explained that he could fix them, I stopped worrying about it as much, although I always wondered if he would ever walk. But he said he would have my boy walking in two years, I believed him — and he was.

ME: What torment and anxiety followed until his feet were normal?

JOYCE: When he was three days old, I had to start exercising his feet to loosen up the ankles and get them pliable so they would move. Then they put him in aluminium splints, which they taped to his feet and they were screwed to a bar to keep his feet in position. He wore these day and night for about two years. We used to turn his feet out a little more each week; then when they were at right angles with his legs, we gradually brought them in again. He had to wear bars on his boots, and he wore these to bed until he was about five. When he was four, he had an operation to cut all the cords in his left foot, which were too tight, and he was in a cast for six months. Then when he was 11 or 12, he had a wedge of bone taken out of the top part of his ankle, and then it was stapled together. When he was about 15 one of the staples came out and back he had to go again and have that removed. He wore special shoes until he was 14. Once in a while he has a little trouble, his feet swell up, but other than that he's fine. He plays baseball, broomball, and he bowls — he's pretty active in sports. It takes a lot of time and patience — not only on the mother's part but on the child's part as well. We were very pleased with the results.

ME: You were present of the Port Credit Legion Ladies' Auxiliary in 1967-'68. When did you become involved with the Legion, and what were some of your accomplishments?

JOYCE: I was president from January 1967 until December 1968 — two whole years. I was secretary for three years before that which I found very necessary to become a president. It gave me the experience of knowing exactly what was going on — it gave you good depth, and this helped immensely. I joined the Legion in 1962. I went to a convention to see what the Legion was all about and that's when I really became interested. And of course, through the years I became quite involved. It was a very rewarding experience. So many people think that the Legion is just a place to drink beer, but there is so much community work that they do that no one ever hears about. The Legion is a marvelous organization. Besides secretary and president, I was Sunnybrook convener, sports officer, social convener and 2nd vice-president. I haven't done much the last couple of years, but I enjoyed every moment I served in office. While I was there, we always went to Sunnybrook Hospital and took cigarettes to the Vets, and we would play bingo. When I was secretary we had the bright idea of bringing them out to our Legion. I believe that was the first time we had done it, and that has become a regular event. While I was president, we got involved in sports through the zone. We became very active in bowling, darts, euchre and cribbage. The first bowling tournament we went in was in Brampton and we won it with 3,400 pins, no handicaps either.

We also put on our first big bazaar and we made over \$1,000. that day. We held rummage sales and other events, and we gave the men enough money to pay the interest off on the mortgage. It was a big thrill being president in the new hall. We moved in before it was finished — Dec. 1965 — the dedication was held on June 6, 1966. I remember one thing I started, we always cater for the men's functions, and I said to the branch president, "What you should do is have an appreciation dinner for us." So darned if he didn't arrange it, and now every year they have an appreciation night for the ladies' auxiliary. I went to two conventions in those years, one in Windsor and one in Ottawa, so I learned a lot through my years there.

ME: You belonged to St. Hilary's Church and were a member of the Women's Church Year. Tell me about the joys and tribulations of those days.

JOYCE: I joined St. Hilary's around 1957 when Mr. Lemmon was the minister. I remember at one time when I was Chatelaine of the Kitchen, which is looking after anything that went on at the church, and social convener at the Legion, and had to look after the food, there were times when I would have to be ordering for a meal at the church and one at the Legion at the same time. I had to be very careful I didn't get the two confused; so that was a hectic period. I taught Sunday School for seven years — four and five year olds. That was fantastic teaching those little ones. I enjoyed it, and I don't regret having been that busy. I took back and wonder how I did it, and still look after my family. But it didn't do me any harm — it adds a little spice to life really.

ME: Last fall, you suffered a disc problem and spent six weeks in bed. What were your anxieties like during this period of convalescence?

JOYCE: At first, I thought — I can't work any more, what am I going to do? It's my only income. When it didn't improve, I really started to worry and thought I was going to be an invalid for life. I don't know what brought it about. It just hit me suddenly, and one morning I couldn't get out of bed. I went to a couple of doctors and they couldn't find out what the pain was caused from. Finally, I went to Dr. Pennel, who looked after my son's feet, and he diagnosed me in a few minutes. I started to wear a surgical support and doing exercises, which I will probably have to do for the rest of my life. I took a two week vacation in California for a rest, and when I went back to work, I wore the support, and I haven't had any trouble since.

ME: Most of us adhere to certain ethics of life, and have sayings we use as a life line. Do you have one you follow?

JOYCE: Yes, I do — I am grateful that I had yesterday. I'm glad I have today, and I am looking forward to tomorrow.

REEL B106

FIRMAN, Joyce
(CONT.)