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Lifetimes: A passion for business, family

Phillip Hoffman formerly of Kitchener; Born: April 18, 1926 in Winnipeg; Died: June 14, 2011 of age related illness



**Lifetimes**

Family photo

*Phillip Hoffman*

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Waterloo Region Record

There certainly was nothing ordinary about Phillip Hoffman’s life.

Born into an entrepreneurial family, Phillip was immersed in enterprise and concept of family from birth.

His father, Phillip senior was born in Yugoslavia and came to Canada in 1924 with his wife Frances and sons John and Paul. Trained as a butcher he quickly landed a job at a meat plant in Winnipeg, a city where their third son, Phillip was born. For the senior Phillip, Winnipeg had been a training ground of sorts, providing him with insight into the meat business.

The family moved to Kitchener in 1929 and in 1934 he opened Central Meat Market then Quality Meat Market in Preston in 1941. Both stores were sold in 1951 when, along with his sons, Phillip Senior opened Hoffman Meats, a hog processing plant. When he retired in 1960, the sons took over.

By 1975, the Hoffman sons sold a 52 per cent interest in the business but insisted the plant remain Hoffman Meats, a testament to the family name. Phillip Junior continued to run the company, modernizing it to state-of-the-art facility and in 1981 the entire company was sold. Phillip stayed on for awhile as an adviser before retiring and the plant was shut down in 1992 by then owners Maple Leaf Foods.

His son Phil said his father was a hard worker, a man immensely proud of the family run business and though he had wanted to become a lawyer, the family was more important. For Phillip, it was always about family.

“He was very kind, very trusting,” said Phil. “I looked up to him. He supported all my efforts.” Phil, a documentary filmmaker, said his father once offered him the family business and when he responded “no” Phillip did not show disappointment.

Phil also noted his father “took care of his workers” rescheduling summer hours to let staff off by noon, but not before they had a little social time with the boss who always brought a treat.

“After work, we’d go in the back (storage) and have a beer and chat,” said Phil. “He was very much respected by his employees.”

The early kick off time meant everyone could head to their cottages, including the Hoffmans whose cottage on McCullough Lake, was a gathering place for the family Phillip once thought he would never have.

Phillip and Susan met in Kitchener through mutual friends and while they seemed to spend a lot of time together as a group, not much was happening romance-wise.

“My mother and dad really had a thing for each other,” said Colleen. “He was in love with her but he was shy.”

It was Susan who broke the ice, writing to her young admirer while travelling in Europe. Perhaps distance encouraged Susan to admit deeply rooted feelings and he responded with joy. They married in 1949 and planned on lots of children but life had a few surprises in store.

Daughter Colleen Hoffman recalled, “They really wanted a family, that’s what they taught us that their purpose was, to have a family.”

Susan had many miscarriages and a still birth and doctors finally told them, they could never have children. Those doctors didn’t understand the depth of this couple’s faith or their determination.

In 1952 Phillip and Susan headed to St. Joseph’s Oratory of Mount Royal, in Montreal, where the faithful went to pray for a miracle. The following year, they got their miracle: triplet girls.

Colleen and Frannie are identical twins and Philomene a fraternal twin, born at St. Mary’s Hospital June 17, 1953. At just over one pound each, the tiny babies lived the first two months of their lives in a London hospital incubator. “My dad said mom prayed for twins and he threw one in,” said Colleen.

Yet the couple’s miracles did not end there.

“Two and a half years later, they had my brother (Phil),” she said.

Colleen remembers an exceedingly happy childhood. “They loved us unconditionally,” she said. “We just adored them and they were so proud of us.”

But raising triplets in an age when multiple births were a rarity was tough and the three babies caused quite the sensation.

“For a long time it was too hard for my mom to take us out in public,” she said of the constant attention.

There was also the issue of having three of everything and at one point, with baby Phil in the mix, there were four babies all in diapers in the Hoffman household.

“My mom didn’t want help, she was like a super mom,” said Colleen. “It was a really happy home.” Of course there was help from the family, particularly grandparents. Colleen said both her parents taught their children the importance of “family devotion.”

In the mid 1980s, when responsibilities for running the plant and raising a family was behind them, Phillip and Susan made the decision to sell their Kitchener home and move to the cottage, spending winters in Florida.

“My dad said this was their honeymoon,” she said.

In Sept. 2009 Susan, who had Alzheimer’s, suffered a stroke and died and Phillip continued to live at the cottage even when his own health failed and he needed almost round the clock care.

At the end Colleen said her dad was bedridden and only one third of his heart was functioning. He died at home, in his beloved cottage.

“They used to sit on the deck every night to watch the sunset,” she said. “When I think of my parents, I think of them sitting there. They loved being together.”

[*vhill@therecord.com*](mailto:vhill@therecord.com)

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