

## **MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER**

**MRS. JEAN McWILLIAM (MAC DONALD)**

**BORN December 19th, 1877 - DIED August 15th, 1969**

She was the President of the Next of Kin Association. With the help of other soldiers' wives, this organization was formed. Times were grim and sadness had swept the Nation. As there was an election coming up for the Federal Government, there was talk that year of conscription, as the men were not rushing to join the armed forces. The soldiers' wives were all underpaid so Mrs. Jean McWilliam, together with other soldiers' wives, formed the Next of Kin Association.

The year was 1917 and Sir Robert Borden was re-elected.

During the years 1914 and 1915, Mr. R.B. Bennett, M.L.A. for Calgary, Alberta, had given the soldiers and their wives reassurance that they would be well taken care of. He suggested that any problems which needed to be solved by these women while the men were overseas, be taken to him and he would personally assist them - free of charge.

There were several meetings of the Next of Kin Association and, at one of these meetings, Mr. R.B. Bennett was invited to speak and to offer what sympathy he could. He had remarked that he, himself, had seen tears of sympathy running down the cheeks of Sir Robert Borden as he read the casualty lists coming from France.

During the Question Period, Mrs. Jean McWilliam stood up and asked this Honourable Gentleman, "If at any time he had observed tears of sympathy running down Sir Robert Borden's cheeks when he read what the soldiers' wives allowance amounted to, and if he questioned how they were supposed to live on this pittance".

Words were thrown around the room and there was a general turmoil at the meeting, with many ladies joining in and really razzing their quest.

Mrs. Jean McWilliam received a letter in the mail a few days later advising her to meet with Mr. Bennett in his office. It was a very severe letter and she made the appointment with his Secretary, Miss Millar, and prepared to beard the lion in his den.

Mr. Bennett had a characteristic way of looking at a person very sternly over his glasses. As she entered the room, he gave her this treatment and, of course, expected her to be completely cowed. He said in an angry voice, "Do you realize what you have done? Your inflammatory words at that meeting are grounds for you being charged with slander, and I want you to know that I will not tolerate this!" Mrs. McWilliam looked him square in the eye and answered, "Mr. Bennett, to the rest of the women in Calgary you may be God Almighty, but to me you are just plain R.B. Bennett and you do not frighten me one bit". He was astounded and absolutely floored.

After this encounter, Mrs. McWilliam and Mr. R.B. Bennett became very good friends and shared many causes concerning the health and welfare of Canadians, not just in Alberta, but in all of Canada. He was her champion to the very end of his days.

My love for my Great Grandmother I cannot describe. She was a constant driving force in nature and I do not know exactly where, or how, she found the strength to accomplish all of the good works that she did during her lifetime.

She was a champion for the poor and the underdog. She never turned a living soul from her door, as she knew that God looks after us all and one kindness will always turn into another.

During her lifetime, she fought tirelessly for better working conditions for women.

She also fought tirelessly for an increase in the old age pensions for seniors and she formed and served as President of the National Social Security Association. She travelled to Ottawa to interview The Honourable MacKenzie King - at her own expense - on behalf of this Association.

He was found to be most interested in their Organization, and in their future plans for lowering pension age, and increasing old age pensions and social security (which at that time was not obtainable until a person had reached seventy years of age).

She lived to see many of her dreams come true.

The old age pension was increased, the Means Test removed, better homes for the elderly were created and the Alberta Health Plan was formulated. Also, she lived to see much better working conditions implemented for women.

She passed away on August 15th, 1969 in the City of Calgary, Alberta.