



AirdrieLIFE... is Heloise Lorimer.

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Airdrie's First Lady

Can you remember Airdrie before there were traffic lights on Main Street? Plenty of you can. Can you remember when Airdrie only existed on one side of the QE 2? (Highway 2) How about when the streets were dirt, there were only 37 houses and 99 residents? Can we go back further? Can you recall playing hockey on a pond in your brother's skates?

Only one woman in Airdrie can talk about all of these events with a clarity that astonishes visitors. At 93, Heloise Lorimer is Airdrie's oldest resident who was actually born in the community. The town's first physician, the now legendary Dr. Edwards, delivered Heloise.

Back when the government was encouraging the population to come west, land was \$5 an acre. Edna and Lafayette Van Sickle homesteaded near Airdrie in 1906 and later moved to town to open a general store where the Royal Bank now stands, that sold "grocery, dry goods, boots, shoes, flour and seed" as the sign boasted. In 1912 Heloise made her grand entrance and Airdrie has never been the same since.

From playing leapfrog over tombstones to climbing on the roof of her dad's store to dump snow on passers by, Heloise was full of energy. During the interview with AirdrieLIFE there was a definite hint of that spitfire in the eyes of the now spry great grandmother. Heloise regaled us with tales of "making our own fun – you know, we didn't have television back then."

She was an avid hockey and baseball player. In fact as a young girl she played on the local boys hockey team simply because "there just weren't enough boys to make a team." Heloise only hung up her skates a few years ago with much reluctance (and her son's insistence!).

The red hair tops a mind with more memories than the Nose Creek Valley Museum. In fact Heloise used to lecture about the history of Airdrie for 42 years, visiting the schools. We bet there is more than one person reading this who can recall a visit from Heloise!

During her childhood the flu epidemic hit the small town of Airdrie hard. The Old Hotel became a hospital and everyone was quarantined. Heloise still remembers her mother not letting her out of the yard for almost a year for fear of her getting ill.

She often joked in later years that she got married just so she could leave that yard, (not because of the flu fears, but because mischievous Heloise was always grounded.)

During the 1930s Heloise was a busy wife and mother. She married James Lorimer in 1931. Jim owned the local garage and since there was not much in the way of restaurants, hungry customers waiting for an engine repair would find themselves in Heloise's kitchen. Today Heloise's kitchen is still a busy stop over on Sundays after church as friends pop in to chat. Her three sons Gary, Buzz and Rick have given Heloise eight grand children and eight great grandchildren who keep in regular contact. "I've always had my family close and I love having them here," she smiles.

Heloise kept her hockey and baseball skills on par with the best, playing in a competitive league against teams from Didsbury, Olds, Carstairs and Crossfield. Of course she didn't always agree with the umpires though. In one particular game Heloise recalls sliding into home plate to hear the ump call, "Out!" She was so mad she kicked the ump in the shin. He threw her out of the game so she went back for one more kick. It was a frosty night in the Larimer home that night... Jim was the umpire!

At one point Jim and Heloise drove the town's first school bus. Heloise drove in the afternoons. But there were mysterious reports of damaged fences and missing dogs so Heloise's driving career was quickly ended. Then she discovered motorbikes.

Heloise's mischievous ways never slowed down. In her early married years Heloise would hang up her laundry only after the neighbour's lights were out. In the morning it would look like Heloise had been up earlier than her neighbour on wash day.

Heloise's spunk has never let up she jokes about being too old to play hockey but still has strong opinions about the game and boy is she glad the strike is over.

Airdrie has grown a lot from 99 residents to almost 27,000 and that's fine by Heloise, "I like people," she says wistfully. Her home is still the one Jim and her bought in the early 30s. Of course, back then, a house could be built in a day. "We had a crew of horses to dig out the basement and then twenty men showed up to build the house and shingled it all a day," Heloise explains. Over the years rooms were added and bedrooms became bathrooms when running water became available in the 50s. The close proximity of the United Church meant Heloise was an active member of the congregation, on various committees, teaching Sunday school and as a member of the UCW.

Her home is full of memories many specially prepared to honour her 80th and then 90th birthdays. Framed momentos show old photographs, newspaper clippings, old ticket stubs, and the business license and stamp for Jim's business. There are images of Heloise in 1938 as a member of the Airdrie Nine women's baseball team. Pictures from hockey show a spunky young woman forced by her mom to wear a dress for the team photo. "My mother refused to let me wear my hockey pants!" Heloise recalls vividly.

Jim passed away over thirty years ago and Heloise kept herself active in the community, taking in boarders and working at the Balzac Gas Plant. Over the years Heloise has been a valued resident of the community. When Airdrie became the 14th city of the province, the

Transportation Minister took her as his invited guest to a special banquet in Edmonton. Her clout with local officials never waned either.

If you can recall a time when the Canada Day parade route changed and then moved back to its original trail, Heloise takes all the credit. "I called Dan Oniel (Airdrie's mayor from 1992 to 2004) and told him I was too old to walk over to another route. I used to babysit the fellow, so he listened to me." And sure enough the parade route winds down 1st Avenue right past Heloise to this very day.

Heloise was called "The first lady of Airdrie" by the Echo back on the occasion of her 80th birthday, and today Heloise is just as revered and loved, a living Airdrie legend.

