

Bernice Harriet Osborne

Biography

Bernie Osborne was born in 1925 in New Westminster, the adopted daughter of Martha Collins Burritt Osborne and Charles Ernest Osborne.

Bernie went to a Catholic school and met her lifelong friend, Gloria Mosser there. At 17, Bernie joined the Army, the Canadian Women's Army Corps. Before they shipped out to Europe, her age was discovered and she was held back as too young. Instead, she drove an ambulance in Canada.

As a young woman, she trained to be a psychiatric nurse and went to work at Essondale, then referred to as a mental hospital. Later, at age 29, she attended St. Joseph's School of Nursing in Victoria and became an x-ray technologist, working at Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria for her whole career.

In 1954, she became a member of Metropolitan United Church. She started a basketball program for boys, which required the kids to attend Sunday school lessons, which she taught. This began her fifty years of service to kids through basketball in Victoria.

Bernie devoted her free time to kids, leading a youth group, working with Canadian Girls in Training, the Girls Explorer Program and taking kids to Camp Pringle at Shawnigan Lake, where she played many roles, including Camp Director. She turned her home into a refuge for girls estranged from their families. Her friend Gloria moved in to help her manage the girls and never left. They lived together for 42 years.

Bernie grew the basketball program at Metropolitan Church into an integral part of the Victoria & District Amateur Basketball Association, also referred to as Night League, and helped build the latter. She eventually served as long-time president in the V&DABA, and owned the role of Discipline Director.

Bernie taught the value of respect in Sunday school, in basketball and in life. It was the hallmark of all the trophies she had made for Metropolitan basketball. So, if a player or a coach got ejected from a game, they had to deal with Bernie. She would remind them about the importance of respect, and then impose her penalty. Bernie worked to establish the BC Basketball Officials Association as well, which helped ensure the quality of games and organize their distribution around the city. She herself was an active basketball referee.

At the end of each basketball season, Bernie would host a Basketball banquet at Metropolitan Church for all the teams playing under its banner. In its heyday, upwards of 300 players and their parents would attend for a sit-down dinner prepared by Gloria and other ladies from the church. It evolved into a pizza and pop affair, but Bernie used the occasion to award her trophies, recognize the play of all the kids and talk about respect.

In 2005, Bernie was inducted into the BC Basketball Hall of Fame in the Builders Category in recognition of her work in the Victoria & District Amateur Basketball Association and in being a founding member of the BC Basketball Officials Association. Her health failing, she wasn't able to make the dinner. Her life ended in 2009 at age 87 at Glenwarren Hospital - just three blocks up Balmoral Road from the church where she had begun her work with kids 55 years earlier. A basketball game was playing on her TV as she drew her last breath.