

How often do you get a family get-together at which the youngest and the oldest people there are almost one century apart?

That happened to us last weekend when a few members of my immediate family gathered in Hanover to share stories with my mother, Louise Hutton, who will be turning 98 on June 14.

The youngest person was my grandson Kai (rhymes with sky), who turns six months this Friday.

How's that for an age spread? Kai is half a year old. His great-grandmother is within nodding distance of turning 100.

My sister, Pat Smith, who organized the do, booked rooms for all of us at the Canadiana Motel in Hanover. The group included herself, our little family from Bala, daughter Sue Hutton with her partner, Kent Wakeley, and Kai. My grown-up son, John Hutton, and his fiancé, Wendy Hewko, stayed a few minutes away at the family cottage, but spent most of their time with us.

I think every family needs a get-together like this every so often – an opportunity to touch base and to take the long view. This was better than a wedding or a funeral because we didn't have the stress of those occasions.

The presence of both my mother, who has lived the last years at the Village Retirement Home in Hanover, and young Kai gave us two quite different perspectives. We were able to look forwards and backwards at the same time.

The highlight of the whole weekend was bringing my mother to the motel around 3 p.m. on Saturday afternoon, a couple of hours after the rest of us arrived. We knew that my mother could only be with us until 6 p.m. or so when her stamina would run out.

Louise Hutton was born June 14, 1910, in Kenora as the second oldest in a family that would

Kai and his great-grandmother are almost 100 years apart

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eventually include nine children (a younger sister, Fern, died at four after a sledding accident).

I never knew my maternal grandfather, Herbert Jamieson, a railway freight conductor. He died a few years after the birth of his last child. He had been injured in a railway accident, but the cause of death was cancer that showed up later. That left my grandmother responsible for looking after a large family with the help of my mother and the other older children.

Louise Hutton was a brilliant student, but university was never considered. Money was too scarce. Instead, she took teacher training that was partially subsidized because she agreed to teach in Northern Ontario. Two of her sisters, Clara and Frances took nurse's training under a similar arrangement.

Mother taught first in Kenora and then at Eagle River. Eventually, she met another young teacher, Bill Hutton, who was teaching at Quibel, a long way from his home town of Tilbury. Bill cut a dashing figure with a moustache and slicked down hair (lots of Brylcreem).

Bill and Louise were married in July, 1932, and I arrived the following April (yes, that makes nine months – just barely). My father was principal of a country school at Trout Mills, just outside North Bay. He was earning \$1,000 a year when he married, but that shrank to \$900 in the fall.



What an age range! Jack's grandson Kai is six months. Jack's mother, Louise Hutton, turns 98 on June 14.

It was the Depression.

By the time sister Pat arrived two years later, my father was a principal in Kirkland Lake, living in a westerly suburb called Chaput Hughes.

In 1952, my father was principal of Port Weller Public School in St. Catharines. I entered the University of Western Ontario that fall, majoring in journalism, and Pat entered an early childhood education program at Ryerson Institute in Toronto. It was a heavy financial drain for a family, so my mother once more joined the teaching profession.

Louise Hutton had been out of the classroom for many years, but she never questioned once putting herself through extra stresses. Her family needed her, so she did it. She became one of her school's most highly respected teachers.

It took me many years to realize just how much both of my parents sacrificed for their children. About the same time, I realized that they had left us a legacy of strong values. My father died in July, 1988, but I feel his influence every day.

As I looked around the motel

room last Saturday, I couldn't resist feeling proud of every one there. In the last year, daughter Sue has completed a Bachelor of Social Work degree at Ryerson University (on the Dean's roll most of the way). She has already been accepted into the Master's program at the U of T. She and partner Kent, a great guy, have bought a house near Bloor and Shaw where they are raising Kai (who is now 23 pounds!).

My grown-up son John Hutton, who graduated from U of T with a Master's degree in English, has a successful painting and renovations business and lives with Wendy in their triplex on Davenport Road. Both Linda and I love Wendy dearly.

Second youngest in the room was stepson John Jackson, who has just finished his first year of Laurentian University studies at Georgian College with a 74% average, and who has ambitious plans to complete his degree (how many other families do you know with two Johns?). We are all proud as punch of him.

My sister Pat probably deserves kudos more than anyone in our

family. She devoted her life to special education after graduating from Ryerson, starting at the Beverley Street School for challenged youngsters and finishing as the principal (or principal-teacher) at the Birchmount Centre in Scarborough. When she retired, she was awarded a lifetime achievement award for her contributions to special education – a rare, prestigious honour from her peers across Ontario.

So that was my family weekend. We shared stories, ate barbecued chicken and sipped the occasional glass of wine or pop. We took so many photos of Kai and Grandmother Hutton, both singly and together, that I had to delete some to squeeze them all onto a CD-ROM on Sunday morning (120 was the limit).

May you all enjoy a similar family weekend in the coming year. God bless, folks.

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FOOTPRINTS GIFT: I didn't want anyone to mention my recent birthday, but was very moved by a gift from my sister Pat, my children and their partners. Together, they have donated \$300 to the First Muskoka Congregational Church, to be used as part of a Mustard Seed fund that anonymously assists people or family who need financial assistance in this part of Muskoka. The fund was inspired by the poem "Footprints", and the gift was accompanied by a plaqued copy of the poem. What a blessed gift.

LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

You will notice that the snow load took its toll on the Bala Museum property. Linda wonders whether there are any angels out there who might like to volunteer to help get the property back into shape for the big 100 Years of Anne celebrations. We are at 762-5876 or balamus@muskoka.com

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