

## Robert Mark Goresky

Mark Goresky was born in the last few days of the first half of the twentieth century. This was one of the defining moments in his life, and it pretty much determined his birthday for the next 50 or 60 years. He lived with his parents (both doctors) in a house without running water or indoor plumbing, in the bustling city of Neudorf Saskatchewan (2001 population: 304), birthplace of the Nobel laureate Henry Taube, and often mistaken for one of its many namesakes in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Serbia, France or Russia. Overcome with an urge to travel, in 1955 Mark somehow convinced his parents to move to Topeka Kansas, where his father found work at the Menninger Clinic of Psychiatry, and where Mark was able to attend the first and second grade. Despite repeated attempts, the Wicked Witch of the West did not succeed in killing off the whole family with a tornado, although she bowled a direct hit on their former house at 2517 West 23rd street, Topeka, in 1966, only 8 years after they had moved to Vancouver, B.C.

You may have heard stories about that trip to Vancouver, and how Mark had patiently explained to his father that the old Chrysler would not make it up the next hill without it blowing up on them, but such stories are not to be believed as they only contribute to the legend, and besides, the old Chrysler did make it. By that time, three sisters had joined Mark in the family and together they conspired to make life Hell for their parents. Forced out of one neighborhood after another, they spent a year in

Burnaby, two years on 24th Ave. in Vancouver, and finally settled on Blenheim Street in Kerrisdale, where Mark attended high school and later, University. His report cards repeatedly warned that "Mark is not performing up to his potential", and no wonder: he was constantly getting into trouble. Like the time that he programmed the University computer to do all the homework problems in his high school chemistry book, which apparently violated some rule about doing your own homework; or the time that he sent a rock through a neighbor's window when the telephone pole that he was trying to hit mysteriously dodged out of the way; or the time that he came home drunk on Christmas Eve, much to the consternation of his grandparents (see the chapter on George Harold) who were visiting at the time; or when he almost flunked out of his first year at the University, so that upon graduation in 1971, one of his reference writers remarked that "The best thing I can say about you is that you seem to have done better and better every year".

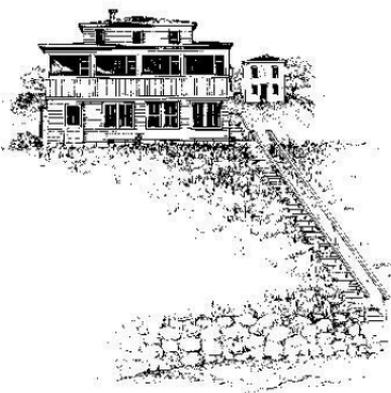
But there were big changes in store, for upon graduation he married his high school sweetheart, Shelagh Curling.



The wedding took place only two months after Pierre and Margaret Trudeau were married. On the other hand, the divorce preceded the Trudeau's by a little bit, thereby establishing Mark

and Shelagh as major Canadian trendsetters. At that point, Shelagh was pretty tired of moving around: they had spent 4 years in Providence Rhode Island (where Mark attended Brown University), one year in Paris (at the invitation of Mark's advisor, Bob MacPherson, who was visiting a mathematics research institute there), two years in Boston Massachusetts and three more years in Vancouver. It is difficult to believe that even after the year in Paris, Mark still could not speak French, although, to his credit, he had developed a certain technique of pointing and mumbling which generally seemed to work pretty well.

In any case, Shelagh kicked him out and he returned to Boston in 1981 to teach Math and Computer Science at Northeastern University. It might have helped if he had known some Computer Science before attempting to teach it, but he soon learned to fake it, and a sympathetic colleague showed him how to appear to always be one step ahead of the students: "just read the textbook the night before the class, because they will never even open it up".



Then in 1987 Mark and his former advisor, Bob MacPherson scandalized the locals (and some of the relatives as well) by moving in together. They bought a beautiful antique Victorian

house on the waterfront just south of Boston, and proceeded to acquire a series of boats and small ships. Some of them sank and some of them didn't. Mark's Mother did not find it particularly entertaining, on one of her visits to Boston, when they ran out of gas in the middle of the Atlantic ocean, but their desperate cries for help were eventually heard and in the end, they all made it safely back to shore.



In 1994 an unwelcome call from Princeton N.J. arrived with an offer that Bob and Mark couldn't refuse. So, they packed their bags, drove 320 miles south, and staked a claim to a small, nondescript house on Haslet Avenue, where they have lived quietly ever since with their books, their music, and their mathematics.