



Shirley D. Stiles

October 22, 2016

We were very sad to hear about the passing last week of a Cape May legend, SHIRLEY STILES. We paid tribute to Shirley in an Exit Zero article, written by Vicky Samselski, published in 2006. Enjoy... and raise a glass to the memory of a much-loved woman. Rest/Party in Peace, Shirley!

IF YOU haven't run into Shirley Stiles, you must have been hiding – the woman is everywhere. Partying on Beach Avenue on a Saturday night, flying off to the Caribbean, taking a snowy train ride to her native Vancouver – this tiny, forceful woman makes her presence known no matter where she is. She has the distinction of having been a part of Cape May's life for so long, no one can imagine the place without her.

But Shirley was once a tourist, back when her fiancée Granville Stiles (she called him Pete... as in Peter Gunn: tough-talking detective) took her to see his hometown. When they married in 1961, Shirley had already had enough adventure for three lifetimes, and it was still another eight years until she started the Cape May chapter. She couldn't wait: "I fell in love," she says. "I said 'We're gonna live here'."

Born in Manitoba – "We had no electricity, there were outdoor toilets" – Shirley and the family moved to Vancouver, British Columbia. In high school, Shirley Doreen had a Home Economics Teacher who changed everything. "She really influenced me. One time, she told this story about Blueberry Hill, this B&B in Maine or something, where they served blueberry pancakes every day. I said 'I want to do something like that, but near the water'." Shirley studied Science and Home Economics at the University of British Columbia. "I trained for my dietetics at the University of Oregon Medical School in Portland then I worked there for a year. But after that, I decided I wanted to do some traveling, so I left Portland and went to Bermuda. I lived there for about three years. I was the head dietician at the hospital there. I had a great life."

A little too good to last, apparently. "I had a motorcycle accident. I should not have been on it. We were out having a party," Shirley grins. "I said 'Oh, I can do it – get out of my way'. Well, I hit a tree. The kids were all in front of me, so they didn't even know I did it, until they got the message later on in the evening that I was in the hospital. They were all wondering why I hadn't met them for dinner. The bike was on top of me. Somebody came

by and found me. I was unconscious for a couple days. After I got out of the hospital, they said it wasn't healing, because in Bermuda it's very damp. They said I had to go to a hospital in New York, so my scars wouldn't be so bad."

In New York, Shirley got a job as head dietician at St Luke's Hospital. "I stayed up there for three years, and there was this advertisement for the Marriott Company, so I went and applied. They told me I had to go to Washington D.C. to do all my training." Training led to traveling, a bonus. "They kept moving me around because I was single," she says. The traveling stopped when she met Granville Stiles, an electrician living in D.C. When Marriott asked her to move to South America, they were in for a shock: Shirley said no. She found a job teaching dietetics at a vocational school.

She also pushed her husband to take her back to Cape May. Married in '61, they stayed in D.C. until they were ready to buy a place in Cape May. "In 1969 we bought our Bed & Breakfast on Beach Avenue. It was called The White House Inn – all the rooms were named after presidents.

"I had an artist who did paintings of each of the presidents to hang in their room." They ran it four months a year, and Shirley found a way to use her restaurant experience.

"When we first came, there weren't that many restaurants around, not like it is now. So instead of just feeding my guests, we decided to open a dining room. We had senior dinners every Sunday. People used to love to come and sit on the porch and look at the ocean while they ate."

They added catering to the business soon after. They served the Yacht Club, Beach Club, cottagers, and private parties from Cape May up to Avalon. "It was a very busy time in our life."

In 1978, they moved here full-time. The casinos had moved into Atlantic City, and Granville and his brother decided to start a transportation service from Cape May to the casinos. The driving service grew into a thriving company.

"That business mushroomed so I had to buy three stretch limousines. Then, Cape May had the airport, but the planes only went once or twice a day. If the weather was bad, they didn't go at all. So the people with a connecting flight in Philadelphia would hire me to drive them to catch their plane. We used the vans as a taxi in Cape May, because there was no full-time taxi. We transported the Coast Guard boys to the airport in Philadelphia; or on Saturdays when they got a day off to have fun, because Cape May didn't have anything going on for them then. My husband drove, too, until he got too sick."

Granville was a heavy smoker, and by the time doctors diagnosed him with lung cancer, it was too late. "They operated, but it was everywhere, so they sent him home. He died in '83, and everything was left for me to do." Shirley talks tough, saying only, "We were happy, but that part of my life is over. I've got the new look, the new at-ti-tude..."

She ran the White House Inn for over 20 years. "You notice in the paper now, someone bought a B&B six years ago. It's up for sale! They don't stay more than 10 years now. It's

very hard, you know.” She ran the taxi company until 1989. “I loved driving. It was fun, too, you met some interesting people. I drove Walter Cronkite around Cape May for a while, and then in 1988 my vehicles went to D.C. to work the Inauguration. We drove some comedian. I stayed here.”

Eventually, even Shirley had to admit that it was too much. In 1989, she sold the driving service, and opened a reservation service. “They paid us to have this central 800 number, and we’d fill up the rooms.” She knew everyone, and went everywhere. “I was involved all along, trying to make Cape May better. Other businesses moved in, the town grew. I was involved in the Chamber of Commerce back in 1972 when it formed, then I was President for three years from 1987 through ’89. We did some good things then, and business in town was mushrooming. We always had a festival going. We had lots of ideas.”

But it was taking a toll on Shirley, who by 1992 felt she had had enough, and left Cape May. “I moved to St. Thomas, had a little condo there. I did a lot of sailing and sports. But then the hurricanes came.” During a visit to her family in Vancouver, storms all but leveled St Thomas. Her condo was destroyed, which Shirley took as a sign. “I decided ‘I don’t think St Thomas is where I’m supposed to be’ so I sold the place, and came back to Cape May in 1998.”

She immediately threw herself into volunteer work, working at MAC and the Chamber, and especially at Cape May Stage. “I helped Michael Laird out when he first came in ’88, so I’d get a role like a walk-on or something. That’s how I got interested in the stage.”

Appearances in murder-mysteries for MAC followed, and pretty soon she was a regular. “When Michael Laird died, and Michael Carleton came, he continued to use me in some plays, and then I became a full-time Board member.” She laughs. “We always advertise ‘Shirley Stiles – starring role!’ oh, and the place is packed. People have to line up to get in!”

Shirley can also be seen winning lip-synching contests all over town. “I lip-synch and I dance. I’m Madonna or Donna Summer.” She proudly shows pictures of herself in character, mocking Madonna’s various incarnations over the years. She volunteers for events like the Victorian Fashion Show whenever she can. She celebrated her birthday twice this year, where she and pianist George Mesterhazy tore through an R-rated version of “It Had to Be You”. She even won the recent “Rock Paper Scissors” contest at Harpoon Henry’s to benefit Cape May Stage.

It’s not all glamour, however. “The last few years, I’ve joined Contact, which is a service for housebound seniors. I do that because it’s very gratifying. I have about 10 that I call every week.” Shirley participates in local government, on various committees, but doesn’t want to run. “If I think something needs to be done, I tell them.” She still works a few days a week, answering phones or selling merchandise at the Exit Zero store. At the store, she chats with families coming in. Her own family is in Vancouver, but she plans to visit in a few months. She shows a picture of her sister’s 90th birthday, but says, “Most of us are

deceased, now”.

Shirley’s home is in Victorian Towers, in a studio where she still has a view of the water she always loved. “There’s music, there’s entertainment, I play bridge twice a week. It’s good for people to always have something to do. And it’s the best view in town.”

She laughs at her life as she’s talking about the past, and then once again starts talking about the future, in this case, her plans for the next night. “Are you going to the after-party?” she asks. “Oh, I can’t wait. We’ll have the best time. You should go.” As I leave, she calls after me, “I’m sure I’ll run into you soon somewhere!” I don’t doubt it.

MEMORIAL SERVICE INFO:

STILES, Shirley D. – of Cape May, passed away on Oct. 22, 2016. Wife of the late Granville Stiles (1983). Beloved aunt and dear friend. A celebration of Shirley’s wonderful life is scheduled for Saturday (Nov. 5th) at 11am in the Macedonia Baptist Church, corner of Lafayette and Franklin Sts, Cape May.

Previous Events

Service

NOV 5. 11:00 AM (ET)

Macedonia Baptist Church
630 Lafayette St.
Cape May, NJ

Tribute Wall

MG

“ *Rest in peace Aunt Shirley. You lived a very full life. You will be missed by so many. Especially in Cool Cape May!*

Love your niece Jackie Burno Green



Maria Green - February 21, 2017 at 10:18 AM

HG

“ *In Memory of our Cousin Shirley :
Just as the sun will set then rise with each and every dawn, the souls of those who lived life well eternally live on....
Love lives on...in the little things we shared, in the moments we'll always treasure and remember, in the smile we can never forget.*

*With Heartfelt Sympathy,
Helen, Charisse, Artena, and Joseph Greene*

Helen Greene - January 02, 2017 at 10:30 AM

SC

“ *I am so sorry we missed the service for Shirley. Had we known about it, we would have been there. We have known and loved Shirley for so many years, and we so much admired her spirit of adventure and her love of life!
Tom and Sue Carroll*

Sue Carroll - November 11, 2016 at 06:09 PM

TK

“ *The Kopps lit a candle in memory of Shirley D. Stiles*



the kopps - November 05, 2016 at 09:45 AM



“ Jennifer Kopp lit a candle in memory of Shirley D. Stiles



Jennifer Kopp - November 04, 2016 at 05:24 PM



We have always loved you and will remain part of the Kopp clan. You got Barbara on a camel! Wonders never cease! Will miss you forever! Much love from the Kopp/Brownstone family. We know you are off on new adventures. ❤️❤️❤️❤️🌹🌹🌹

Jennifer Kopp - November 04, 2016 at 05:29 PM



“ These are the many facets of Shirley Stiles. Businesswoman, entertainer, partier, friend. Shirley lived her life as only she could Shirley-Cape May isn't the same without you!



Debbie Drozda - November 01, 2016 at 06:08 PM

ED

“ We knew Shirl for close to 30 years and there are too many stories to tell but one stands out. While staying at the White House Inn we (my wife, a couple of our friends and Shirl) decided to have a Pina Colada party. As a joke I mixed up a pitcher full of water and Ivory Liquid soap. I poured the glass and asked Shirl to test the concoction. I chickened out and warned her of what I had done. Bad choice! She poured the pitcher over my head and proceeded to instruct me to scrub the entire kitchen floor. Just one of Shirley's many fun times.

Ed Drozda - October 31, 2016 at 01:36 PM

ED

“ 8 files added to the album *Ed and Debbie Drozda, memories of the Original Cape May Diamond*



Ed Drozda - October 31, 2016 at 01:31 PM