

# Betty Thompson

It is a very long way from being “Miss Betty” on the pre-school television show *Romper Room*, to being a beloved and respected community leader. If anyone could make the journey, it would be Betty Thompson-Bauman.



When she was named the Kitchener-Waterloo Citizen of the Year in 1992, the Waterloo mayor at the time, Brian Turnbull, called Betty Thompson a “hero in our community.”

Her diagnosis of breast cancer in 1990 was devastating to her many supporters, however, true to form Thompson turned her misfortune into a public campaign to encourage women to undergo regular breast examinations.

Shortly before Thompson died in 1994, a friend explained why the creative broadcaster spent so many hours volunteering her time:

“I don’t see Betty as a person driven by personal rewards, but she’s always thinking of ways to help others. I see that very strongly. Often well-known figures in the community do what they do for personal gain, but I’ve never sensed that with Betty. It’s a genuine commitment to the community. She’s just a very caring person.”

Her friend Joyce Stankiewicz also noted that Thompson relied on community services when her first marriage broke down and she had three young children. “She has never forgotten that, and what she does now is pay back to a community that supported her. And that feeling of obligation, as well as gratitude, has permeated her whole life.”

A native of Walkerton, Thompson moved with her family to Peterborough shortly after she was born in 1933. It was there that the young Betty Jones got her first taste of broadcasting as co-host of a radio program that reported on events happening at her high school.

She took the advice of a Canadian broadcaster and studied Radio and Television Arts at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, graduating in 1956.

While Thompson was well-known for her professional work on CKCO-TV’s *Romper Room*, *Betty and Friends* and *Morning Magazine*, she was equally known in the community for her volunteer contributions.

She served as president of the Zonta Club of Kitchener-Waterloo and on the boards of organizations such as the Salvation Army, the John Howard Society, the Victorian Order of Nurses, the United Way, and Parents are People Too. In 1990, Thompson organized a fundraising event with Gordie Tapp that raised \$38,000 for the Ontario Summer Games. That same year she served as the games’ chairperson.

Perhaps her most memorable and lasting volunteer contribution was for the Big Sisters of Kitchener-Waterloo, and her fundraising efforts for the group Best Friends of Big Sisters. In 1991, the Big Sisters organization announced that its downtown housing project for homeless teens would be called The Betty Thompson House.

Her legacy lives on through the Zonta Club's annual Betty Thompson Golf Classic, with proceeds going to breast cancer awareness and research.

It is fitting that even long after her death, Betty Thompson's name is being used to help those in need. The tireless volunteer's motivation was simple, "I just feel you take from the community, you have to put back," she said.

*Photo courtesy of CTV (Southwestern Ontario)*