



Biographical note of Mrs. Annette Bouchard (Desgagnés)

(August 30, 1916 - December 24, 2011)



Annette Bouchard and Maurice Desgagnés, circa 1938
Courtesy of Martin Desgagnés

Born in Les Éboulements in 1916, Annette Bouchard studied at the convent in Tadoussac and became a schoolteacher in that parish. She married Maurice Desgagnés, the youngest son of Mathilda Audet and Zélada Desgagnés, a navigator from Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive.

Annette and Maurice met at the Les Éboulements train station, which in those days was the meeting place for young and old alike. The passenger train ran daily between Quebec City and Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive. Maurice was a very handsome man and a good catch, so Annette challenged her friends that she would be the one to win him over, and she succeeded.

At first, Maurice's family, especially his mother, opposed the marriage, considering Annette too fragile to start a family, standing at a mere 1.52 m and barely over 45 kg - not to mention the fact that she had another woman in mind for her son... But flouting the family opinion, Maurice married Annette on January 4, 1939, and from this union 11 children were born: 6 boys and 5 girls, all in excellent health. The subject of her presumed frailty quickly became a moot point!

Maurice, in collaboration with his brothers, was one of the company's artisans, and devoted his entire life to it, with the help of Annette who always supported him. Among other things, during her "spare" time - that is, between cooking, washing, ironing, housekeeping and everything else - Annette would keep the company books and pay the bills.

As for the boys, they were introduced to sailing when very young. From an early age, to free their mother, they would spend summers aboard boats with their father and uncle Joseph-Arthur, nicknamed J.A.Z.

When Maurice died in 1972, Annette inherited one-third of the company Transport Desgagnés. When Groupe Desgagnés inc. was created that same year, she sold her shares to the new company, which was formed by her sons Claude, Rosaire, Zélada, Marcellin, Pierre-Paul and Martin, as well as the sons of Joseph-Arthur (J.A.Z). Four of Annette and Maurice's sons remained shareholders in the company for many years, working there until their retirement.

Until the late 90s, she lived in Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive, enjoying good health and tending her house and flowers by herself. She then moved to Quebec City to be closer to her children.

This history shows just how much Annette was immersed in the maritime world all her life. She was always close to the company and an active witness to its evolution. In a way, she is one of its cornerstones, through her constant support for her husband, through her children who worked to consolidate it, and her grandchildren who are still working and building for the future.





Biographical note of Mrs. Berthe Tremblay (Desgagnés) (March 17, 1906 — January 9, 1983)

Berthe Tremblay (Desgagnés) was born in Les Éboulements on March 17, 1906. She was the eldest daughter of Joseph Tremblay, a farmer, and Émilie Gagnon.

Through her mother's family, the Gagnons, her ties to the St. Lawrence river go back a long way. Indeed, her great-great-grandfather, Jacob, built a schooner, the *Marie-Louise*, as early as 1847. Her great-grandfather Ovide, and grandfather François, were also captains and schooner owners.

Berthe was only 12 when, one day, she accompanied her father to Les Éboulements-en-Bas (Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive); she was then noticed by a young sailor with a long memory... Berthe and Joseph-Arthur Desgagnés married ten years later, on January 28, 1928.

This marriage brought the young woman permanently to "Les Éboulements-en-Bas" to live in a multi-generational home.



*Berthe Tremblay and J.A.Z. Desgagnés, circa 1950.
Courtesy of Michel Desgagnés*

In the spring of 1928, she took advantage of the maiden voyage of the family sailboat, the *J.Z. Dégagné*, to Quebec City. She saw her husband's difficult working conditions: the ship's crew of three or four lived in a single, very narrow room. So early in the season, it was cold and very damp. There were no comforts. She would always remember it.

It was at this point that, for all practical purposes, the agreement between the spouses was established: Joseph-Arthur (later to become J.A.Z.) would look after the boat(s), while she would definitely be in charge of family life. They will have six children, two of whom worked more actively in the family business, including Yvan who, for several years, was president of Groupe Desgagnés as it is known today.

In winter, they received people at home, often for several days at a time, either for business or for work on the boats. What's more, it was a delicate task to reacclimatize to "normal" life a man who had been away for seven or eight months. Luckily, he held some business in Quebec and Montreal, and she could accompany him on occasion.

During the sailing season, she would wait for her husband, sometimes with some worry. In those days, they could not call each other. When he arrived, she was there. If he arrived during the night, she would get up and sometimes prepare coffee or a snack. When he left, he was confident the household was in good hands. During school vacations, she would sometimes take a few trips with her husband, with the younger children accompanying them on the boat.

Berthe and J.A.Z. each fulfilled their part of the original agreement and lived together for 55 years. Berthe passed away in January 1983.

A rather discreet and reserved woman, she'd be surprised to see a great ship named after her. Surprised, but quite proud.

Like their husbands, all sailors, Marie Boudreault, Mathilda Audet, Berthe Tremblay, Cécilia Tremblay and Annette Bouchard, and all the others who followed were, often behind the scenes, the pillars of what became Groupe Desgagnés.

Naming the beautiful blue and yellow ships after them is a fitting tribute.