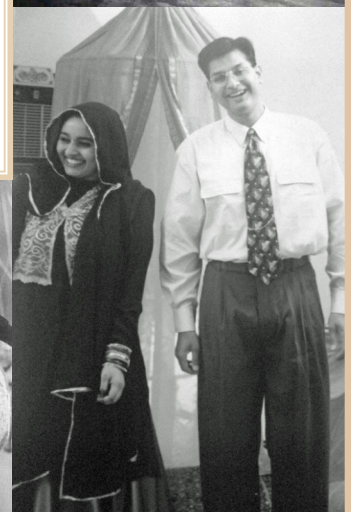




Backward Glances

Lifescapes Writing Group
2013
Milton Public Library





Backward Glances

Lifescapes Writing Group 2013
Milton Public Library

This book was written by members of the Lifescapes group, a seniors' memoir writing program sponsored by the Milton Public Library.

Editor: Joan Faehrmann
Photo editing: Joan Faehrmann
Cover by Joan Faehrmann

Copyright © 2013 by the Authors

ISBN 978-0-9880631-1-2

Milton Public Library
1010 Main Street East
Milton, ON L9T 6H7

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>The Goose Hunter - 1943</i>	7
Trevor Trower	
<i>In the Middle of the Night</i>	13
Jean Barratt	
<i>Dawn Glory</i>	16
Gillian Reynolds	
<i>Daydreams, Dance and Romance</i>	21
Eva Hegedus	
<i>Monkey Business</i>	29
Wendy West	
<i>Childhood Memories</i>	33
Ken Marvell	
<i>My New Life in Canada</i>	38
Mary Cummings	
<i>Memories of the Boarding House</i>	45
Lorrette Shermet	
<i>My Dadi Amman</i>	51
Rubina Ali	
<i>Wonder Days</i>	55
Dorothy Menear	
<i>Where is Home?</i>	60
Nargis Naqvi	
<i>My Future Dream Gone</i>	67
Marloes Timmers	

Introduction

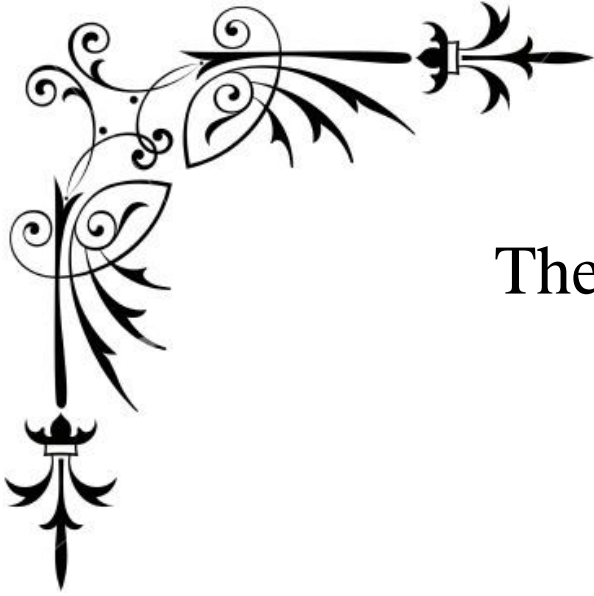
Lifescapes is a Milton Public Library program designed to help adults/seniors write their life stories. The Milton Public Library is committed to providing a gateway through which people may connect with other people, ideas, and information. We strive to encourage lifelong learning, to promote authorship, and to empower people to fulfill their creativity. The *Lifescapes* program introduces participants to something that will enrich their lives and also give them the opportunity to enrich their community through their stories.

Twelve men and women completed the program in 2013. It was a diverse group that included native Ontarians and Quebecers, as well as others who had emigrated from England, Wales, Hungary, Tanzania, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Each brought a unique perspective to the group. Their diversity is reflected in the fascinating stories they shared. Their stories of family history, of special people and special times exemplify our motto: "Everyone's story is worth telling."

My thanks go out to all of the authors for their hard work and dedication and for allowing all of us to enter into their experiences. Special thanks also to author Larry Brown who led one of our classes.

We hope you will enjoy the second edition of Milton Public Library's *Lifescapes* anthology, *Backward Glances*.

Joan Faehrmann
Adult Services Librarian
Milton Public Library
Milton, Ontario
23 May 2013



The Goose Hunter (1943)

By Trevor Trower

Why hunt geese? Why hunt at all? Surely you can get everything you need from the grocer.

When I was a lad I was of an adventurous nature. I loved the countryside and, if you have ever spent time in North Wales, you will already know that Wales is the most beautiful country in the world. Winter-time in North Wales can be dreary, but starting a few days before Christmas each year, when the stubbled fields are stark with frost, the wild geese come in, flocks of thousands of great, flapping, honking, monstrous birds. What a thrill for me, a young hunter, my gun gleaming, the pair of long barrels of the great 12-bore shining both inside and out, the walnut stock glowing with a dozen coats of wax. It has been a long wait since the last time the geese were there to present me with the ultimate hunting thrill. The magnificent honkers had left the area mid-February, heading north to their traditional nesting grounds. No-one knows for sure why they come back year after year, but they do and I always longed for their return.

The one luxury in my young life was my gun and those fellow aficionados of that hunting scene. My affection for the sport was a result of my love of reading adventure stories. The main hero in my young life was Peter Scott, Captain in the Royal Navy, well-known adventurer, artist and sportsman, the accomplished son of “the” Scott of the Antarctic. The main subjects of his brilliant paintings were waterfowl, and I had seen nearly all of his paintings and had been thrilled at their realism and beauty. His birds were there on the canvas, so real you could almost touch them. I had read all of his stories. I did not own one of his books but there was no need to buy books as our Rhyl library had available every book Scott had written. His books told of his early morning winters hunting, out on the marshes of Norfolk, just him and his retriever dog, lying still and patient as he guided his punt toward the flock of widgeon. How quiet he was and careful not to frighten his prey. One shot was all he had. His great punt-gun¹ was loaded with number four shot and an extra dash of powder. Then at a range of forty yards came the blast from his gun and during the next few minutes he and the dog retrieved a dozen or more wildfowl. Now, the very thought of that carnage fills

me with dread, but that was a different time in history. In those days there seemed to be plenty of everything, and we must admit that a further incentive would be the smell and taste of those wonderful game roasting in the oven.

It was December the 22nd 1943. There was no meat for our Christmas dinner. Coincident with this paucity of meat at the butcher's shop, the geese arrived. The first sign of their arrival was the honking which sometimes disturbed our sleep. They seemed to fly in groups of thousands, skeins led by the grand old honkers, their chests covered with black bars indicating their age and leadership status. Here was Anser anser, commonly known as the Greylag. Sometimes these magnificent birds seemed to fill the sky, then after checking out their camping ground they would settle down to a night of rest and feeding. Fallen grain from the gathered wheat field seemed to be a favorite food.

Finding and preparing ammunition for the hunt was an adventure of its own, to beg, borrow or scrounge any shells for the winter hunt. Cartridge was scarce, the war was on and very few shotgun shells were available for the public. Bona fide farmers were given special license to purchase these munitions for pest control, as much foodstuff was lost to rabbits and other animals which were classified as vermin. A rabbit, or a wood-pigeon grain-fed and plump, was very good eating.

I remember one day I went to the city of Chester for the day. Walking down the main street of that beautiful old walled city, I made a point of visiting the old, dark gun shop. That visit alone was an exciting adventure. Lots of clothing for the hunter was on display and examples of taxidermy so life-like. There in the corner of the shop window lay a double-barreled, 8-bore shot-gun. Who on earth would ever buy that old, huge hammered gun? It must have weighed twenty pounds. But there on the small "for sale" card was a notice that ten shells were included in the price of ten pounds. So gone was my ten pounds and in return I lugged that big gun home. I had visions of somehow making shells for my 12-bore gun out of that rare stash. On another occasion, I had traded the silver cornet I owned and played in the Sally-Ann Band for 25 cartridges but these jewels were long since used up. But it might be of interest to you, dear reader, if I told you another story which took place around that time, and you will, if you listen carefully, learn how serious I was in those days about the business of wildfowling.

We were living in a place called Sandy Cove, Rhyl, North Wales. I was sixteen years that April 1943 and I quit my job at the munitions factory in order to work for Mr. Hobson in his photography business². I was fascinated with reading and shooting (hunting), and the more regular hours of work enabled me to pursue my hobby of bird-watching. It was war-time but in our area the only sign of war was in shortages of various necessities, and the variety of flotsam which, when gleaned from the sea-shore, were reminders of tragedies taking place not that far away. There was one occasion when my little brother Brendan found a pilot's sheepskin boot washed up on the shore; the remains of the airman's foot was still in the boot and we could only imagine the horror that must have taken place. Brendan suffered many nightmares for ages before that awful memory faded.

Just across the way, the countryside began in earnest and often I'd walk for hours bird-nesting or in other peaceful reveries. In season I'd carry my 12-gauge shotgun and when game presented itself I'd provide meat for our family – rabbit, hare, pheasant, duck and so on. Ammunition was very scarce so sometimes my hunting trips became the peaceful activity of bird-nesting. Further west along the coast, seagull colonies were established and seagull eggs were plentiful in the spring of the year³.

Backward Glances

A woods near Bodellwydden, which we kids knew as “Long Wood,” was our favorite place, made more interesting as, in a clearing in its centre, lived the owner, Sir Nigel Birch M.P., J.P., Bart. On one occasion, bird-nesting in Long Wood, I was caught by the gamekeeper, Mr. Jones. I had earlier been looking at his “gallows” which in my mind was a disgusting contrivance. The gallows was a line strung up between two trees on which the gamekeeper hung the predators which he had killed to protect his pheasants. I saw the corpses of a hawk, two stoats and a ferret, along with several other small animals hanging from his ghoulish line. Jones was a tough, fearless brute armed with a club who was about to punish me for trespassing. I was powerless to fight back as he threatened to thrash me, his club raised, when an English voice cut through the woods, “What’s all this about Jones?”

The atmosphere immediately lightened as Mr. Jones lowered his club, released his hold on me and stated, “Caught him trespassing master.”

Then I saw my savior, a tallish man in brown tweeds, in his mid-forties, handsome ruddy complexion; he gave me a stare, then with a slight smile asked, “What is your name son, and what are you doing on my land?”

I knew this must be the owner of the woods, Sir Nigel Birch. I nervously replied, “My name is Trevor Trower and I live in Rhyl. I’ve been bird-watching Sir.”

“Trevor,” he said with a smile, “did you know a Little Owl is nesting nearby?”

“Oh yes,” I said, very pleased with myself. “I noticed the birds were nesting in the big oak in the middle of the field,” I said, pointing in its direction.

By his demeanor and questioning, I felt that he was an educated and not un-kindly man and I felt that I was in no danger.

After a while he seemed satisfied that I wasn’t some sort of a criminal and asked me if I would like to see his house; he pointed to the manor which was just visible through the trees. “I would very much Sir,” I replied and we made our way in a pleasant fashion to the most beautiful home I had ever seen close up. How kind and polite he seemed. He introduced me to his wife, a very attractive lady, and escorted me through his library to another room where suits of armor, guns and souvenirs of all kinds decorated the walls. He looked at me and with a smile said, “Trevor, if ever you want to come on the property again, just ask for permission first.”

During our conversation, I told him of my interest in shooting and described my new shotgun to him. “Would you like to join in a pigeon shoot?” he asked.

“I would like that very much, but I have no cartridges, sir.” I replied.

He wrote down my address before I left for home. A few days later, I received in the mail, a letter from the manor, my first letter bearing a coat-of-arms. It was an invitation to attend a ‘shoot’ for the purpose of pest control and, wonder of wonders, enclosed was a permit to obtain at the local hardware store (Rhydwyn, Jones and Davies, in Bodfor Street, Rhyl) a box of twenty five, Ely Kynoch, 12-gauge, two and a half inch shells suitable for pest control.

Soon I had saved the money to purchase the cartridges. I asked the store clerk for the supplies as I flourished my permit adding, “By the way, could you make the shot size SSG or BB’s?”

“Dust shot only for pest control. Size 8 is the biggest shot we have,” the sales clerk responded; he seemed to express some satisfaction at being able to deny my request. So having paid, I left the store with my prize, 25 shells for my new gun, shot size #8. I hurried

home happy, already planning on my Christmas hunt of the big grey geese that frequent this North Wales paradise. Naturally, I had no intention of wasting my shells on a pigeon shoot.



Home From the Hunt, 1943

I prepared two shells by emptying the lead shot into a crucible and melting it down, adding an old lead toy soldier; when the mix cooled I fashioned the soft metal into round balls which would replace the shot—I figured twelve per shell. This, and an additional charge of gunpowder, would assure me of the range and power to bag the Christmas geese.

On December the 22nd the “Greys” arrived in their thousands and settled on the flat stubble-strewn fields, a few miles south of town. Under a full moon, just before Christmas, in rubber boots and wearing my older brother’s home-guard overcoat with an old white sheet for camouflage, I set out to hunt for our Christmas dinner. A light dusting of snow and a hard frost covered the land. It was very cold but my youth and excitement kept me warm. I hunted the geese by creeping along hedges and through the drainage ditches, which crisscrossed the fields, all the while encouraged by the murmuring in the near distance of the feeding game, the sounds increasing in volume as I crept closer and closer.

The ditches held a few inches of water, frozen over but still not able to

support my weight. My method of progress was to wade through the ice-encrusted water, breaking the ice with each step I took. After hours of stalking, a peep over the ditch revealed my quarry—thousands of Greylag geese camped out in that huge field, ganders stretched tall keeping watch; some were resting, some, grazing and some, gleaning fallen grain.

Seething with excitement, I again dropped out of sight in my trench, adjusting my sheet over my head and shoulders. I checked my gun to make sure the barrels were clear of any obstruction. Armed and ready again, I passed my gun carefully over the edge of the ditch, my head and shoulders slowly following in preparation for an excellent brace of birds. How happy my mother would be welcoming me home with a pair of “Greys” for an otherwise meatless Christmas dinner. The geese were there, alert and murmuring, about thirty yards from where I crouched. I aimed my gun as two big ganders crossed my sights. It was night but the full moon and the snowy frost made it as clear as day. Maybe I’ll bag three geese with my two special shells. I laid my cheek against the cold walnut stock and carefully squeezed the trigger for my right-side barrel. There was a blinding flash and a thundering roar as the breech of my gun blew apart. The detonation of the right barrel had caused the left side to fire at the same time. I felt a searing pain on the left side of my face; the splintered metal had torn

across my left cheek and ear lacerating the skin—how warm and sticky. The explosion had blinded me momentarily, but soon I was able to see reality—the geese leaping into the air wheeling and honking while gaining height to escape. The sky was darkened by thousands of panicking, flapping, monstrous birds, some old ganders' chests barred with age leading the fray. The noise of roaring and hissing in my imagining did not lessen even though the geese, by now, were gaining distance from me. My warm, wet hands, I now realized, were soaked with blood. I dropped my shattered gun onto the frozen ground and hastily looked around for my Christmas geese but, of course, not only was I wounded and gun-less, my quarry was unhurt and in the distance making for safer space.

Bleeding, in pain, alone and miles from home, I was terrified thinking I was about to die. I spotted a farm with a dim light in the window about a mile away. I hastily made my way to the farmhouse and, stumbling, found my way to the front of the house and frantically knocked on the front door. Soon it was answered by an elderly lady who, upon seeing the white-faced youth covered in blood, wearing a mud-spattered army great-coat, slammed the door in my face. I could just hear her calling for help and shouting, "The Germans are here!" I turned and fled and, after what seemed like ages, I found my way home and soon the first light of dawn was lighting the sky. My mother bathed my face and put me to bed. Later Dr. Jones Sr. said I was lucky—one burst eardrum, which would probably heal, a small piece of ear missing and a few shrapnel cuts to my face.

Well, I thought, I have a year to save for and buy a new gun, and plan for a hunt for the most exciting animal in the world – Anser anser, the king of the grey geese. I had no plans to make my own ammunition.

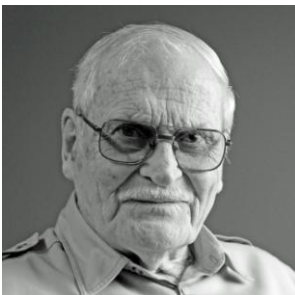
Our Christmas dinner was not bad: a feast of re-constituted dried eggs, courtesy of the U.S.A., as well as fresh fish from the ocean, just a few hundred yards up the road.

Notes

1. *As the name suggests, the "Punt Gun" was a gun specifically designed for the purpose of wildfowling where the prey was plentiful and the population scarce. The gun was like a small-bore, long barreled cannon. The hunter would lay prone on the floor of the shallow boat (punt) with the butt of the gun resting against his shoulder and attached to the hull of the boat by ropes. Typically the gun was used in a punt as this type of boat was flat with very little freeboard. The outfit would be aimed in the direction of a large group of birds and propelled by the hunter's hand over the sides of the boat. When the gun was fired a half pound of shot would be discharged and usually resulted in considerable decimation of the flock. It was rarely used in the U.K. but, was a popular gun on the Chesapeake Bay in the Eastern U.S.A. at the turn of the century. The punt-gun is no longer legal.*
2. *Anyone engaged in war-work, aged sixteen and over, was not allowed to quit their place of employment. This was explained to me by Mr. Hobson and this knowledge enabled me to leave that factory a few days before I turned sixteen.*

Backward Glances

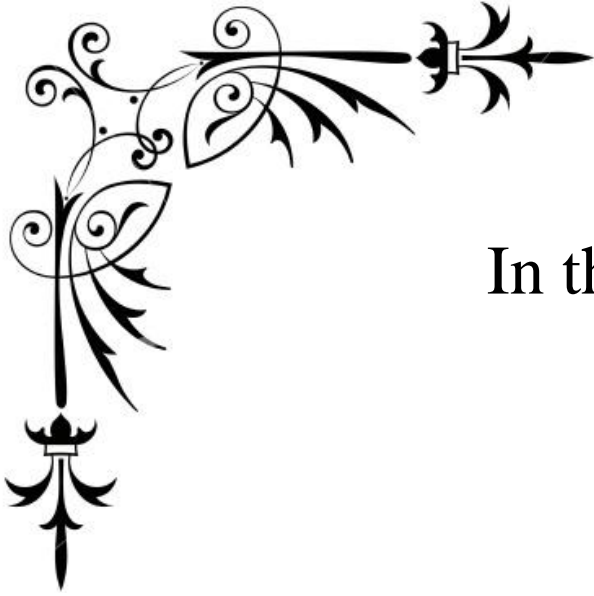
3. *Seagull's eggs were collected in the spring. They were plentiful, laying on ledges on the cliff-sides in the area around Llandudno, just a few miles to our west. Gulls eggs were about the same size as eggs from the dairy and some of the less discerning cooks used them as an alternative to regular eggs. At that time chicken eggs were rationed and each person was allowed one egg per week when they were available.*



Trevor Trower was born in Southampton, England. After a 35-year career with Air Canada In-Flight Service, Trevor retired and pursued various hobbies such as model trains, model radio-controlled boats, woodwork and archaeology. He trained in photography and became quite skilled with a camera.

In the last few years, his passion for writing short stories and particularly poetry resulted in the publishing of three collections of his work. A number of short stories and poems have been published in magazines and on the web at BBC North Wales.

He currently lives in Georgetown, Ontario with his wife of 56 years, Kay Thompson. They have 5 children.



In the Middle of the Night

By Jean Barratt

When you are sleeping soundly, an unusual noise in the night will wake you up. The odd train not blowing its whistle at the railway crossing going through our property, or screams from a pack of coyotes or, in this case, the bawling of a cow in the pasture—this means trouble.

All the family, which included my husband, Ross, our two daughters, Susan and Kathy, and I, awakened and each bolted out of bed and ran to grab a plaid flannel jacket to put over our night clothes. There was no time to decide who would go out to check first.

At the back door, the line up of rubber boots soon took flight. Then we heard the sound of a train whistle in the distance, so forlorn. No one dared to speak for fear the cattle might have broken through the railroad fence and gotten onto the tracks. That section of fencing was under construction.

Rushing out to the pasture behind the farm house, we discovered our little calf, Benjie, had wiggled through a small opening in the wire fence joint making it bigger as he went through. Momma was getting pretty testy and was ready to bull her way through also. The only thing keeping her and the whole herd in was the electric fence. It was strung across the top of the wire fencing producing a hefty jolt of electricity. We couldn't steer Benjie down towards the barn and open the gate to the pasture as he was being frisky and handled like a greased pig. Opening the gate would have been risky because the whole herd was now interested in the greener pasture on the other side of the fence.

In order to attempt to push dear, sweet, little Benjie back through the hole, the electric fence had to be shut off at the barn. One of us ran to the barn, turned on the lights and flipped the circuit breaker off to turn off the electric fence. Whoever it was said, "The horses scrambled up on their feet with eyes blinking, Alfie the goat got up yawning, and all the cats and kittens were washing themselves. They all thought it was feed time." Not so!!

Benjie thought this was great fun as we grabbed him trying to steer him to the opening. He lurched and wiggled, getting away—like "catch me if you can." Remember, this was in the middle of the night.



Momma and Baby Benjie

become a bull.” “You would be a nice veal dinner!” We were joking, of course. Remember, this was in the middle of the night.

Finally, we got him lined up. Yelling, “Quick!” the other two gave a gigantic shove on his rump that could have sent him to the moon. Then it was back to the barn to get binder twine (the fix-all) to make a temporary repair to hold till the next day. The fence opening was closed then and all was well for the night. Everybody was happy and back to normal. We could go back to our nice, warm, cozy beds for a few hours.

I went to the barn to turn the electric fence back on and the lights out. The animals shuffled around and had a way of telling you, “I want food.” So, a handful of oats was given to Alfie and the horses and a little kibble, for the cats. Thank God this night was over!!

Looking around quickly before turning out the lights, I saw something—oh my gosh! I screamed out the barn door for help. Everybody came running to find another adventure



Good Job, Ross!

Two of us would try to get his front legs through the hole along with his head with him protesting. It had to be easier for him to squeeze through than us trying to put him back in. Also, momma was pushing against the fence not leaving him much space to re-enter. All the rest of the herd, being nosy as they were, started to congregate around the area to watch.

Benjie was no longer the cute little guy; we felt for him. Dumb, dumb, dumb! Swear words were not used but a few not so nice remarks were thrown in to vent our frustrations, “Smarten up or you won’t

become a bull.” “You would be a nice veal dinner!” We were joking, of course. Remember, this was in the middle of the night. Everybody came running to find another adventure unfolding. We will never forget what we saw. One of the little kittens had squeezed his head into a jam jar that had been left on the window sill for measuring purposes. He couldn’t get his head out. I guess he had thought he could get a lick or two of something. The jar was starting to steam up and his little eyes were bulging out like two marbles ready to pop. He was still trying to get out, moving the jar a little bit.

We had to act fast and get to the work shop to get a hammer and chisel. Ross had the delicate task of trying to break the thick rimmed neck of the jar. One of us held the kitten’s body and another steadied the jar. One sharp tap, two taps, and then a few more but nothing happened. Time was running out. The kitten had almost suffocated so Ross had to give a good hard whack with the hammer. This was it! The odds weren’t good because the chisel could kill the kitten, a sharp piece of glass could pierce his throat, and shattered glass could go into his eyes.

The glass shattered to pieces, releasing the

Backward Glances

kitten. The chisel stopped in time and no glass appeared in his eyes. “Good job, Ross.” We could not have ignored this dilemma and had to try our best to save the kitten.

The kitten was still breathing but, very limp. I cupped him in my hands, rubbing his little body against my cheek and neck, transferring warmth and love to one of God’s little creatures. Slowly, his paws twitched and then moved a little, trying to get going. Giving him to his mother, I watched as she gave him a good washing, doing all his face and ears good, especially to his eyes which were now normal. Just a little TLC goes a long way.

I don’t know if the kitten knew he had used up one of his nine lives. The next day, everything was back to normal as if nothing had happened.

This was one of the many, many challenges on the farm. There is a saying, “Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.” Farming gives you this sense and appreciation of Mother Nature and how delicate it is.

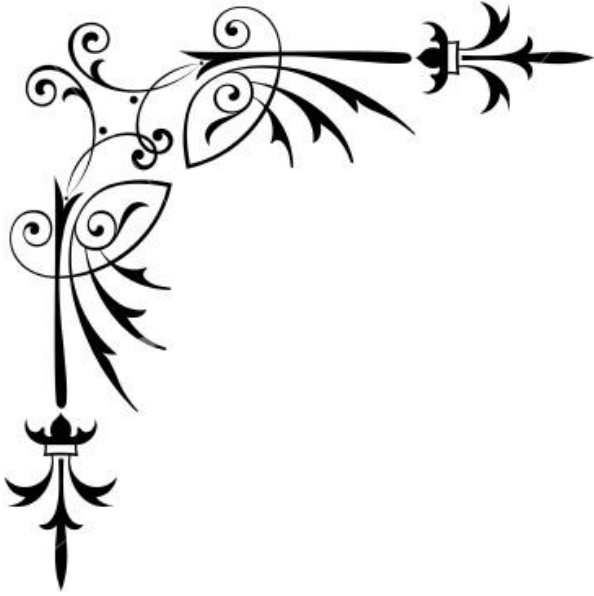
Remember, this was in the middle of the night. We were all wide awake and thinking of breakfast—not so!! A cup of coffee was our pleasure and a handful of oats (cereal)



“I’m Okay Now.”



Jean was born in 1931 in Hamilton, Ontario. She met and married the love of her life, Ross, and they were together for 59 years, which some day will unfold a very romantic memoir. With two daughters and two grandsons, she hopes to pass along some life experiences on the farm to her family.



Dawn Glory

By Gillian Reynolds

Seven days on a canal makes one week. Actually, a week of operating all those locks made us stronger.

On August 31st, 1968, I, along with my cousin Margaret and friends Janet and Jenny, all single and in our twenties, set out on a weird and wacky week-long adventure along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal in England, on a boat named "Dawn Glory." That was when the Beatles were in their hay-day, with hits like "Hey Jude." Robert Kennedy was killed that same summer.



Captain Gill and Crew

The sun was shining down on us when Margaret's parents, my Uncle John and Auntie Frances, who owned a farm nearby, dropped us off at the boat rental. After a short briefing by one of the men, Janet started the engine and we were off, filled with excited anticipation as we waved our goodbyes.

After a couple of hours, our excitement started to wane when the engine stopped. We managed to moor the boat and Jenny and I went off to find a phone so that we could inform the rental company.

Meanwhile, Janet and Margaret, noticing a couple of able-bodied men on a nearby boat called out, "Ahoy there. Would you mind taking a look at our boat? The engine's quit." Seeing two lovely damsels in distress, they hopped aboard. After a brief examination, the tall blond-haired chap said, "Well, for a kick off, you have a leak. We plugged that. But 'fraid we can't do nothing about the broken sheer pin."

Backward Glances

Then, as they were leaving, the other fellow, a red-haired, freckled, stocky man said, with a cheeky grin, “Say, could you girls baby-sit for us while we take our wives to the pub?”

“Baby-sit!” exclaimed Janet. “Sorry, we know even less about babies than we do about boats.”

It was the following morning when the mechanic finally arrived. He hopped on board with his bag of tricks, replaced the broken sheer pin, repaired the leak and assured us that everything was OK.

After some trials and errors, we figured out how to manipulate the locks. Janet, being

tall with keen eyesight, was good at steering. She was a very thoughtful gal, with a quick wit that sometimes left us in stitches. Jenny preferred to tie down the boat. She would jump off the boat and have the knots tied before you could say “knife.” This slim, petite redhead was not just a pretty face. Margaret and I fancied ourselves as the strong ones and so, our job was to turn the lock handles. Margaret had built up her strength doing chores down on the farm. She had dark brown hair



Margaret and Gill Turning Lock Handles

and her face had a healthy glow. Margaret was the sensible one. I was the smallest at five feet and a half (an inch) but what I lacked in height, I made up with muscle strength, from working out.

After filling ourselves with food and the boat with petrol, we were feeling very relaxed and mellow. I was sitting on the deck looking up at the sky. It was dark and brooding. A flash of lightening zigzagged in the distance, followed by a clap of thunder. It was not long before we were battling through a thunderstorm. The cracking whips of thunder made Jenny and Janet scurry below deck. They tried to muffle the frightening noise by wrapping towels around their heads.

Suddenly Margaret shouted, “Oh, no, the water’s coming through the floorboards!” It was a couple of hours before we finished bailing out all the water, after pulling up the wooden floor. There must have been forty bucketfuls. Finally, the rain stopped.

Janet was at the helm. The rest of us staggered down into the cabin to take a rest, only to discover that the beds were wet. We had forgotten to close the windows and the rain had gotten in. We dragged the beds up on deck to dry them out, but at bedtime they were still damp. Fortunately, we had brought along hot water bottles, which came in handy that night. We hoped they would help dry out the beds or at least provide some comfort to help us fall asleep. Unfortunately, the offensive smell emanating from the chemical toilet made sleep

impossible, until Janet had the bright idea of putting Vic's VapoRub under our noses – and leaving the windows open!

I was awoken in the middle of the night feeling my cold, wet nightie clinging to my legs. My first thought was that I had wet the bed. The water bottle had leaked, adding insult to injury. I wrapped myself in a towel to shield me from the wetness. Then, I tried to get back to sleep.

It rained in the night! Water came in through two of the windows. We were awoken by Jenny's cries, "My sleeping bag's all wet!"

I rolled over and the dampness hit me like a wet fish. "So's mine," I whined.

The next morning we thought we had two problems: the offensive-smelling toilet and the wet beds, sleeping bags and towels. Then we discovered a third: all the packaged food smelt like the toilet chemical, because the pantry was right next to it. We threw out all the food, except the tinned stuff. The smelly toilet? Well, we made an executive decision and dumped it into some bushes. I guess we were not environmentally friendly back then.

The rest of the morning was wiled away in a launderette in a nearby town, drying out the towels and sleeping bags.

Back on board, Janet said she would prepare the lunch – fish and chips. What a treat! Our mouths were watering just thinking about the taste. But, why was it taking so long and why couldn't we smell cooking? Finally, Janet emerged from the cabin, ducking to avoid banging her head. She looked very frustrated. "Anyone seen the fish and chips?" she enquired, looking at us all suspiciously. "I wrapped them in newspaper so they wouldn't thaw out."

"Well, err, I think I might have thrown them out at the last stop," said Jenny, looking very apologetic. "I just thought it was rubbish." Jenny was a bit of a neat freak. It was hard to stay mad at her though. She looked so pathetic standing there looking all sheepish. It was over an hour before we arrived at the next pub where we could finally get some grub. By this time our stomachs were growling at us.

After lunch, it seemed that our bad luck had started to change. The storm was behind us. The sun came out and dried out the beds, which were sunbathing on deck. We operated the seventeen locks that day with fluidity and ease. Our strength and stamina were improving lock by lock.



Gill & Margaret Relaxing, Jan Steering

By Thursday, we were beginning to feel that all our troubles were behind us. The sun and Lady Luck were shining down on us - only one lock to go through. Time to sit back and muse while basking in the sunshine, savouring the peace and quiet of the English countryside and marvelling at its beauty: the gently undulating landscape; the patchwork of fields separated by hedgerows, some with sheep grazing, some with crops growing or recently harvested and others lying fallow; densely wooded areas, where the trees dividing the waterway made it look even narrower; brick bridges that had

Backward Glances

withstood the test of time, where roads crossed the canal; canal paths where people could walk or ride their bikes; and all kinds of houses and gardens that were lucky enough to look out onto the canal.

Back then, traveling along the canals by boat was like stepping back in time - to a time when horse-drawn barges used to be the main method of transporting cargo, mainly coal. The chief engineer of these man-made waterways was James Brindley. The Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal was in operation from 1772 until 1959. A volunteer group managed to get it reopened in 1968, when it was reclassified as a cruise way, and then a conservation area in 1969. Before they were reopened for recreation, the canals had to be cleaned up, which involved removing tons of junk that people had thrown in, such as dead animals and old bedsteads.

I was thinking how happy I was to be finally living my dream of a canal holiday, hypnotized by the throbbing of the motor. A farmer was ploughing a field nearby. There was a clonk every time the tractor blade hit a rock. The drone of an aeroplane reminded me of a civilization, which seemed so far away.

A few drops of rain awoke me from of my reverie. My peace was shattered. Black clouds were gathering. Soon, we were traveling through another thunderstorm. We ran out of petrol just as the rain abated. Unfortunately, our timing was not good. While we were filling up from the spare tank, the boat started to drift, until it was broadside across the canal. As we slowly floated around the bend, we met several canoeists, who were taking part in a race. They had to make some nifty moves to avoid hitting us, because we, of course, were out of control. I shouted across to them: "Sorry, we ran out of petrol. Can you give us a tow?" They were not amused.

By Friday, we thought that nothing else could possibly go wrong, but we were wrong. You would think that after operating an average of a dozen locks a day that we would be able to do it blindfolded. Not so. At one of the last locks, we were waiting for the water level to rise and wondering why it was taking so long. "Oh no" cried out Margaret. "We forgot to close the bottom gate paddle." The gate paddle separates the two water levels. Trust Margaret to be the first to figure it out.

Canal holidays were fairly new back then so we did not see many other boats. Mostly, the other boaters were families. We did get lucky one day and met four boys at one of the pubs where we would moor each night. We spent a very enjoyable evening cavorting with them in our tiny cabin (all good, clean fun). Just our luck they were headed in the opposite direction.

We did not need a map. Half way through the week, we simply turned round and went back to the start. Our speed was little more than walking pace and so very few miles were covered. But, as the saying goes, "The journey is more important than the destination." Throughout the journey, we learned a lot about each



Away From It All

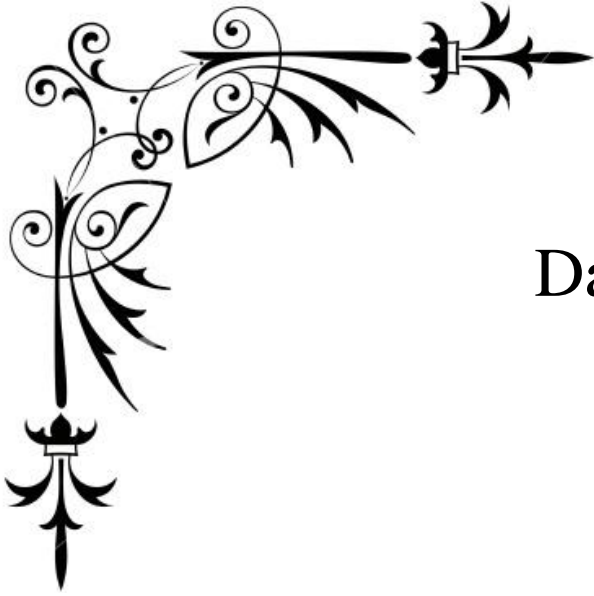
Backward Glances

other, but not much about boats. The experience, however, changed us on many levels. We had a deeper appreciation for the beautiful English countryside, for a quieter, slower pace, for a simpler, more relaxed way of life, and for each other.

Although I have lost touch with most of the girls, I still think fondly about them, and I will forever treasure the memories of that unforgettable week on Dawn Glory.



Born in Birmingham, England, during the war; married her childhood sweetheart and lived in a bungalow (which they helped build) near Coventry; divorced; married Bryan; immigrated to Canada in 1969; lived for thirty years in a bungalow (which they helped build) on the Niagara Escarpment, where they owned horses and grew fruits and vegetables; raised two children, one of whom lives in Guelph and the other in Whitehorse, Yukon; worked mostly as a legal secretary; moved to an Adult Community in Milton in 2002; enjoys yoga and aerobics at the Leisure Centre, hiking, biking and just being outdoors, and of course writing.



Daydreams, Dance and Romance

By Eva Hegedus

Eva, honey, I have no money for dance lessons. All my pay from C.B.C. goes for mortgage, bills, food and clothes for you and Mary and Frank.” This was my mother’s reply when I begged and even tried to bargain for dance lessons: “Please, just once a week for a couple of years and I’ll give up Christmas and birthday gifts for good!” But my pleading fell on deaf ears. Once my mother said no, she never ever changed her mind.

However, seeing that my eyes were already moist with tears, she tried to offer something in place of the dance lessons, “If my mother gets her visa to come from Hungary, she’ll live with us and can give you piano lessons for free!” Already feeling completely deflated, I now felt insulted as well. I shot back, “I don’t want any dumb piano lessons; I want dance lessons!” Without waiting for a response, I ran straight upstairs to my bedroom. At the age of 9, I cried often and copiously. I threw myself onto the bed and wept a river of tears into a pillow that had been permanently soggy ever since my dad died of a heart attack less than a year ago: on August 1, 1956, to be exact. Couldn’t I just have one thing that would make me happy and let me forget how miserable I felt without him? I tried to cheer myself up by singing my favorite line from the Mickey Mouse Club March: “Forever let us hold our banner High! High! High! High!” Head Mouseketeer Jimmie Dodd would have wanted me to be cheerful even after this setback. But the only sounds coming from my throat at this point were stifled sobs that sounded like stupid hiccups.

What my mother would never understand (which was why I never told her) is how much the Mickey Mouse Club meant to me. My secret was this: I was desperate to be a Mouseketeer and that’s why I had wanted the dance lessons. Every weekday after school, I raced home from Balmy Beach School like someone possessed, almost wiping out on my descent down the steep ravine at the back of our Toronto home in the east end, just so that I wouldn’t miss a second of the opening Mouseketeer March and roll call on my black and white T.V. Of the girls in the club, my idols were Annette and Darlene. When they danced, they danced as if it was as easy for them as a walk in the park, and when they smiled and

Backward Glances

looked right at me, I was sure they were inviting me to come be a Mouseketeer with them. In fact, hadn't all the Mouseketeers told me in their song that I was "as welcome as can be?" How hard could it be to do the things they did? I had heard that they had special coaches right on their T.V. set for everything they did on the show: the dances, the skits, the songs, the acting. I figured that since I already sang in the Balmy Beach School Choir, now all I really needed was to learn some tap and maybe ballet.

I could already picture myself in the Mouseketeer outfit: black cap with Mickey Mouse ears, knee-length pleated skirts and black shoes with little bows on each shoe strap. Best of all, I'd wear a short-sleeved white turtleneck with my first name across the front in big block letters and I would come up and announce my name during roll call, right after Annette and Darlene.

As miserable as I was when my mother nixed the dance lessons, over the next three months I gradually calmed down and saw things less melodramatically. Talking to my sister Mary always helped me see the bigger picture. While she totally understood my dream, she also got me to see that in this case anyway (unlike other times when we completely agreed she was just being mean), Mom had just been stating the cold facts: after our dad died, she was left, at age 38, with three children to provide for and three mortgages to pay off. She was lucky to even get a job and luckier still to be able to keep our house on Neville Park. Mary also got me to see that all the stuff the Mouseketeers did on TV was way harder than it looked. If I was honest with myself, I also knew that I still cried too easily and I was still much too shy to perform in front of TV cameras. All the dance lessons in the world might not change how I was at 9.

My mother always went on and on about how I should do well at school if I wanted a bright future and good career later on. Without openly agreeing with her, I tucked my daydreams away in a safe part of my heart and doubled my efforts at school.

By Grade 10 at Malvern Collegiate, my average was a solid A and my mother was very pleased that I was so studious. While I had two wonderful girlfriends and good marks, what I didn't have was a boyfriend, a fact which made me very sad but shouldn't have come as a big surprise. After all, I was still plagued by shyness and by my tendency to have a wild crush on the coolest and most popular guy in the class. Had such a guy ever actually approached me and started up a conversation, I would have turned beet red, stammered something, and beat a hasty retreat!

So there I was without a steady, without the status of having a steady, and without even a remote chance of going to any of the school dances or proms. Not going to dances was a bitter pill to swallow since I still loved to dance and would have died to dance with a partner.

Little did I know, however, that my all-work-and-no-play life was about to change in a way I never could have predicted.

I'll give the credit for the big change to my sister Mary; it was Mary who suggested that we catch the Kodaly Ensemble show at the O'Keefe Centre that spring. I knew I always had lots of fun with Mary whenever we went anywhere together, even though she was 6 years older, and I knew this show had lots of dancing. That's why I replied to her invitation with, "Sure, let's go!"

From the moment we took our seats at O'Keefe's and the Kodaly girls (who were all about my age I noticed) came out to dance, my eyes were glued to the stage. They wore skirts and matching aprons in bright rainbow hues; their skirts puffed out at the bottom and were

pulled in tight at the waist; they flared out to waist level as they spun round and round, revealing layers of white starched petticoats; on top they wore either white blouses with dark vests or embroidered jackets. Each girl wore cherry red leather boots and a matching red ribbon at the end of her braided hair. I also noticed they all wore big smiles and were enjoying every minute on stage.

They jumped, stamped and clicked with their feet, did the csardas with many fancy variations I had never seen or imagined. They formed circles and interweaving lines or made a chain with hands connecting to girls behind and in front; they sang (almost shouted) songs in which they boldly teased and flirted with the nearby boys. One girl danced a light-hearted duet with her partner called “The first kiss”; after playful dance sequences, they ended the dance with a “kiss” behind a handkerchief. This one had the audience smiling.

When the boys ran on stage to join their partners, the music (I could pick out violin, clarinet and double base) got louder and the pace of the steps and turns and spins doubled. It was all I could do to stay in my seat and not run up on the stage to join the dancers!

The men’s dances seemed, more often than not, to be about showing off: they were friendly, high-spirited contests to see which man could leap the highest, slap the floor, his thighs and boots the fastest and improvise the most complex set of figures and steps. Loose hip swivels and fancy hand claps contrasted with fluid arm circles and the rhythmic hard slapping and clicking low to the ground. Arms, legs, hips, feet went in different directions all at once, never losing the beat.

Between group dances and some duets, the large four-part Kodaly choir sang beautiful folk songs led by their conductor and Ensemble director, George Zaduban: he had started Kodaly Ensemble as a choir back in 1960. (I would later get to know him through my husband and my admiration only grew for his talent, energy and patience.) The finale was called “Wedding Dance of Ecser” and it told a wedding story in dance and song from the bridesmaids dressing a bride for her wedding; the bride dancing with her groom encircled by the girls; and ending with the entire wedding party celebrating the nuptials.



Their Dance Costumes: the Kodaly Girls in One of Their Dance Costumes



Performing the Wedding Dance of Ecser at Expo '67

This number showcased the full range of our music and dance from slow to fast, nostalgic to joyful. The gypsy influence on our music is clear at every turn: strong accents, strong emotions, strong and confident playing.



*Posing Tall and Proud in My
Brand New Red Boots*

By the end of the evening, I told my sister: “I have to see if I can join this group. I know I could learn these dances.” Mary was all for this and encouraged me to “go for it.” I showed up at the Kodaly’s next dance practice in the west end of Toronto. I was right to think I could learn the steps easily. I was finally dancing with guys my age who were great dancers and no longer gave a second thought to missing the probably boring school dances at Malvern.

A few months later, I entered a tiny, rather nondescript shoemaker’s shop in the west end of Toronto to pick up my very own custom-made dance boots. The Italian boot maker had brought his craft from the Old World and could probably have made my boots in his sleep. His shop smelled of leather, dyes, cleaners, and polish—a masculine smell which I quite liked. A few weeks earlier, he had drawn the pattern of each of my feet on brown scrap paper, took 3 or 4 quick measurements and said, “That’s good...come back 3 weeks.” Now he slipped my brand new boots on my feet and I immediately felt tall, confident and empowered: completely ready to dance on stage. The boots fit my feet like a second skin.



*Our Persian Cat on My
Grandmother’s Lap, Dreaming
about My Boots*

Nor was I the only creature fond of the red boots: our white Persian cat, Pandora, would try to get right inside each boot when I kicked them off at home after dance practice. She was intoxicated with the ripe smell of leather and foot odor: to cats, apparently, this is catnip!

From now on and for the next 7 years (until the end of my 4th year at University of Toronto), every Tuesday night was dance practice, the high point of my week. For 3 to 4 hours I pounded the floor boards and banished my every worry and preoccupation from my head. Kodaly was everything I hoped for and a kind of therapy as well: a much needed break from homework and studies. Never did I feel pressured or in competition with any other dancer: our instructors were very patient when they taught new dances; we were all there to dance and then share our enjoyment of Hungarian dance, an important and old part of our culture, with audiences.

The years between Grade 10 and my second and third year in Modern Languages at U. of T., flew by quickly. Kodaly dancers performed in church basements, auditoriums large and small, outdoor festivals and picnics and many multi-cultural events where we would share the

stage with groups from every background including Ukrainians, Chinese, Indians, Native Peoples, Spanish, Polish, to name only a few. I really enjoyed watching other groups perform and getting a taste of their culture through their dances and songs. We could be in Welland or Kitchener one week and in Hamilton two weeks later. We were especially pumped up for our full-scale shows on stage at Massey Hall or in large public auditoriums in Niagara Falls, Detroit or Cleveland. The Hungarian Americans who packed their large public auditoriums greeted our performances with thunderous applause and standing ovations.

Although I never tired of Kodaly, by 2nd year university I was questioning every other aspect of my life and the choices I was or wasn't making: why was I even going to university when I had no idea what career or job I wanted; what religious beliefs did I have now that I was disillusioned with going to church; could I succeed on my own out there in the big world, away from home? Number one question on my mind was this: where or where was a fellow I could see myself with in a long term relationship? I completely identified with the "Sounds of Silence" song from the 1967 film "The Graduate": the world around me seemed to have few answers for my questions and "echoed with the sounds of silence." (Well, except for the times I was dancing).

By the time the Kodaly Ensemble performed on the spectacular World Stage at Expo 67 in Montreal (with more than 50 ethnic groups sending dancers, singers, and other acts and people from all over the world in the audience), I was starting to discover answers to at least a few of my questions. For one thing, I now had a steady boyfriend. I hooked up with a good looking fellow from our choir, my age, who I'll call John.



Kodaly Dancers Posing on the Expo Letters

We dated for almost two years. He had a great sense of humor, was very patient and considerate, had a car and was happy to go anywhere I wanted on our dates. My mother seemed to like him as did the rest of my family. Nothing was amiss except I began to notice that he liked being the passive partner in the relationship and wanted me to make every single decision. The other big problem was this: he was far more serious about me than I was about him. When I finally realized I was being unfair to let the relationship continue while he built up hopes for something permanent, I broke things off.

But a much more substantial romance was in the wings in the form of a mystery man, also from the choir. As I took a window seat on one of the buses that was taking the Kodaly Ensemble to Lakewood Auditorium in Cleveland Ohio for what Ed Sullivan would have called a "really big shew," I had three things on my mind: a year-long trip to France that would begin this fall (I couldn't wait!), the assignment due on Monday for one of my German profs (hated that prof and his stupid course), and whether or not I brought everything I needed for the trip. Romance was the furthest thing from my thoughts.

Backward Glances

About an hour or so into our trip, I was gazing out my window at a blur of trees, fields, and buildings. Through a backdrop of talk, bursts of laughter, and bits of songs starting up here and there throughout the bus, a rich, clear and very pleasant baritone voice broke through my reverie and surprised me with these words:

“Can I interest you in a game of Scrabble?”

Never had I heard of a guy using scrabble as a pickup line. Intrigued, I looked up at the speaker: he was someone I recognized from the choir as a person of interest. I replied: “Sure, that sounds like fun. My name is Eva Cserepy by the way.”

“And mine is Zoltan, Zoltan Hegedus. I noticed you at Expo. You’re a very good dancer.”

I was flattered by his last remark. As he sat down in the empty seat beside me and produced a Scrabble board and tiles, I had a chance to take in more of his features: he was just a bit taller than me (good height if we ever danced together), had a handsome and classically Hungarian face with high cheekbones, a straight and elegant nose, a thick head of dark brown wavy hair combed back over his crown, and straight thick eyebrows above grey/green eyes which sparkled with life when he spoke. I can remember nothing of the Scrabble words we scored with or who won the games; after all, Scrabble wasn’t the main interest for either of us. More conversation ensued as he as he remarked:

“I don’t detect any kind of an accent in your English. Are you second or third generation?”

“Actually I was born in Hungary in 1947 and we escaped to Austria in 1948 and came to Canada in 1949. I’ll save the whole story for later since it’s long. What about you?”

“We escaped during the ’56 uprising and went to England first for a few months before coming to Canada. We finally settled in the Toronto area and not long after that, I started going to St. Mike’s Choir School in Toronto. I loved music and got lots of choral training there along with piano lessons and later I studied church organ. I went to Jacksonville University and also studied music at Peabody in Boston but I couldn’t afford to continue my studies in the U.S. I had to come back to Canada to earn some money and help my parents. They own a large property with an old log cabin on it between Georgetown and Acton.”

Our conversation lasted for the whole bus ride to Cleveland and back. The more I got to know about Zoltan and his family, the more I wanted to know. First impressions are always key. He was much more exciting, had many more interests (which included reading about saints, famous people, and innovative thinkers) and more ambitious plans for the future (including starting an arts and crafts camp on his parents’ property) than anyone I had ever known, male or female

What surprised me the most, and pleasantly so, was that he enjoyed working with children, had been active in Hungarian Scouts and had even operated the first Catholic group home in Canada with his dad, a social worker. His younger brother, Attila, was an artist as was my sister Mary.

Finally I had met someone who had loads of energy, a dynamic personality, a good upbringing, and liked children. It turned out that we had much in common. Moreover, he seemed genuinely interested in finding out what I thought on a variety of topics and what plans I had for the future; he asked about my planned trip to France which I described as a “much needed change from my studies and living at home, and a chance to see more of the world.” Now the only questions were these: was he as drawn to me as I was to him and would this relationship continue after Cleveland?

Backward Glances

During preparations for that night's concert, my eyes zeroed in on Zoltan among any random group of people. Funny how, before Cleveland, I had barely even registered his presence, and now he was the only one I had eyes for. In turn, he watched me closely whenever the choir and dancers were on stage together. We sat together again on the return trip and agreed to get together at the next meeting of the Ensemble that was coming up. From there we started dating and talking almost every day on the phone. More long conversations and dates were followed by late nights in his car, followed by sneaking into the house late, trying not to wake up my mother.

In September I left for my year in Rouen France. I had an excellent but sometimes lonely year there without him. We wrote regularly to each other and shared romantic cards and letters. It would be dramatic and fun to say that "Rouen was my ruin", but I actually didn't go too wild. I lived with a married couple and the husband had been a childhood friend of my mother's from Hungary. My mother had asked that Sandor and his wife "take good care of me." They took this to heart and treated me like a daughter, Need I say more? In any case, I wasn't tempted by anyone. I traveled to Hungary at the end of my year in France and had a wonderful visit with my uncle and cousins visiting all the places that had been important in my parents' lives. While in Budapest, I was thrilled to see a performance of the National Folk Dance Ensemble on Margaret Island on the Danube River. It was the perfect end to my travels and I was now more than ready to come home to Canada and to Zoltan.

And so it happened that after a year ('71-'72) in which I completed a Bachelor of Education Degree and continued to date Zoltan, I convinced him that we needed to take our relationship to the next level. We both wanted children and we both agreed that we would save sex for marriage, and so it felt right to marry sooner rather than later. Finally he saw the wisdom of settling down and we went to pick out my engagement ring and our wedding bands. This led to a rather amusing scene one fine spring day a month later, while he and I were sitting with my mother in the kitchen at Neville Park. To make casual conversation, my mother asked Zoltan: "Do you have any plans for the summer Zoltan?" Both my mother and I nearly fell off our chairs when he replied, "Yes, I think I'll get married." (I had assumed I would break this news gently to my mom the following week.) Perhaps she was not

completely shocked after all: a few weeks later she held an engagement dinner in our honor at home. My Uncle Imre (the same uncle I had spent a month with in Hungary) was visiting Canada and was there with his wife, my cousin Kati was there with her family, and so too were my future in-laws and my immediate family.

We married at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church on July 15, 1972 and had a small, intimate reception with only 60 friends and



*Engagement Dinner in My Mother's Dining Room.
Zoltan and I are at the head of the table*

Backward Glances

family in my mother's large house and beautiful garden at 193 Neville Park Blvd. It poured rain as we exited the church: it is said this is a sign of fertility and indeed that promise held true for us. We've had good luck and bad luck during our 40 years of marriage to each other; we've gone through illness, financial setbacks, many times of feeling frustrated. I describe my marriage this way: I've been many things, but I've never been bored.

Marriage brought us two wonderful children, Kristina and Gabor, their excellent spouses, and our 4 beautiful grandsons. Together they have brought us immense joy which more than makes up for any hardships we experienced along the way.

Neither one of us will ever forget the Kodaly Ensemble and a certain bus trip to Cleveland in 1970. How remarkable when I think back! My love of dance (which started with the Mickey Mouse Club) prompted me to go see a Kodaly performance in Grade 10 which led me to become a Kodaly folk dancer which placed me on that bus going to Cleveland where a certain man approached me, asking if I would play a game of scrabble. We dated, we married, we moved to Milton and raised our family here. I applied for a position at Milton Public Library where I worked as an assistant to the Head of Circulation while Zoltan worked at E.C. Drury School for the Deaf. After 40 years of working and living in Milton, we feel Milton is now home and it's where we choose to live out our retirement.

By the way, the Kodaly Ensemble spawned several marriages besides ours. It continues to this day as a vibrant and very active dance group in Toronto complete with its own website.

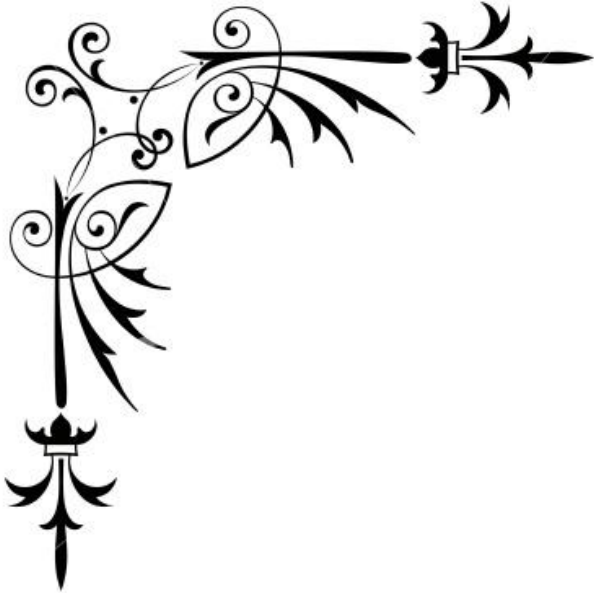
The magic of dance and romance lives on fifty years later.



Eva Hegedus (nee Cserepy) was born in Hungary in 1947. Last year, as a tribute to her brave parents, she wrote about her family's daring escape from Hungary in 1948 and their early struggles in Canada. This year, Eva's memoir is about the path by which a few seemingly isolated dreams and choices in her life (starting with her dream, at 9, of becoming a Mouseketeer) intersected, connected, and in the end determined everything else that happened--including whom she met on a bus trip in 1970 and would marry two years later on July 15, 1972.

She dedicates this memoir to Zoltan and their forty exciting years together as husband and wife, and also to their two most successful co-productions, their wonderful children Kristina and Gab.

A warm hello also to Len Lalonde, Mylene Tremblay, and my sister Mary. Hugs to our four beautiful grandsons: Lenny and Andrew Lalonde, Raphael and Jakob Hegedus.



Monkey Business

By Wendy West

The sudden ear-splitting screams (not unlike the high notes of a bagpipe) that flew from the chasm of my elder sister's mouth as she stood rigid, ricocheted around our spacious country kitchen. And, more likely than not, they wound their way down and through the barn yard, in all probability, making it difficult for the farmer to squeeze milk from the frightened cows. All her screeching, however, only served to turn an unfortunate situation into a frantic state of pandemonium.

It was the year 1960, or thereabouts—not so very long ago in the scheme of things. That is why to this day, I can still recollect the horror of the spectacle unfolding before me. Casey Jones, a hefty sized Rhesus monkey, his ears pinned back in rage and no doubt coupled with panic, skidded along the surface of the long, pine table, which stood rock solid in the centre of the room, whereby sending my sister's wedding china flying off in all directions, shattering the delicate pieces as they made contact with the slate floor. "Do something!" she shrieked just as, for good measure, Casey Jones hurled himself into the air and, once there, demonstrated the precision of a trapeze artist by achieving a soft landing on my hysterical sibling's left bosom. Then, having no regard for decorum sunk his teeth in with obvious relish.

Now just to keep you, the reader, abreast of the situation: fortunately for her and, I might add, for myself, she happened to be wearing not one but two woolen sweaters as we had not yet set a match to the wood burning stove and there was a definite nip (no pun intended) in the air. Not being a soothsayer, how could I, the innocent party, have prophesied this regrettable outcome?

If you will bear with me, I'll explain how all this came about. I'd been performing with my band at the Famous Door nightclub on Yonge Street in Toronto. It was a Saturday and, on this particular evening, two young men in the audience noticed I was not of my usual high spirits. So when they inquired, "What seems to be the trouble?" I informed them with a long face that my monkey had died. I failed to see what they found amusing in this statement.

However, I was instantly elated when they told me to buck up as they could very soon get me another monkey. The plot thickened.

“How? When? Where? I jabbered.

“Never mind any of that,” they said smirking. “Here’s all you have to do.” I leaned towards the conspirators as they continued in hushed tones, “All you have to do is meet us very early Monday morning.” My head was nodding in full agreement. “Let’s say 6:30 a.m.”

“Yes, yes, just tell me where, tell me where,” I whispered ardently with no hesitation.

At this point in my story, you may be asking yourself what did they want from me. I’m pleased to tell you they just wanted me to sing a couple of their favourite songs: “I Remember You” and “The Auctioneer.” But, let’s get back on track. Insistent that our meeting place should be covert, they settled on a railway crossing just north of Gormley where I was living at the time. It turned out to be a very lonely stretch of road.

So, come Monday, to the delightful chorus of bird song, I leaped out of bed—this being a feat seldom achieved—and dragged my dubious, long-suffering sister along with me. I wound my way past farms and woodland, then along a pot-holed gravel road towards the designated spot. “They’re not going to be there, you know,” repeated my sister yawning. I was beginning to find her unfavourable viewpoint somewhat irritating and asked her politely to, “Put a sock in it.” She complied and, sinking down into the seat, reclined her head, and kept her eyes and her mouth shut.

My excitement was mounting as the beetle—a1952 gray Volkswagen—crawled up to the said railway crossing only to find, to my great disappointment, that an extremely long freight train was slowly swaying by. After what seemed like an age, the caboose finally rattled off down the line and there it was, barely visible through the swirling dawn mist: a solitary van parked at the side of the road. And yes, true to their word, the two young men were closing the doors and walking towards me toting, between them, a large, shapeless sack.

“I told you. I told you they’d be here!” I shot over my shoulder with more than a tinge of triumph in my voice as I hastened towards my knights in shining armour, for that’s how I beheld them. They stood grinning and informed me he’d been given a little something to help him sleep. “So,” I whispered, trying not to disturb him, “it’s a boy.” They were pleased with my obvious delight and said the drug should wear off by the time we reached home. “What’s his name?” I asked eagerly, “What’s his name?”

The two men looked at each other, then at the diminishing caboose, smiled and said in unison, “Casey Jones.”

We arrived home without incident. I eagerly opened the sack and gently placed Casey Jones’ head on a makeshift pillow. We didn’t have to wait very long for him to come out of his induced sleep. And, I believe this is where you, the reader, joined us in our spacious country kitchen, where Casey clung with tenacity to his tasty morsel.

On realizing that a mouthful of wool was not all that appetizing, he released his...tit-bit...and my sister cautiously edged her way out of the danger zone uttering a stream of colourful oaths as she securely shut the door behind her. I, in turn, slowly sunk into a seated position on the floor where previously I had placed a shallow bowl of tepid water spiked with a generous amount of Woodward’s Gripe Water—a tried and trusted remedy for soothing babies. I began to croon the song, “An Irish Lullaby,” having learned from past experience how singing always calmed a nervous animal. This took awhile but eventually his hackles went down. Then, keeping hazel eyes fixed upon me and being the intelligent little chap he was, he came to realize I meant him no harm and tentatively approached my outstretched

Backward Glances

hand which held a tempting supply of sunflower seeds. After going through our final bonding ceremony by picking through each other's hair, I showed Casey Jones around his new home.

Halfway between the back door and the barn, I had commandeered a huge sturdy cage, approximately 14 ft. x 14 ft. x 12 ft. in height with no sides closed off from its surroundings. This cage had belonged to the chickens and, not wanting to ruffle any feathers, I had introduced them to yet another cozy roost. Casey immediately went to try out the small hammock rigged up in one corner and, after finding this to his satisfaction, scrutinized the covered wooden box filled with sweet smelling hay. But his greatest delight was the water trough warmed by the sun. He was to spend many blissful hours swimming below the surface, then flopping back in his hammock in an ungainly position, legs dangling over the side, while he dried off.

Casey and I would enjoy many long walks over the fields where, on hearing the distant bark of a dog, he'd spring onto my shoulders and, once there under my protection, would behave like a fearless King Kong. Unlike my previous squirrel monkey named Pixie, Casey would never venture off the property, even though he had a free run of the farm only being confined when we had unsuspecting visitors whereas Pixie would use hydro lines and jump from tree to tree as a means of arriving at the local school house. Then I would receive yet another call from an irate teacher asking if I could collect the monkey as its antics at the classroom window were a distraction to the children.

However, back to Casey, the subject of my story: trouble began to brew after the birth of my daughter, Jesica (the one 's' was intentional). Unfortunately, Casey Jones felt threatened by the competition and this put Jesica under a precarious threat. So, with a heavy heart, I made the painful decision to place Casey Jones with the dear, late Bobby Ash. Bobby, back in the '60s, was the delight of small children and was known to his fans as Uncle Bobby. Every morning, his show could be seen broadcast from the Channel 9 studios—C.F.T.O. in Agincourt. How did I know Bobby? Well you may ask. At that time, I was in rehearsals for a show, but that's another story, and over many lunches in the channel 9 cafeteria, Bobby and I became well acquainted. I learned he possessed a genuine love of animals, having come from a circus background in England—one of his many jobs having been caring for the elephants. Bobby was intrigued with the idea of having Casey Jones on his show and the plus was, I'd be at hand to help Casey, not to mention myself, make the transition. All turned out well. Bobby's show, after receiving Casey, ended up having a menagerie of small animals. He would receive over 300 unsolicited letters a day. His show became dear to the hearts of 35, 000 children who would sit each morning at 9:30 am for 90 minutes of chaos and, presumably, about 35,000 mothers would heave a sigh of relief and settle down with a cup of coffee.



Uncle Bobby with Miner Bird and Bunny

Backward Glances

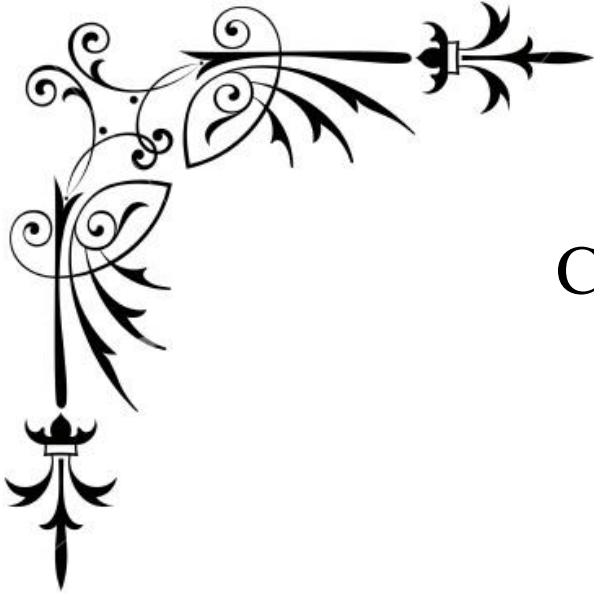
Meanwhile, up in the control room of C.F.T.O., the normally cool producer, Isabel Costello Western, was having her daily nervous breakdown while pouring a steady stream of instructions over the intercom. Here's a sample as told by Bob Blackburn of the Telegram on March 28, 1964: "Bobby, you're too close to Casey's cage. Bobby, Casey's got your mike cable. Bobby, Casey's throwing his bath water on the floor and Morning Magazine's coming on in five minutes. Bobby, Casey's got the cable again." And so it would go.

Morning Magazine was on the air 30 seconds after Uncle Bobby signed off, often with ludicrous results. His two talking mynah birds often stayed up in the grid to watch it, making Iris Cooper's interview subjects somewhat nervous and occasionally contributing wolf whistles and rude remarks to the conversations. All these goings-on provided much jollity in the corridors of C.F.T.O. Some of my readers may recall that, way back then flying high atop Casa Loma, was a huge poster with my loveable Casey Jones in glorious colour.

Post Script: I'd like to set the record straight. I no longer hold with keeping wild animals that should be allowed to live out their lives in their natural environments. But, in my defence, I did save Casey from the uncertain conditions in an animal lab. I believe my mother was right (aren't they always?) when telling me that's where he must have been taken from. I never did see the two young men again. But, speaking for Casey Jones and myself, we were very grateful.



I am a self taught professional actor, bronze sculptor, and portrait artist with works in private collections such as Gordon Lightfoot's; a vocalist, song writer and composer although I don't read music; a recipient of many international awards including the "Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal" for songs written and performed especially for the War Amps of Canada commemorating the 50th anniversary of WWII. Under the name Zoe Kendell, I was a feature vocalist at the 1984 Toronto International Jazz Festival. I currently perform (as Wendy West) with the Sentimental Swing Orchestra and, with his kind permission, I'm sculpting Christopher Plummer as Prospero from "The Tempest." I'm just another dyslexic born in the U. K. many moons ago.



Childhood Memories

By Ken Marvell

I grew up in a small Quebec village called St. Paul L’Ermité. Population 800 of which about 150 were of English descent. The rest were French Canadian. St. Paul L’Ermité was located 20 miles east of Montreal. The main industry was Canadian Arsenals Ltd., a major ammunitions manufacturing plant.

Growing up in the 1940’s, life was different in many ways than it is today. With no TV, computer games, or organized sports, we made our own entertainment.

Enjoy, as I share a few of my many and varied childhood experiences.

The school I attended, Cherrier St. Private Protestant School, consisted of one classroom with 16 to 20 students enrolled in Grades 1 through 7. One teacher taught all seven grades. The school was located ‘within’ Canadian Arsenals Ltd., which made and filled bombs, torpedoes, and other explosives.

All the students walked to and from school every day. A common occurrence in the fall of each year on a hot humid day, was for a group of kids to get hold of one unsuspecting student on his way to school and stuff dry straw down that student’s shirt and trousers, then watch with delight, as the ‘victim’ sat squirming in the hot, sticky classroom, as the remnants of straw itched and scratched his body. We all had our turn being the victim to this prank so we knew oh so well, how awful it felt.

Every school day started with all students reciting the Lord’s Prayer, followed by the singing of “The Maple Leaf Forever”, and “God Save the King”



Ken, age 2, 1944

Backward Glances



Class of 1951/52



*Bombs Manufactured in Canadian Arsenals Ltd.
Plant Where School Located*

My Grade 3 class consisted of Muriel, Bobby, and me. We sat in a row, our desks, one behind the other, in that order.

Sometime during the day, each class had 15 minutes of scripture reading from the King James Bible, followed by a discussion with the teacher on what was just read. One morning, having just read and discussed the parable of Jesus rebuking the Devil by saying, "Get thou behind me Satan," the teacher turned her attention to the other students. We three were left to work on a different subject. However, Bobby and I started whispering over and over, just loud enough for Muriel to hear us, "Get thou behind us Satan. Get thou behind us Satan". After five minutes of this, Muriel started to cry.

"Why are you crying, Muriel?" the teacher asked?

"Bobby and Kenny are calling me Satan, telling me to get behind them." She replied between sobs.

Upon hearing this, the teacher marched Bobby and me into her office and after a short lecture, proceeded to give us the strap, on each hand. Now Bobby and I had received the strap often enough to know that if we cupped our hands a little, the strap would not hurt too much. All the same we would yell, "Ouch!" with each strike of the strap so the teacher would not hit us more than once or twice.

After the strap, we would head back into the classroom, trying to smile, as we knew all the students would be staring at our faces to see how much pain we appeared to be in.

The strap was a piece of flexible leather about ¼" thick x 3" wide x 10 to 12" long, specifically made for meting out corporal punishment.

My family consisted of both parents, and six children. As you can imagine, with eight of us in the family, it was crowded at the supper table and I, being the youngest of six, had to sit on a bench between two of my sisters, our backs to the wall for support. It was the custom in our house that no one left the table till everyone was finished their



My Family - 1949

Backward Glances

meal. Back in those days, we knew what day of the week it was by the meal we were having for supper. Monday's supper was rabbit stew, Tuesday's supper was pork chops, Wednesday's supper was spaghetti, and Thursday's supper...left an impression in my mind to this very day, as Thursday's supper consisted of roast pork, with lots of crackle, some potatoes and veggies. Crackle or crackling was the thick crisp, fatty skin of roasted pork. It tasted so good.

I once made the major error in saying, "The sound of everyone crunching on the crackle bothers me; in fact, it makes me angry to hear it." Well, my sisters, especially my sister, Mary, didn't waste any time getting to the crackle each week, to add to my anger. In fact Mary delighted in sitting across the table from me with a piece of crackle in her hand and a taunting smirk on her face as she would say, "Oh Kenny, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch." This amused my brother and other sisters to no end.

Almost 60 years later, whenever I hear someone crunching on a carrot or any hard food, my mind places me right back at that table. Oh, and yes, sometimes I still get angry.

One summer when I was 8 and my sister Marjorie was 10, our cousin Anita, aged 9, came to visit us for a week. Anita, an only child was born in England. She was spoiled and had a British accent. We didn't like her accent as we thought she sounded snooty.

As mentioned, no one left the dinner table till everyone was finished eating. At supper one evening we had meat with boiled potatoes etc. Marjorie and I ate everything on our plates, but Anita didn't like potatoes and she just sat there trying to figure how she could get away without eating them. Marjorie and I whispered, "Put some butter and salt and pepper on them and when Dad isn't looking, slide a potato off your plate and feed it under the table to our dog, Smoky." Smoky was a black Springer Spaniel and Marjorie and I both knew Smoky didn't like boiled potatoes.

So Anita did as we suggested and held a potato in her hand, under the table. Smoky, slowly walked over to the potato resting in Anita's open palm and proceeded to lick the butter, salt and pepper off the potato, then slowly walked off into the living room, leaving Anita with a now cold potato in her hand which she quickly placed back on her plate.

Holding back our laughter so as not to get in trouble with Dad, we said, "Come on Anita, eat up so we can go out and play". Even Dad told her to finish up at which time she started to cry and confessed about trying to feed her potato to the dog. Because Anita was a visitor, Dad made an exception and allowed us to leave the table to go out and play.

With eight of us in the family, my parents supplemented the family income by having the largest vegetable garden in town. When it was time to plant, water, weed, and harvest the vegetables, we all helped.

We also raised rabbits. We canned the rabbit meat and had the furs tanned at a nearby tannery.

We ate the meat on a weekly basis, every Monday as a matter of fact, and from the tanned hides, mom and my older sisters made baby booties and muffs which we sold.

I recall one evening watching my dad and brother as they prepared to kill the fifth rabbit for that night. We were in the kitchen, a dim 40 watt light bulb hanging from



My Brother with Rabbit and Me

the ceiling. The porcelain enamel kitchen table top covered with newspapers. My dad, having enjoyed a few glasses of rum and cola, stood at one side of the table with a 20" long piece of pipe in his hand, waiting, while my brother on the other side of the table picked a rabbit out of the cage and proceeded to place it on the table and hold it by the ears and hind legs. Once ready, my dad swung the pipe down hard, to break the rabbit's neck, killing it in one blow. Suddenly, newspapers flew all over the kitchen from ceiling to floor. As they settled a few minutes later, the rabbit was nowhere to be seen.

Dad said in an angry tone of voice, "Why the hell did you let it go?" Then seeing my brother standing there in pain, with tears in his eyes and rubbing his swollen wrist, dad realized he had missed the rabbit completely. His voice now lowered with an apologetic tone, dad said, "Let's call it quits for tonight."

Eventually the rabbit was found hiding behind the stove and returned to the hutch. We always referred to that incident as being the rabbit's great escape.

In the evenings, a bunch of us kids often played games like Kick the Can or Hide and Seek, but when it came to be apple growing season a small group of us would sneak onto strangers' properties and steal apples off their trees.

One dark and quiet night we silently crept onto a property that had many apple trees. One of our friends, Mitch, climbed a tall tree to shake the branches so the apples would fall. As they fell, we gathered them up.

Suddenly the house front porch light came on and there standing on the veranda was a huge figure of a man, staring into the darkness, looking our way.

"Who is out there?" he hollered gruffly.

We quickly ducked down and hid in the damp, grassy ditch, not moving and being as quiet as we could with our hearts beating loudly, in fear of that huge man coming after us. Mitch, in the meantime was still up in that tree, also not moving for fear of being seen. We could see Mitch. His four limbs stretched out, clinging for life to four limbs of that apple tree. He looked like a Halloween statue up there. After a good five minutes of hiding in that ditch, we became a little more brave or silly, as one of the boys we called Jinx, whispered, "Let's throw some apples at Mitch."

Being as quiet as we could, we started throwing a few apples from down in the ditch, at Mitch, up there in the tree. As some of the apples hit him, we could hear Mitch whispering, "Ouch, stop that you guys. Ouch, you're not funny."

Eventually, the huge man went back into the house and we decided to get out of there just in case he came around from behind the house to catch us.

One last memory to share, for now, happened when we hung out with some older boys. A prank we enjoyed playing was to get a wooden thread spool, and hammer some tacks around the circumference of the spool. Then we would sneak up to a house and push a long nail through the hole in the spool and quietly press the nail into a soft wooden window frame located near the front door. Once the nail was in far enough we would wrap some thin string around the spool then slowly creep back and hide behind a bush. From there, we would take both ends of the string in our hands, and pull on alternate ends of the string causing the tacks on the spool to strike the window pane with a clack, clack, clacking sound.

Before long someone would open the front door and ask, "Is anyone there?" It was hard for us not to burst out laughing as we watched them.

Backward Glances

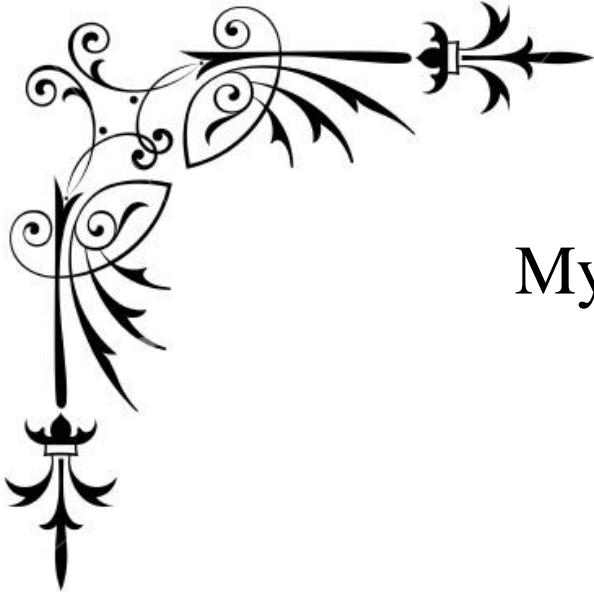
No sooner would they go back inside and we would pull the string again. This often went on for 15 or 20 minutes till eventually the nail holding the spool would come lose and fall to the ground.

I hope you, the reader, enjoyed these stories I shared and that you have a new insight into what life was like for me, a young boy growing up in a very small village in the 1940's.



I was born in Montreal in 1942, the youngest of six children. The oldest was my brother Gordon, followed by four sisters, then me. When I was two years old, my family moved to a very small predominately French village, 20 miles east of Montreal, called St. Paul L'Ermite, where I grew up and where my parents worked for Canadian Arsenals Ltd. St Paul L'Ermite was renamed Le Gardeur in 1978.

Retired from a career in sales, selling steels to industry, I continue to enjoy living in Milton, Ont., where I have resided for 34 years. I am married and have three grown children. I currently have three grandchildren and another two on the way.



My New Life in Canada

By Mary Cummings

I can't believe this is really happening. Standing beside my husband's grave, our arms around each other, his sister and I were weeping together. I was filled with grief at his passing but also with a great sense of thankfulness and peace. But had she really forgiven me? Perhaps it was nothing but fantasy or was it just wishful thinking?

I had come to Canada in 1946 as a war bride. During the war, I had met Richard, a Canadian soldier, and we were married in an Anglican church just before he was repatriated to Canada. We had a lovely honeymoon then Rich had to go back to base. He would try to phone me at night when he could

One evening, when his call came, I could tell he was upset. "Whatever's wrong?" I asked

"Well, I had an angry letter from my sister."

"What did she say?"

"She's really upset because we were married in the Anglican Church."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Read it to me," I demanded.

"This is the meat of it," he said. "How could you get married in the Anglican church? You should have at least got married in the vestry. And speaking of the minister, as if he was a real priest!"

I started to laugh, "Well, it's too late now. Oh, I am sorry Rich, what will you say to her?"

"I'll think of something," he sighed. "She'll calm down after a bit."

Soon, I put the incident out of my mind. My sister-in-law was 3000 miles away and I really couldn't worry about her. I didn't expect to be going to Canada any time soon. But this did not promise well for my future relationship with my husband's family

Truthfully, I did not want to leave England. It was my home! I loved its country lanes and small fields. I loved the sea coast. I loved the small villages and I loved the great city of London. Besides, I had just survived 5 1/2 years of war with this people. Whatever was I doing? But I had made my decision and there was no turning back.

Backward Glances

However, I did have some time, almost a year in fact, before I had to leave. I took the opportunity to visit some of the historical sites I thought I'd have my whole life to see - Westminster Abbey, Canterbury Cathedral etc. I also spent a week in Northern Wales, hiking the hills there. And, of course, I was up in London on V.E. day - right along with so many others - singing and dancing in front of Buckingham Palace

But time does not stand still, and the dreaded morning came when I had to say "good-bye" to my mom first, then my young brother. My older brother was in the army. Dad was coming to Euston with me to help with my bags. On the train, people were chatting with us, noticing the Canadian tags on my stuff and wishing me well. Dad was having a hard time keeping the tears back. We connected with the Canadian representative at the main line station and my dad hugged me good-bye and gave me the only compliment I can remember from him. "You'll do fine dear, you have lots of common sense." And then he was gone. (Perhaps he meant that he was going to miss me!)

There were lots of us war brides. We were herded into a building and there we languished for a couple of days, while everyone was rounded up - 2,000 of us. This was particularly frustrating for me, because I could have been home in an hour. But finally, February 23rd I think, we were on the train heading for Southampton where we boarded the liner Aquitania.

It was a beautiful English spring day and, as we sailed down the Solent, the trees beside the river were just coming into full blossom. Hard to leave behind.

I was in a large cabin, with 9 other girls, in the forward part of the ship. This was a lot more comfy than for some. Others were in hammocks as the Aquitania had been fitted out as



Me (left) On Board Ship

into Halifax, at Pier 21, around March 3rd or 4th. Then, on to a train for a couple of days. Sometimes we'd stop in the night to let someone off. At one stop in Quebec, sadly, for



War Brides On Board the Aquitania

a troopship. I had no idea how huge an ocean liner was, with its ballroom and large dining room. It could have been a lot of fun, but soon we hit the English Channel, and our tummies started feeling queasy - especially for those who had been stuffing down chocolates and white bread, oranges and other treats which we hadn't seen for years. Many girls were throwing up, but I managed and, after the first couple of days, it was indeed, fun.

After about 5 days, as we came close to land, we saw an iceberg. It was cold and clear, the sea was green, and we finally sailed

one of the girls, there was no one waiting for his bride. In Riviere du Loup we were let off for a break. I bought an apple for 50 cents - robbery in 1946.

Then, finally, into Toronto and Union Station in the downstairs concourse. We waited, a crowd of expectant wives! Finally, my name was called and I stepped forward to be greeted by my husband...and my sister-in-law, my father-in-law, 3 nieces and a boarder and more. And thus my new life began!

I thought Toronto looked horrible, no green grass, no leaves on the trees, and big banks of black stuff (which had been snow), lining the side of the road. We drove to the suburbs, to Mimico (The Home of the Wild Pigeon!), to a small house, and my new family.

The day after I arrived, my sister-in-law handed me a book. "This is something you're going to need," she said. I glanced at the title and somehow had the grace to mutter, "Thank you." Whereupon I fled to our room and immediately slammed the book down on the bed. My husband looked up from his reading. "Whatever is the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know how she, your sister, can be so insensitive," I stormed.

He reached for the book, glanced at the title, and started to laugh. "Oh, I see, *Answers to Non-Catholic's Questions*. I bet you weren't expecting that."

"No, I thought it might be a book of recipes—something I could really use."

"Come here and let me wipe your tears. You know, my love, my sister has a lot on her plate. Besides, we have invaded her space."

"I suppose so," I grudgingly agreed.

To be fair, my sister-in-law had a difficult life. Her husband had gone to war and never returned to her. He had left her with a step-daughter and two other daughters, the youngest who had been brain damaged at birth. Plus now, a father to look after. Her two brothers were very fun-loving (Rich. was the youngest) and, sadly, she was considered the prickly one in the family. Now she had us dumped on her.

At this point, as a 21-year-old new bride, I felt that I didn't want this woman in my life. I didn't care about her circumstances. I just wanted to get on with my life. I didn't like living here, in her house, plus her family and a boarder.

The first few weeks in Canada were quite different and very difficult. I was home all day with Hilda and the family.

On days off, Rich, his sister and the boarder would take me to the beer parlour. This was a horrible place. Tables covered with glasses of beer, and no place to sit quietly for an hour or two. My new family would ply me with drinks and seemed to like to see me skip along the pavement home and, of course, my accent was always a source of amusement. Most weeks we would go downtown to dinner and a show and, as the weather got better, we'd go to lacrosse games.

People would expect me to be so grateful to be here, would tell me that they had been rationed too, and ask me if I had seen Simpson's and Eaton's? I don't think they realised that I was familiar with London and all its West End shops. I almost felt like an alien on some foreign planet. It wasn't that people weren't nice and kind. They seemed so unreal. Perhaps it was after living through the war when everyone was living on the edge? If only I could speak their language. I was so homesick for a familiar voice or a familiar touch. Sigh! And I just longed to meet someone familiar on the street who would greet me in recognition. I often wondered if this loneliness would ever go away.

A short time later, rescue came in the visit of a couple, Dorothy and Bert, from Oshawa. Dorothy's mother had been killed when a V1 rocket had hit an apartment building

Backward Glances

near my home, and I had brought some of her mother's jewellery over to her. This dear couple immediately invited us to their home the following week-end. They took us under their wings and a great friendship developed. We'd go there every Christmas and, even when we had children, we were always welcome at their cottage.

Another family who were great to us was Rich's aunt, uncle and cousin. We'd go there for Sunday dinner sometimes and it felt a little bit like home. A special treat was later when we had kids and, a few days after Christmas, we'd pull them over there on their wagon and gather outside Uncle Pat and Aunt Em's house, waiting in anticipation. Then Uncle Pat would drag out the Christmas tree and the kids would be allowed to carefully light a branch and the tree would go - whoosh! We'd sing and dance around it and have so much fun! Plus, we never left there without a bag of goodies to take home - grapes and nuts and apples etc. They also introduced me to a totally new taste experience - peanut butter!! - peanut butter and banana sandwiches - yummy!

Still, we needed to find somewhere else to live. And I started to work at a local bank. This also was somewhat of a problem because, as Hilda complained, this deprived her of our money for board. But, we absolutely had to go. I couldn't stay there another minute...I was desperate!

So we went to live with a Welsh couple with six teenagers. We had a lovely bed-sitting room and again, this couple was so good to us - took us to Niagara Falls and other places. The husband even helped Rich get a better job. And it was fun living there. Then Rich changed his job again, and started working at the Post Office downtown, on the 4-12 midnight shift. He would come home about 1 a.m., when I was in bed; then I would leave for work in the morning while he was still sleeping. It was a bit crazy but we managed.

My first Easter in Canada, we went to Mass at St. Patrick's Church (not really my choice.) Then, Eaton's for lunch, where we also bought a small portable radio in a nice wooden cabinet. This was such a treasure, our first home purchase. Rich sat with it on his lap through the afternoon movie and all the way home on the streetcar, just so we could enjoy it over the long week-end.

The following year, Hilda was upset with us again. My father-in-law was ill and she chided us for not visiting enough. We had no car and it was a very long walk; but still, in this case, she was justified. However, we were able to be with him at the end and I really missed my father -in-law! He was a wonderful man with a great sense of humour, who always accepted me.

His funeral was another cultural shock for me. His body was laid out in the dining room and everyone was drinking. "Dad would have wanted a party," they said. I suppose it was an Irish wake but it felt totally bizarre to me!

Things changed again when I learned that I was pregnant. Now we really needed to find somewhere else to live - not an easy thing in 1946. Our landlady was upset that we wanted to leave, but we decided to buy a house. Not being very savvy, we paid the full list price - a whopping \$7,000! Our mortgage payment was \$23.00 - about my pay for a week at CIBC. We quickly rented out the upstairs, bought a couple of bits of used furniture, and an ice box for \$10.00. Of course, we had a coal furnace and had to run down to the basement every now and then to shovel in some coal to keep it going.



With Our Firstborn in Mimico

it was my turn, they came and sat on my sagging studio couch, their feet on my bare hardwood floor. But I did give them splendid refreshments: scones and jam, a milk chocolate cake, brownies and other squares. Then they told me I was supposed to keep it simple. Eventually, my mum came for a visit and took pity on us, and bought us a carpet.

Our people upstairs were great, and Rich and I and our precious son settled down. One day, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law came visiting. Our babe was about 18 months old, and was down for his nap

“That’s why we’ve come,” Hilda said, “to see him.”

“I don’t really want to get him up from his nap,” I replied.



Our Visit to the UK in 1951

Our son was born and, oh, how I wished my mum was nearby. I came home from the hospital on New Year's Eve. That night, my sister-in-law and boarder came to visit and they sat around the table drinking and laughing, seeing the New Year in, and all I wanted was to go to sleep and tell them to go home!

We invited Hilda, my brother-in-law and his wife, and Bill, the boarder, for dinner, to celebrate our new house. It was something of a disaster. One didn't eat any meat, another was on a diet and no one wanted dessert. That didn't stop them being keen drinkers though. Maybe my cooking wasn't that great?

I made friends with the girl opposite too - also a war bride. Otherwise, I didn't find our street very welcoming, until I was told it was up to me to get to know the neighbours. I had been used to the opposite in the U.K. So, I joined a book club with my war bride neighbour. Perhaps it was foolish of me. There was a lawyer's wife, a doctor's wife, my friend who was a teacher, plus a few others. When

“But we can't stay very long.”

I sighed, “Alright, I'll make some tea, then maybe...”

I felt so pressured to get my little fellow up. He did not want to be wakened. I brought him out to meet these relatives who were strangers to him.

My brother-in-law bellowed out, “Come here, son, and sit on Uncle Jack’s knee, and have a good tickle.”

I put David down. “Come on boy, come on.” David started toward him, then turned back and ran and clung to me.

“I’m sorry all. He’s not really awake. Normally, he’s the friendliest little fellow. Perhaps when you come again?”

I felt like saying, “If only you hadn’t been so loud and had let him get used to you a bit.”

Another disaster with the in-laws?

Even so, it was true that I was slowly settling down. I was part of a war bride’s group which was fun and helpful. When David was less than 3 years old, I took him to Sunday

school at the Anglican Church. He loved playing with the kids there and it was another step toward integrating into the community.

By this time, Rich was working for the Liquor Board. Then another baby came along, a precious little daughter, and then another little princess was born. By this time, the children slept in our one bedroom, and Rich and I slept on the studio couch. We didn't see much of Hilda, though her youngest daughter, Theresa, would spend time with us sometimes. Then, one evening, Hilda visited us, saying she was very concerned for her daughter. Apparently, a neighbour was acting inappropriately toward her. Theresa was a young teenager now, and I had watched her jump on any man's knee and wrap her arms around him in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. The poor child had no boundaries or fear. By the time she was 16, she was admitted to permanent care in the Ontario Hospital, because of her previous brain damage at birth. I told Hilda and promised that I would watch out for Theresa as much as I could. The strange part was that, for the first time, I felt I had a real connection with Hilda, that somehow this was a real conversation. Perhaps I felt her anxiety, and felt compassion for her - at last, I'm ashamed to say.

It was time for us to move to a new house - which we did - to Long Branch. Our fourth child was born in 1950. Our children thrived in this new location. After Hurricane Hazel, we had a beautiful park nearby, and our street was pretty safe for kids. As they grew, there was school, Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Guides, and they sang in the choir at church. We had our usual ups and downs with broken bones and sickness, whooping cough being the worst, where even Rich had it, down to our 5 month old. Only David and I escaped.



The Baby of the Family

Rich continued to work for the Liquor Board and, when our youngest was 7, I started to work part-time. Then, in 1974, we bought a cottage and I worked full time at CIBC to help pay for it. I worked there until Rich, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's in '75, could no longer be left at home on his own. He was admitted to hospital in 1979 and from then on, my time was given to caring for him.

Hilda and Theresa would always spend Christmas with us, and during the time Rich was in hospital on University Avenue, I would often meet Hilda, as we both went to visit him. I can only remember one annoying incident between us, the last one I can recall. We had met at the hospital and decided to go to lunch nearby. It turned out to be a spaghetti place and not really my choice. With my British background, in those days I didn't consider spaghetti real food, and was not very familiar with it. We sat down at a table and our food was brought.

"What's this stuff beside the pepper and salt?" I asked. "It looks like some kind of seeds."

"Oh, you shake it on your spaghetti to spice it up a bit."

"OK, I'll give it a try."



At our New House in Long Branch

Backward Glances

Whereupon, I gave it a good shake and covered my spaghetti quite generously! They say you can learn something new every day. That day I learned that red pepper flakes are very hot! Even though I was somewhat ticked, I'm sure Hilda did not really intend to mislead me.

Somehow, during these hospital visiting years, our concern for Rich created a bond between Hilda and I and we became friends.

In 1981, I sold our house in Long Branch and moved to Campbellville, to my own apartment in my daughter and son-in-law's home. I also became part of a Christian Community close by. I managed to get Rich moved to Milton District Hospital, where he died in the spring of 1982.

Rich's funeral was held in Grace Church Anglican, Milton, although the service was independent. A friend brought Hilda out from the city and I was concerned that again she would be upset that her brother was put to rest in an Anglican church. I wondered, would she make a scene? However, she said not a word. I asked my friend if she'd complained to him on the way but no, she'd said nothing. As we stood by Rich's grave that day, I felt God had gently closed the book of his life and I felt too that He had healed a wound in my own heart. I truly believe that Hilda had finally forgiven me for not being a Catholic and, more importantly, for leading her brother astray. And for that, I am very thankful.

Even after Rich died, Hilda would bring Theresa, who was now in permanent care in a group home in Barrie, to visit me at my home in Campbellville. Then, Hilda herself was admitted to Providence Villa, where I visited her from time to time until her death. I would also visit Theresa on my way home from the cottage and take her and a friend out to Swiss Chalet. Sadly she died just before Christmas. However, I am still close to Hilda's older daughter, even though she lives far away in Nova Scotia. She has six children and lots of grands... I wish I lived nearer so I could really get to know them all.

My roots remain in the British Isles, but now I am truly Canadian, except perhaps for a bit of an accent. I love being at the cottage. I love the fall when the leaves are gold and orange and scarlet, and the smell of the pine needles underfoot is a fragrance like no other.

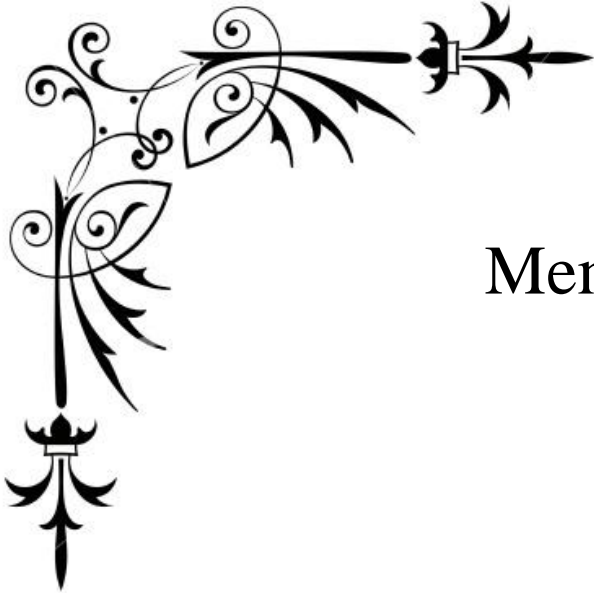
I like these warm and generous people in this land that I am now pleased to call home.



Mary was born in London, England, lived through the Second World War, and came to Canada as a war bride in 1946.

Here she raised her children, and now has grandchildren and great grandchildren. She worked for some years in the bank, then cared for her husband, who died from Alzheimer's disease in 1982. In later years, she acted as an Associate counselor at the Christian Retreat Centre, in Orangeville, Ontario.

She is retired now and lives in the country.



Memories of the Boarding House

By Lorrette Shermet

The boarding house is located at 14 Mirambo Street in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. My grandfather Joseph George Haidar built the boarding house in the very early 1900's. Back then it was Speke Street—named after John Hanning Speke, one of the British Army Soldiers. When Tanzania received its independence in 1961 the government changed all English street names to Swahili names.

Dar es Salaam, located 8 degrees south of the equator on east coast of Africa, is now the largest city in Tanzania. In the 19th century, Mzizima, as it was called then, was a sleepy coastal fishing village. In the 1860s, Sultan Sayyid Majid bin Said of Zanzibar developed it into a port and trading centre and renamed it Dar es Salaam (Harbor/Haven of Peace). When he died, the town sank into anonymity until the 1880s when it came back to life as a station for Christian missionaries and then as a seat for the German colonial government.

My grandparents Joseph and Lydia Haidar immigrated to German East Africa from Lebanon at the turn of the century as Lutheran missionaries. My grandparents were newlyweds, my grandmother was 7 years younger than my grandfather and this was quite an adventure for her. After several years in German East Africa my grandfather travelled to Germany on his own and studied design and architecture. He then returned to German East Africa and designed and built homes including hotels. My grandparents



The Boarding House, 2011

owed and ran the Splendid Hotel for many years. The boarding house was one of the many homes he built and it was this home on the first storey where the Haidar family resided.

German East Africa was a German colony comprising what are now Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania. The colony came into existence during the 1880s and ended with Imperial Germany's defeat in World War I. Tanganyika was governed by the British from 1919 until 1961 when it gained independence from the United Kingdom as a Commonwealth Realm on 9 December 1961, becoming a republic within the Commonwealth of Nations exactly a year later, on 9 December 1962. On 26 April 1964, Tanganyika joined with the islands of Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, a new state that changed its name to the United Republic of Tanzania within a year.

My grandparents had nine children: six boys and three girls. My father was the youngest boy and the eighth youngest in rank. His oldest brother John was seventeen years his senior. It was a busy, active home as the family occupied the first storey of the boarding house.

I lived in the boarding house from the time of my birth in 1951 until we moved out in 1965. It was a very large double storey house built in colonial style. The house only had seven rooms and a massive verandah surrounding the building. The verandah was made of concrete/stucco with huge arches and a decorative balustrade. On the ledge of the balustrade, were a variety of potted plants. I would say there were at least thirty to forty potted plants. The front verandah was so large that, as children, my siblings and I used to play squash against one of the walls. Each room was large enough to house a family of five. The rooms were at least 30 feet by 30 feet. My bedroom had two large beds, a 3 foot square table, two chairs and two large wardrobes. I shared this bedroom with my sister and two cousins. The house had two rooms on the left and four rooms on the right. It was divided by one enormous room that was known as the dinning and sitting room combined. This room was at least 60 feet by 30 feet. The dining table in the dining room was large enough to sit anywhere up to twenty people comfortably and within this room there were two large couches about 3 feet long and several arm chairs, including a wall unit and gramophone. The ceiling was at least 15 feet high. When we had to change a light bulb we would have to climb on a chair that was placed on a table and stand on the chair. To do this one had to be at least 5 feet tall. The house was nicknamed the boarding house as we had many boarders. I remember fondly when all the kids, about ten of us, came down with chickenpox and our mothers believed we should be kept away from daylight so we were all put in one bedroom that had no windows but it did have three double beds and we were quarantined there for at least a week. It almost felt like being in a hospital.

The second storey, which is a mirror image of the first floor, was occupied by St. Joseph Convent Catholic School for many years. St. Joseph Convent Catholic School was a convent run by Catholic nuns in the heart of the capital Dar-es-Salaam. When the school was being expanded, the nuns rented the second floor from my grandparents and had regular classrooms operating out of there for a few years. Each room was a classroom and I understand they had all seven grades there. The last family to live on the second floor was a wealthy Greek tycoon family, the Papadopolous.

My family situation is unique. There are three brothers married to three sisters, my father Emil and his two older brothers Albert and Louis, were married to my mother Helen and her two sisters Tosia and Stasia. Tosia and my mother are fraternal twins. My mother

and her family of six came to Tanganyika (as Tanzania was called then) as Polish refugees during the Second World War; that is another story for another time.

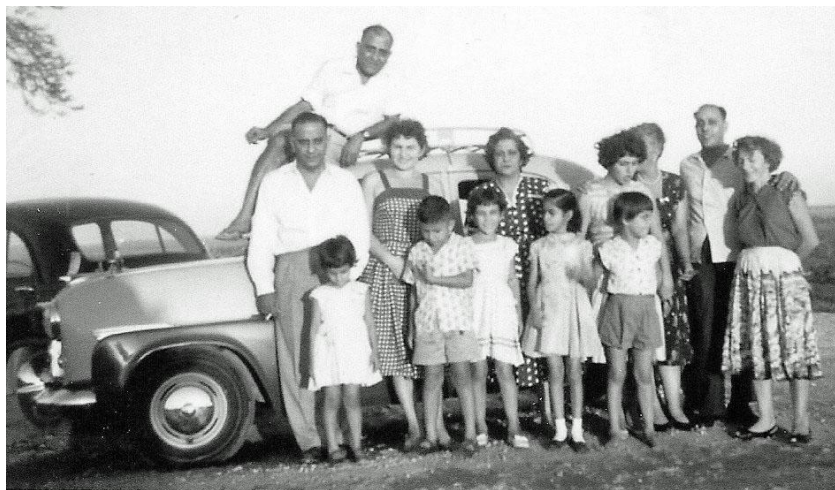
My immediate family consists of my sister Emily who is 11 ½ months older than me, my parents Emil and Helen and me. My aunt Tosia and Uncle Albert had three children: Jeannette, Frank and Michael and my aunt Stasia and Uncle Louis had two: Charles and Doris. From the oldest to the youngest there was an 8 year difference. We all lived in the boarding house together. There were other family members that dwelled there as well.

Typical working or school hours in Tanzania are from 7.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a two hour lunch break from noon to 2 p.m. Monday to Friday. On Saturday's it was a half day from 7.30 a.m. to noon. Our main mealtime was at noon. It always consisted of three courses: soup, the meal and a dessert. Being of two ethnic backgrounds and living in a multicultural community, our main meals were very culturally diverse. We had Arab dishes such as: Shish Barak, Mujaddara, Kibbeh; Polish dishes such as: Pierogi, cabbage rolls, borsht; Indian dishes such as: curry, biriyani, Pilau; and Tanzanian dishes such as: ugali, samaki, and mishkaki, just to name a few. At supper time we had something light, a sandwich or a bowl of soup, and we all ate together.

What was so memorable about mealtime is that we all sat at one table with my grandparents at the head of the table. The meals were prepared by my mother and her sisters, but were served by two of our servants, Juma and Hamisi. Juma and Hamisi wore a white long Kanzuu with a red belt around their waists and a red fez. Juma and Hamisi stood at the end of the table and served



Boarding House, 1956



The Haydar Clan

our meals. There always was a minimum of fifteen people at this table. That is where we ate and shared our daily stories. Many times there were so many people talking and laughing at

the same time that you could not hear yourself think. One of my uncles, a professor, Uncle Ernie, who we actually called Mwalimu, a Swahili word for teacher, used to use a gavel once in awhile to control the noise. I have heard the phrase, “children should be seen and not heard,” so many times around that table.

I remember an incident very vividly when my uncle Theodore, my father’s second oldest brother, visited us one day. It was just before lunch and he was invited to stay for lunch. He asked my mother, “What are you serving for lunch?” My mother knew Uncle Theo raised rabbits and would not welcome the idea we were having rabbit stew for lunch, so she responded with a fib and said, “We are having chicken stew.” He agreed to dine with us. After the plates were cleared from the main meal and we were about to start on dessert, my mother asked, “Theo, how did you enjoy your meal”. He said it was delicious. She and her sister started giggling like high school kids. He asked, “Why are you laughing?” They spoke to each other in Polish and continued to laugh. They then told him that was not chicken stew he ate but rabbit stew. I never saw my uncle get up so quickly and dart for the verandah. He kneeled over and was sick to his stomach. He was not happy with my mother or her sister, and he let them know in a few choice words (*#*#) how he felt.

Saturday was a great day for us kids. We loved Saturday afternoons. It was our time to play together and make up our own games and stories. As it was only half a day at work or school, after lunch the adults used to take a nap and the children used to amuse themselves, always playing together. There were enough of us to make up a team. Sometimes we would go down to the park that was a couple of streets away, and play such games as: rounders, cricket, British bulldog, hide and seek or we stayed closer to home and played on the verandah.

I recall this one Saturday we decided to play “barber shop.” It was my shop and I was the barber. The rest of my siblings sat in a row patiently waiting their turn. My cousin Doris, who is 4 years younger than me, was first up. I was 10 at the time. I took a white bed sheet and draped it over Doris and, with my father’s clippers, I proceeded to clip her hair down the middle. Doris had short hair and I decided I was going to give her a buzz cut. I finished the first row and was about to start on the second when I heard this loud voice shouting my name, “Lolley!” (Lolley was my pet name growing up. Each of my siblings had a pet name.) I looked over and



Playing the Game, “Going to Market”

there was my Aunt Stasia, Doris’ mother, standing at the door very matronly looking with her hands on her hips and she continued to say, “What on earth are you doing?” Realizing I must be in trouble I quickly dropped the clippers and darted out of the room. My aunt outran me and I was not able to sit for about a week after that. That afternoon they had to take Doris to a hairdresser and cut the rest of her hair to the same length,

which was almost bald.

I recall another Saturday, after the adults went for their nap, and we kids went to amuse ourselves. This time we decided to play “going to the market” and I was going to be a Chinese merchant selling hats. I went around the house and searched in all the wardrobes for as many hats as I could find. I found about six and one was a tam. I recalled seeing a movie where there was this Chinese man selling his merchandise from a pole, so I decided to put the hats on the pole, but, the hats were having a difficult time staying on. I decided the best way for the hats to stay on was to make a hole in each hat and drag them through. The hole must have been at least an inch to an inch and half. I was so proud of myself that I had something totally different from the rest of my siblings. But, at the same time, I could not understand why the hat owners were very upset and angry with me when I returned their hats. My punishment this time, coming from my parents, was to kneel upright in a corner with my hands up for an hour and the very next day I had to write 1,000 lines, that is, 1,000 times on a piece of paper, “I will not take or ruin what does not belong to me.”

The Christmas of 1965, my cousin Charlie returned home from boarding school in Ireland and excitedly told me about a new group out in England called the Beatles. The news had not reached D’Salaam as yet and we were not familiar with this group. He said they had a new record out called “Yesterday”. I asked him how it went. He took me behind a stairwell and holding a tennis racquet he started strumming away on the strings of the racquet and singing “Yesterday, love was such an easy game to play. Now I need a place to hide away. Oh, I believe in yesterday

One of my most memorable times was Christmas – Dec. 25th. Obviously for us it was a green Christmas, living only 8 degrees south of the equator. It was the hottest time of the year. We did have a real Christmas tree. All our decorations were home made, and one I recall was our imagination of snow – cotton balls. The men used to take all the children down to the beach, while the adult ladies stayed back and prepared the feast. We use to go in three to four carloads and spend at least three hours playing and swimming in the Indian Ocean. On this day we normally ate around 2 p.m. and after our meal we used to gather in the living room and sing Christmas carols and while we were doing this Father Christmas, the man in the red suit, used to show up. Father Christmas always arrived in a car and sometimes sat in the trunk of the car. He always had one present for each child.

My immediate family moved out of the boarding house sometime in 1965 and moved to Upanga a suburb of Dar-es-Salaam. We lived on a compound. There were 4 homes on this compound: 1 very large and 3 smaller ones. We lived in one of the smaller homes. My



African Cousins

Backward Glances

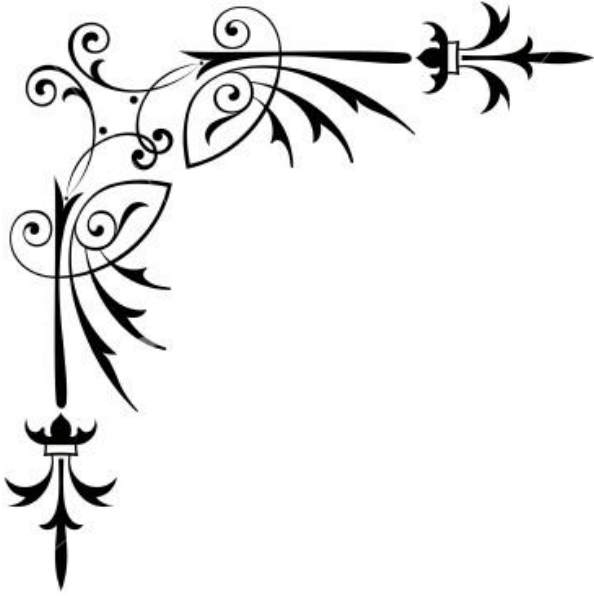
Uncle Louis, Aunt Stasia, and cousins Doris and Charles moved to a flat in the city of Dar, whereas my uncle Albert, Aunty Tosia, and cousins Jeannette, Frank and Michael moved up country about a three hour drive to a sisal plantation called Mombo.

We all immigrated to Canada between 1968 and 1972. My sister and I were the first and within four years the rest of my relatives, including my parents, followed. Today we live within a radius of about 50 km. from each other and get together three to four times a year and continue to share and reminisce of our great life in the boarding house.



Lorrette Shermet (née Haydar) b. 1951

Lorrette was born in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, East Africa of Polish and Lebanese heritage. Lorrette immigrated to Toronto, Ontario with her sister, Emily in November, 1968. Lorrette and her husband of 40 years, Pete, are now retired and have lived in Milton for 30 years. They have two daughters, Nadia and Diana, and one grandson, Eli. For most of Lorrette's working life, she was an administrative assistant at Sheridan College (11 years) and Atomic Energy of Canada (14 years). Now retired, she enjoys reading, writing, volunteering, and exercising.



My Dadi Amman

By Rubina Ali

She sat me down and said this, “You are leaving for a new country. There would be no identity, no goodwill, no family history or background bolstering your personality. Your conduct should portray your image in such a way that people should ask you where are you from? And then when you would tell them they would respect not only you but also the country that you came from.” This was my grandmother at the time when I was leaving to come to Canada. She said this to a grown woman knowing that everyone needs advice at different stages of their lives.

She knew me well not only because grandparents have a special kind of a bond with the progeny of their progeny but also because I had spent some of my formative years with her and my grandfather. My father was a chemical engineer and worked for cement factories that were usually located in rural areas where the raw materials for cement were found. In the area, there were schools established by the government but they did not provide the standard of education that my parents thought was fit for their firstborn, so they decided to send me to my grandparents who lived almost six hours away in a city called Hasan Abdal.

My new school, Presentation Convent Hasan Abdal, was a missionary school. A very kind and generous soul was who was called Mother Superior, and that is why perhaps I do not remember her name, was the head mistress and the teachers were mostly nuns. Though it should have been tough for a nine year old to leave the comforts of her parents’ house and move to a new place and new school, I do not remember any such emotions. I



My Mother and I

liked the school but what I liked more was how my life had suddenly changed. It was transformed from the ordinariness of being a firstborn child, who had to be somewhat responsible for the younger kids and was disciplined occasionally for various normal routine reasons, to the status of royalty.

Whereas at my parents' home I was being trained to become a responsible and accountable adult, in my new abode I had suddenly become a celebrity. My grandparents' house was a very interesting place as twenty-eight kids had lived in their household, albeit at different times in their lives. My grandfather was a strict disciplinarian, a formidable man, education had always been very important to him. Therefore, relatives and even friends who thought their kids needed a more conducive atmosphere for education sent their kids to my grandparents' house. He was fully supported in his endeavours by my grandmother; in fact she took it upon herself to cover the religious aspect of their education and also helped them in Urdu language. Other subjects were obviously his responsibility as his English and Math were phenomenal. I remembered he was one of those people who could recite paragraphs and paragraphs of prose by authors such as Bertrand Russell from his memory and multiply three digit numbers by three digits numbers in his mind in seconds.

Some of these kids were comparatively underprivileged some not so much but none was as privileged as their firstborn grandkid. They tried to be just and balanced in their approach towards all the kids but obviously their glee in having fulltime care of their granddaughter was not something they could hide from me.

Fortunately for me and for the ones that were not there, I was the only one living with them at that time and what a time it was! Some of the pleasures I experienced at their home were: my uniform and night suits were warmed in front of the electrical heaters that served as fire places in winters, before I wore them so that they wouldn't feel cold to my body; my bed, if they decided was not warm enough, was heated either by hot water bottles or by the body heat of my Grandma; special food, mostly of my choice, was cooked in the house; when we visited somebody's house I was the central figure in the conversation. It was a princess's life. Everything happened more or less as I wanted it to happen. Whatever I wanted to eat or play with was made available by hook or by crook.

When my Dadi Amman (as I called my grandmother) decided that I should be introduced to cooking, very cleverly, not only special pots and pans but special small sized stove were procured and I had my first cooking lessons with her. Though she always had hired help to assist her she cooked some of her specialities herself. The roties that she made were exceptional. I don't think I have ever eaten "Attay Ka Halwa" or "Shaljam ka Achar" of her standard and taste.

The cherry on the cake was the lunch that was delivered hot to the school either by my grandfather's driver (chauffeur) or if my grandfather was out of town then by hired help on a bicycle.

These scenarios which had been witnessed by my parents on their monthly trips to my grandparents' house were quite alarming to them. I wonder why? It was perfect arrangement! But they had their opportunity in putting this idyllic state of my being to an end when my grandfather retired from his job. They came up with the idea that now that he is retiring he should be free to travel to wherever he wants to and my stay and school should not be an impediment to their now changed lifestyle.

Thus occurred the fall from royalty to ordinariness which I endured with great forbearance and humility since in the Ismail Wall Cement Factory colony (the residential area), that my parents were living in, there were other interests that captured my attention.

When there was no TV there was the great outdoors. I remember myself and my sister Nageen going for our tree climbing expeditions, right in our backyard in the afternoons and we enjoyed that immensely.

My grandparents would visit us quite often and different dimensions of my Grandma's personality would continue to amaze me as I was absorbing more from the world around me. She was what I would call an actively religious person. She had performed Haj (pilgrimage) meaning she went to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that they are absolved of all their sins that they had indulged in after performing Haj. After it they should tread the path of righteousness hence there was definitely an increase in the religious content in her reading repertoire. But there was always a desire in her to know more about different people, places and religions. According to her, religion was for the betterment of human beings as it did not teach hatred towards anybody. She had lived in Hasan Abdal, which was a sacred place for Sikhs, and April was synonymous with Sikh pilgrims visiting Hasan Abdal. She was quite respectful of their religion and their Guru, Nanak Sahib. We would visit the Punja Sahib, a sacred place for the Sikhs with due respect for the sanctity of the location. I remember seeing a spring sprout out of the land inside the huge building since there were many waterways and canals inside the pavilion.

She made it a point to go to all the religious occasions of her Shia friends since we were Sunni Muslims. She taught me a religion which was tolerant, loving and humble. In her personality, the love of religion was intertwined with the quest for knowledge.

When India and Pakistan were carved out of British India causing colossal bloodshed on both sides of the border, she was living in the Hindu dominated area managing a family of considerably younger kids. My father, the eldest of her kids, was around 12 at that time when the Hindus that were pushed out of the Muslim dominated areas came to live in their town. My grandma's family became very friendly with one of the families as they were staying in the same apartment building. She was very sympathetic towards their plight since they had to leave their ancestral homes, jobs and businesses to save their families and their lives. When the Hindu rioters came for my grandma's family, the same family hid them inside their home for the night. It was because of that Sharnarhi (immigrant) family that my ancestors were able to catch the train the next day to the Muslim dominated areas. She had always narrated this incident as proof of inherent human goodness.

The last time when I visited Karachi where she lived she had unfortunately lost the use of her limbs and had to rely on others for



My Grandmother and I

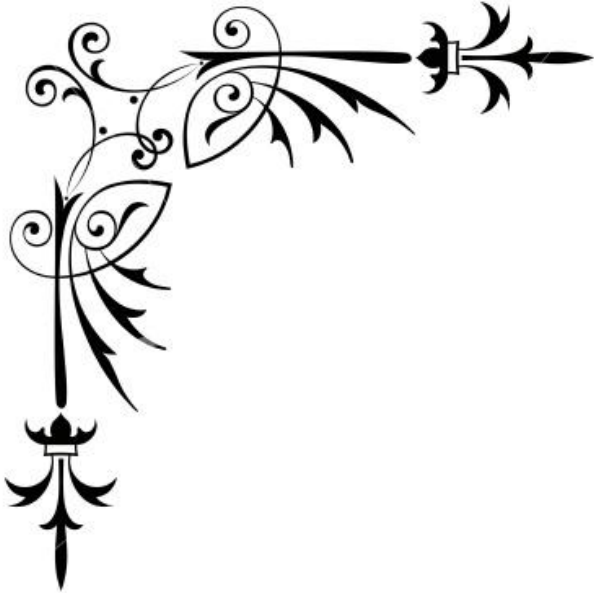
her ordinary needs. She had been very active and agile all her life and this was very hard for her. She had also become hard of hearing but her power of comprehension and sense of humour were still intact. I remember we discussed a lot of things and she had her hearing aid-armed ear trained towards me and we were having a nice time. She was telling me, “Now all my friends have moved to the greener pastures, which are at the other side of the pearly gates, so you should know that your status has been elevated, you are now my friend.” Just when I had finished thanking her for this honour she suddenly demanded, “Why don’t you ask your Government to give me visa even if they give it only for one week. I just want to see how you people live.” Having been denied a visa, perhaps because of her senior years, this was quite a sore point with her. I replied back, “Why don’t you ask the angel that is taking you towards your friends to take a detour and fly you across Canada when the time comes?” She laughed so hard at this suggestion that my aunt and mother gave me quite a tough time afterwards, claiming all that laughter could have disturbed her internal organs, as she was at such a precarious stage in her life. Interestingly all her blood tests’ results would always come out normal. She passed away at the age of ninety-six. When she passed away and my father informed me of the news, I felt as if she had really seen her brood in Canada since one of my uncles also lives here with his family, and is looking down at me and saying, “Hmm... so this is your house and this is how you people live.”

She was a woman born in another time, in another century but she understood change and accepted it with an open mind. New technologies were always very exciting for her. Once she stumped me completely in response to my assertion, “I have seen this on the computer.” She asked, “Did you receive an email or did you read this on a website?”

I believe all of us are a sum of different parts. The combination of these makes us what we are. She is not amongst us anymore but parts of her live in me, my siblings and my kids and they will continue to survive in the generations to come.



I was born in Lahore Pakistan but finished my education in Karachi. I moved with my husband, two daughters and one son to Canada in 1996. In 2003, July we moved to Milton which we proudly call our home. My education was in literature and law, professional experience mostly in journalism and advertising but in Canada I ended up working for a firm that provides personal income tax services. Being a people person, I enjoy the experience thoroughly. Writing was obviously my first love so I have stolen some moments from the never ending “to do list” that life is, to indulge in this luxury.



Wonder Days

By Dorothy Menear

They descended like the clouds of an unexpected thunderstorm. Those teen years were amazing, leading to an adulthood, both full and satisfying. I managed to become a teen just before Newfoundland joined Canada as our tenth province in 1949 and in the meanwhile I was thrilling to the crooning of Frankie Laine and Vaughn Monroe as their music flowed from my radio.



Summer Days with Dad



Mom and I after Our Vacation

Busy days; school, a part time job at the library, friends and social life kept me operating at break neck speed; not much time to be introspective, and my world spun round like a Tasmanian Devil gone amok. Sports were my love and I put heart and soul into playing basketball, volleyball, baseball, running and anything else which was a physical challenge. It was unfortunate, but I cared much less about academics and did well only in those subjects which were easily handled and allowed me to slide through with little effort

Backward Glances

Most of my classmates in high school were the ones I'd had in elementary school. However, two new groups were added; students from the Roman Catholic system and those from the country schools surrounding Paris, Ontario. This opened up a whole new world and greatly enlarged my circle of friends.

A high priority of the year's events was the greatly anticipated prom, and now, actually having a boyfriend to escort me, I was eager for the night, having spent considerable shopping time seeking the perfect dress, and finding just the right one, I lovingly bore my beautiful dress home. "Look what I found; have you ever seen anything like it?" I crooned to my parents who were glad to know that soon they would no longer have to listen to my prattling about the big dance. Eventually, the momentous day arrived and that evening, excitedly preparing, I carefully donned my powder blue gown, admiring myself in the mirror which seemed, in fact, to reflect my very mood. Everything went exactly as expected; my date picked me up and soon we found ourselves whirling around the dance floor until, suddenly, I abruptly came to a dead halt, nearly causing my partner physical harm. Slowly I turned and there, across the room, I confirmed that which I'd seen out of the corner of my eye; my dress, only it had turned pink and had also doubled! "Oh, no, it can't be," I cried but it was. Barely believing my eyes, I looked across the room again. The dress had been chosen by someone else, and furthermore, it had been chosen by twins.

After the shock passed, we decided it was our good taste which had led to our purchasing the same dress, had a good laugh and one of the boyfriends remarked, "Wear your dress anytime, just make sure we are not at the same event," causing another outburst of laughter

Sport's day was eagerly awaited each year, despite the rash of sore muscles produced by the upswing in exercises which were making us ready for the day. Even though we'd spent the year playing all the indoor games, none of them prepared us for the intensity of training for racing, running jumps, high jumps and all outside sports. Teams were formed and the competitive spirit kicked in. The whole day was fun as we strove to be the very best in whatever field we'd chosen. My favourite was the running broad jump even though I never achieved the greatness in it that I had hoped would be mine. Those who were not really into running and jumping managed to participate in one way or another and it goes without saying that it was one of the highlights of the school year.

If I had attacked my studies with half the amount of enthusiasm I had for sports, I might have been a good student. However, other than English and Literature, my attention could not be corralled. Many years later I paid the price, spending five years attending college in the evening to gain a diploma. To be perfectly honest, I loved "going to school" so didn't feel "I paid the price" but rather had the time of my life, though it required the juggling of family life and included a full time job.

When I was fourteen, just about through grade eight, my brother arrived home with a message for me. "Mrs. Muir wants to talk to you," he told me. There was no more information coming from him. With a beating heart, I whipped onto my bike, headed for the library, wondering what I'd done to receive a summons from the librarian. Rushing into the building, I noticed a smile on Mrs. Muir's face so immediately knew I wasn't in trouble.

In fact, I was thrilled to hear her say, "would you like to work here?" It took me only an instant to respond in the affirmative, hardly believing my good luck in being asked to fill, in my mind, this exalted student position. The library was one of my favourite places to be as I was a voracious reader. So after school and on Saturdays, I worked there, enjoying every

minute. One of my main duties was repairing books as their spines cracked and backs began to peel off. At that time book covers were black, green or red (as I remember) and generally had flaking gold lettering on the covers; the paper covers, in which the new books arrived, didn't last long and were soon in unrepairable tatters. Eventually I did a credible job, but nothing compared to today's fine binding.

"Beat you to the top of the hill!" screamed one of the Girl Guides as we all raced through the bush to the clearing where we'd be having lunch. The cool rippling stream flowed quickly down over the rocks, inviting us to have a refreshing cold drink of its water and use it as a refrigerator to chill our pop. Hiking was one of our favourite activities as Guides and, living in little Paris, Ontario, we were close to the wide open spaces. Thanks to the local farmers, whose gates were always open, we could explore as far as we could walk. My Dad was a scouter so it was natural that I should become a Brownie, fly up to Guides, be a patrol leader, become a Lieutenant and receive a promotion as Acting Captain. I was one badge short of earning my "Little House" and had I worked a little harder, it could have been mine.



Tree Planting with the Girl Guides

Leaving school, I joined the Penman Company (knitted underwear and outerwear) as assistant to one of the managers. My co workers were a terrific bunch of people so it was with some regret that I accepted a promotion as pay clerk, within the company but at another location. This office also had a great staff and I quite enjoyed my work. Those were the days of manual typewriters; in fact, every machine, no matter what its function, was manual.

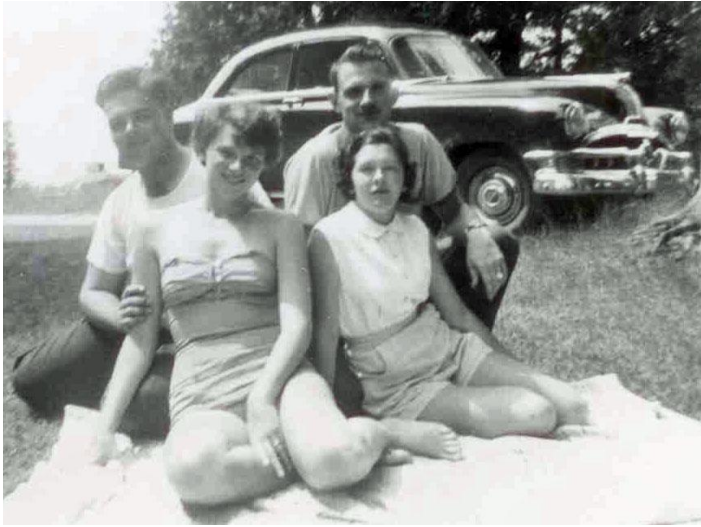
Mine, on which the payroll details were printed, appeared as an ancient instrument of torture with a great gelatinous pad in its arms. Each employee's card on which his or her earnings for the week appeared had to be laid, in order, on the contraption. After much ado (I regularly fought with the beast) large sheets of paper were produced, bearing the information required by the pay master and my job was done for another two weeks.

Approaching the building, we could hear the noise of people having a great time and were anxious to join them. Entering amidst the din and donning the proper shoes, our team gathered at the lanes and as the game began, cheers and catcalls raised the volume to fever pitch, "Come on, you can do it", "Let's go" or "Oh no " as a ball headed for the gutter. Balls went whizzing down the lanes and pins went flying as the ladies look their turns at bowling five pins. Depending on the hit either screams of encouragement or howls of despair would be elicited. My team mates were all twice my age. I've no ideas how I came to be with this group of "old" women, but have to confess they were out to have fun and I therefore always enjoyed the games, win or lose along with all the friendly joshing.

Backward Glances

Each Christmas the P.E.R.A (Penman's Employees Recreational Association) sponsored a Santa Claus parade and one year I decided to join, as a clown. The good people of Paris turned out in great numbers to watch, as always, and I had the time of my life. What freedom: to be in disguise, to be unrecognizable, running from child to child, handing candy out and pulling all kinds of foolish antics, calling "Merry Christmas" at the top of my lungs was absolutely fabulous. By the time the parade ended at the arena, with hot chocolate and hotdogs for the kids, coffee for the adults, I was very happy to head home, wrap myself in a blanket, try to get some feeling back into my frozen toes and lay back contemplating a wonderful day.

While still in high school I belonged to the Glee Club and was a member of the church choir. How I loved to sing but never learned to read the notes so I always sat with someone who did read music and had a strong voice. We put on a concert each year and went to Toronto by bus to compete in the Kiwanis Festival. Thanks to our excellent music teacher, we usually did well and the bus ride home was pretty noisy with everyone excitedly calling



My Boyfriend Jack, Me, My Brother Jack and His Wife Jean

back and forth to one another about our successes

Vacation time took us either to Howdenvale or Red Bay on the Bruce Peninsula or to PortDover on Lake Erie. Almost every waking hour was spent in or on the water, we could never get enough. "Come on, race you to the lake," Jack would yell.

"Bet I can beat you," I'd holler back, but I never did. Still, we enjoyed day after day of bright sun, soft sand and sparkling water and never, ever tired of that same old challenge. After spending the day on the beach, we'd head to the cottage for dinner which Mom, who cared not at all for the water, would have prepared. Whether it was a wood stove on the Bruce or a two burner in Port Dover, the meals were always nourishing, ample and ready at the usual time because she felt we should eat properly. Occasionally, I would stop to think of this phenomena and one day finally asked her if she really enjoyed sitting under a tree, watching Dad, Jack and I having great time. "Oh yes", she said, "I love being at the beach." This was an enigma to me; how could anyone sit by that inviting water without being compelled to have a refreshing dip; I just couldn't understand that. It was as though she came only to cook for us and to look after us.

Through all those teen years and into my early twenties, I dreamed of moving to Toronto. Such a different life it would be and as the urge strengthened, I made plans to go. Opportunities to sing in groups doing light operettas was the main attraction in the city and a friend, having told me about these, was happy to introduce me. So I joined Simpson Avenue United Church choir which presented Gilbert and Sullivan and The Eaton Operetta Society

Backward Glances

where we performed such musicals as *Rose Marie* and *Brigadoon*. Again, I had such a great time; perhaps, became a little stage struck, but never progressed beyond the back line of the chorus. Also, I met Harvey, my future husband; surely that meant I had made the right move.



*Fun Preparing to Perform
Rose Marie*



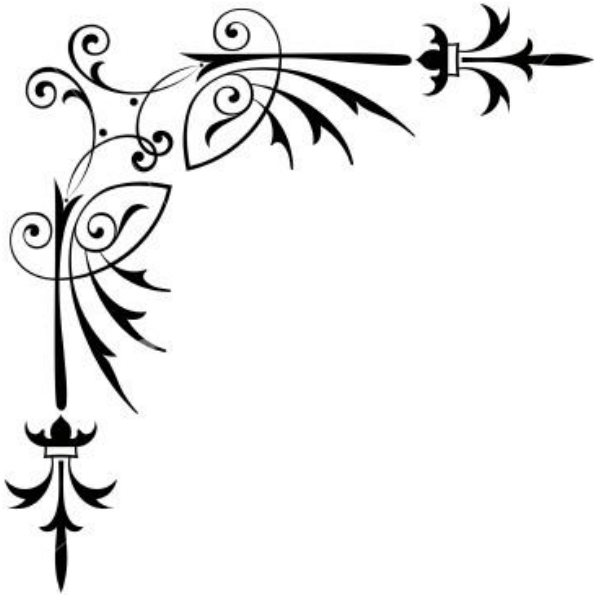
Ready for the Stage



*John, the Ferocious Looking
Indian, with his Hand on my
Neck*



*Dorothy Menear (née Powell) b.1936.
Dorothy and her husband Harvey, after numerous moves, are now enjoying their senior years in Milton. They met in 1958, married in 1960, and soon moved to a home north of Mount Albert, ON, where they raised a daughter, Ann and a son, Martin. While there, she worked in both school and public libraries, eventually entering the evening programme at Seneca College; graduating in 1982 with a diploma in Library Techniques. Following this, she worked in the educational department of a book wholesaler; then joined a publishing house, never returning to library to work. 2001 brought retirement which she enjoys to the full.*



Where is Home?

By Nargis Naqvi

2013 I feel the plane descend and the lights blink the seatbelt sign. While the stewardess hands out instructions, I glance outside the window at the shimmering dark ocean with lights ablaze around it. Jeddah never sleeps. It is late at night and the city is lit up like a bride. Nothing unusual for this busy city named after Eve. Jeddah is an Arabic word for grandmother.

I can see the beach near my parent's home, as the plane circles over the Corniche and goes back over Madinah Road towards King Abdul Aziz airport. I see this view every time I



Jeddah - Corniche

come and I never get tired of seeing my favorite city in the world. But this time is different. My heart is tinged with sadness. I am trying to find the excitement in my heart that I always feel when I come home. But this time, the heart isn't jumping with joy. My stomach isn't doing its usual summersaults. I am happy that I'll be seeing my parents, if only for a

fortnight, but this time feels different.

My brother is waiting for me as I walk out, wheeling the luggage trolley. The security guards usually check the passports, as passengers walk out of the doors, but seeing the parrot green Saudi passport in my hand they step back. I never dressed like a Saudi. I had my green pants on, my orange and white chiffon shirt, my plaid cloak and my hijab. Covered like a Muslim woman. Not like a Saudi one. They looked at each other as I ignored them and rushed

towards my favorite sibling for a hug. I overheard them mutter to each other, “Leave her. She’s Saudi.” “How do the foreigners get the Saudi passport?” What a story I could tell them.

As we left the wide highway outlined with palm trees, the weather was pleasant. 24 degrees Celsius, the Captain had announced. Coming from -4 degrees, it felt great. The familiar route home has always given me joy. My parent's home, I corrected myself with a sigh, looking out at the brightly lit highway and the crazy traffic that drove with a vengeance. The stores along the highway loomed in all shapes and sizes and the fast food restaurants were buzzing with humans, a mass of black and white. I could almost feel the flavor of succulent chicken pieces inside the wrapped pita with pickles, hummus, and fries. A traditional *shawarma*. Served with freshly squeezed *Mushakkal*, a fresh juice blend of tropical fruits. They just didn’t make it that way in Canada. Another sigh. What was wrong with me? I had never felt this way before, always embracing Jeddah each time with a promise to enjoy its diversity and its foods.

It has been so long. Over twenty-one years I have been away from this country and still struggling to find my identity.

I remember the first time I finally left to go study in America, Minnesota. From the heat of the desert to the freezing winters of the mid-west, the change was harsh. I had begged Abbu to send me. Being young, everything seemed greener on the other side of the world. Abbu imposed one condition: find a male relative or immediate female relative there and that is the only place you can go to. My maternal uncle, with wife and child, had decided to do his MBA from Mankato. So Mankato it was. I had no other choice and that is where I landed.

1991. It was midnight when my plane landed in the twin-cities airport. There were no lights that I could see from the plane windows and upon disembarking, no people. Apparently ours was the last flight, which was pretty empty to start with. My uncle was late. As I finally got into his station wagon, half an hour later, and drove down highway 169 towards Mankato, I was shocked at the lack of highway lights. There were dark shadows of trees towering above us on the sides, no stores, no gas stations and just signs to watch out for deer that may cross. How was one to see deer on this dark highway?

The next morning as I left for orientation, my aunt drew me a map and told me how to catch the bus if it got too confusing and off I went to enjoy the crisp autumn morning with leaves that had started to turn orange. Coming from a dusty yellow country with great highways and lots of light but no nature -unless one counted the sand dunes as nature - it was a freshly invigorating sensation to walk in a cool breeze where the leaves rustled and made one shiver. I took a deep breath in but it came out like a sigh. I missed home.

Apparently people in Mankato were not used to seeing foreigners with *hijab* in their midst, and I was taken aback by their stares. The Gulf War had just been over a few months. One would think news travelled but it hadn’t here. Never having been the type that gets offended easily I just smiled at them and some smiled back.



Mustafa and I with Our Parents

I found the International Students' Coordinator who immediately exclaimed, "I know who you are!" She got up from her chair and extended her hand. "You are Nargis. I have been waiting for you to arrive my dear. Along with so many other Muslim boys." Did she just wink at me? I blushed, not really knowing why boys would be waiting for me and how would they know me. "The first time our volunteers saw your name posted in the new students list, they were jumping with joy. You're going to have to watch your back." Putting her hand on my back, she led me outside the office. Some other students who had been in the office got up and followed us. "Orientation is starting so we must hurry along. We'll chat later." She looked back at us all and led the way into the large hall slowly filling with students of all colors and genders.

"Where are you from?" The girl walking in with me asked. She looked Spanish and had a pleasant face. Her large brown eyes under curly brown hair were friendly. This was the first time I felt I didn't know for sure how to answer this question.

"Ummm, I guess from Pakistan." I replied, not really sure if that was the correct answer. It just didn't feel right.

After that day many people asked me that question and I was never really sure how to answer it. The Pakistani boys, yes there were over a hundred of them, laid their claim to me as their female representative but then the Saudi students, only a handful, did the same. I dressed like a Pakistani and spoke the language. But I had never lived in Pakistan so a lot of the culture, except for clothes and food, was alien to me. My passport was Saudi. It was the only country I loved and knew, the only place I called home, but I practiced none of its culture. I was a lucky expat who was of the lucky few that got the nationality.

"But where were you born?" Lee, a Chinese girl, asked me one day as we headed out to the movies and started to talk about home and missing our families.

"What difference does that make?" I frowned. Hadn't she heard of people being born in planes? "I was born in Ireland." Let her make of that what she wants.

"So you're Irish too?" Lee and Hazel, my Spanish friend from the first day, both said simultaneously, giving me a strange look.

"No. I was just born there when my Dad was working there. I was a few months old when we moved to Riyadh." I explained. This was getting tedious. I needed to find a country that would just roll off my tongue naturally as where I was from. My grandparents moved from India to Pakistan in 1948, a year after the partition but never do I hear them or their children say they are from India. So how can I be from Pakistan? Yet that is where my mother had always told us we were from.

Every year, my heart craved to go home. I missed the spacious homes, the carefree lifestyle of afternoon siesta, the late nights, women given priority in queues over men, and the time of various activities determined by the times of the five daily prayers. Appointments were made by saying, "Let's meet right after *Maghrib*." I had been given so much freedom to roam around the city on my own even as a teenager with my friends. There was no crime so my father felt it was safe.

I would close my eyes at night and think of all the food I could eat without checking if it was *halaal* or not.

"Abbu, the boys here eat the beef and chicken from Hardees. Can't I eat it?" I would at times whine on the phone with tears in my eyes.

"Nargis, our religion has been sent to make life easy, not difficult. The Quran says we can eat the meat that has been slaughtered by the Jews and Christians. Don't make your own

life difficult. Just eat it.” I could always count on my father's interpretations of the Quran. He studied it like a professor would and always used his intellect, backed by the scholars he liked, to come up with reasoning.

When I would talk to the Pakistani boys, who would eat that meat, their reason to eat was not the same as my father's. “We eat it coz we can't live without meat. In reality, you don't know if it's being really slaughtered by a Christian or a Jew. It could be an atheist in the factory. Plus they don't use the same methods they did 1400 years ago. They don't drain the blood out so it's not really kosher or *halaal*. Just eat it.” Most would shrug it off casually. I had had enough of fish and I started eating the chicken. Beef still didn't sound so great. But the combined guilt of all the different opinions made me miss the variety of food in Saudi Arabia, hosting a multitude of ethnicities and variety in everything.

It was Ramadan and we were busy studying for our exams. Running from class to class, finding an empty classroom to pray in, not drinking water or having food all day, waiting for sunset, all of this was fine. But it didn't feel like a holy month. I sat down with my



Kaaba and Women



Kaaba in Courtyard

aunt and uncle to break fast and as they kept glancing at the clock for the correct sunset time that day, making sure it was correct by the minute, I craved to hear the sound of the prayer call, as it rang out into the sky from nearby mosques, announcing the time to start eating and to rush to prayer right after. The schools and work started later in Ramadan and ended earlier, accommodating those fasting to go home to rest and prepare their meals. The evenings were full of locals coming out to shop for *Eid*, the feast celebrating the end of Ramadan. Families would sit by the beach and have meals all night, often praying on the sidewalks or a patch of grass. Most people waited to do *suhoor* and pray *Fajr* before going to bed. The policemen at traffic lights would be standing around giving candy and dates to passersby. Everyone felt generous and kind and felt like a community bound together by the same love for their God and Prophet.

And I missed my trips to Makkah and Madinah. Makkah was only a forty-five minute drive from our home in Jeddah. Once when I was visiting my parents during winter break, my friend Sara invited me to meet up for tea by the Red Sea. We sat on the terrace of a restaurant at the Corniche, munching on fries and sipping mint tea. The cool breeze brought with it salty sea vapors and the smell of *shisha* wafted from the restaurant below.

“Hey, do you want to do Umrah?” Sara suddenly asked. I had gone for my pilgrimage a week ago with my parents, but wanting to go again I perked up at her suggestion.

“Sure. When?”

“Now.” Sara had a gleam in her eye indicating a challenge.

“It’s past nine. Who would take us so late? Is your driver at home?” I asked her.

“Listen, let’s just cab it. The two of us.”

Straightening up in my chair I looked at her for a while before saying, “Sure, why not?” I smiled. My adventurous self didn’t need much persuasion to do things unheard of in Saudi. People always said girls needed to travel with a man in the country. I had taken cabs in the city limits before but going to another city at night was something I had never done. Let’s try it, I thought.

We hurried to Sara’s home in the first limousine (as cabs are called) that gave us a fair price. After completing our ablutions, wearing our black *abayas* and performing our prayers to indicate intention of *Umrah* pilgrimage, I called up my parents and informed them that I would not be back that night, and off we went. Taking a cab from the downtown hub of buses and cabs that took pilgrims to Makkah, we felt courageous. The man eyed us strangely but merely asked us if we had IDs. My heart was singing. I always knew that in Saudi Arabia, you could do all of this crazy stuff and the capital punishment imposed on criminals kept the criminals at bay. Hardly anyone ever attempted anything. Stories had been heard but they were so minimal that one wondered at the true events of what had really happened.



Kaaba and Lanterns

We got to the mosque, lit up at every minaret, its white marble gleaming. The *Kaaba*, a black cube structure built by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael, loomed ahead and I caught my breath as I always did upon the first glance. I silently said a prayer, as one is supposed to, and walked in, not able to take my eyes off it, as it hid behind pillars and peeked out until we reached the open courtyard that held it. Holding my tears in check, I saw Sara’s streaming down her face. Such was the magnificent effect this place had on people.

The two of us did our forty-five minute pilgrimage, and stayed there till the *Fajr* prayer at 5 a.m., talking to God and asking Him for the things we wanted from life.

Coming back to reality I realize that it doesn't matter what a person's passport says. It doesn't matter where your ethnic background takes you or what your skin color tells the world. You are really from where your heart is.

When we love someone, we are not blind to his or her flaws, and I am not blind to the things that need to change in Saudi Arabia. But then what country doesn't need to change? What country boasts perfect everything? It is the values that we hold dear that make us love one thing more than another. I guess even though I was a rebel as a teenager that should have hated living in a place with restrictions, I was also one that did whatever I wanted in that same place. When I was fifteen I even dressed up in the garb of an Arab man; my father sat in the passenger seat as I drove around town in his car, understanding my need to be free. When the security guards saluted me, mistaking me for a man, my heart soared with happiness. Once was enough. I knew the risks my father ran and I loved him for his courage. I loved being able to swim, bowl, and have girls' parties where in a segregated setting I could do as I wished keeping within the religious requirements of modesty. I remember the first year in Mankato when I went to the gym with my hijab on, fully clothed. As I walked on the treadmill the lady next to me said, "This is America. You don't have to wear these clothes now. Take them off!"



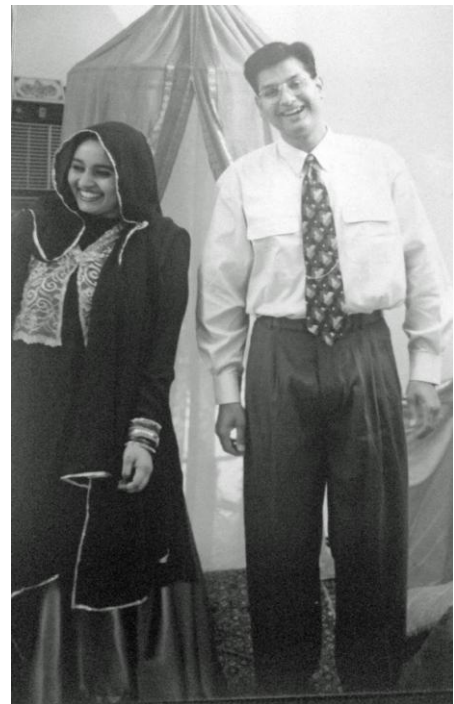
My Saudi "man" look

I was startled, thinking to myself how little people realize that no one is being forced to do this. I want to follow God's rules and be accommodated for them like I was in Saudi Arabia. I had started to count the days then, as to when I would graduate and go back.

But over the years, my dream of moving back to Saudi Arabia diminished. I met my husband Kamran at University and got married. Of course, even then I told him where I wanted to live but fate had other plans. His fate did not involve the country I wanted, hence affecting mine as well.

During our eighteen years of marriage we have lived in Mankato, Minneapolis, Canada, Dubai and Islamabad. Fate threw me a line when for a brief eight months in 2010, we also moved to Jeddah, giving me hope that I am finally home. My children fell in love with Jeddah in those eight months but fate had another surprise up its sleeve. We moved back to Canada in 2011. And I stopped hoping.

I won't say I lost hope. Because losing hope is a sin in Islam. But I stopped thinking and craving and wanting. I decided to live day by day and let fate unravel the days to come. God has a plan and He alone



Kamran and I

Backward Glances

knows its reasons and its benefits. But my heart stopped thinking of home. I realized I had no idea what home was anymore. It was just wherever fate led a person.

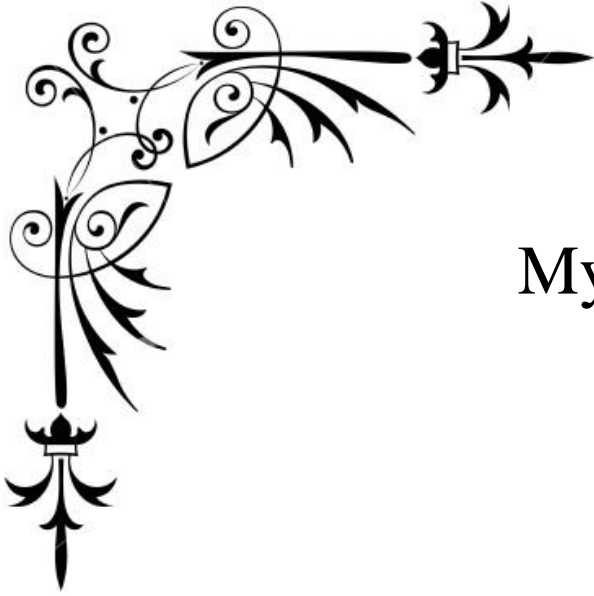
So as I come back to visit my parents for two weeks, wanting to spend some time with them in their old age when most of their children are in different countries, I can't find the happy lurch my heart used to give when the plane landed, as the Saudi officers checked my passport, as the luggage came and as we drove to my parents home. I know I will be going back in two weeks' time. This is no longer home.

Who am I? I am just a citizen of the world. I belong to God and to Him I shall return.



Nargis Naqvi is a mother of three children residing in Milton, Canada. She was born in Ireland, raised in Saudi Arabia and has parents from Pakistani background. She got her education in Minnesota in Business Administration after which she also obtained a minor in Interior Design, a diploma in Photography and a TEFL teacher training certificate. She has also briefly lived in Dubai and Islamabad in the past few years.

Nargis co-founded a non-profit organization, Turn2Learn (www.turn2learn.ca) to teach parents how to cope with raising ethical and God-conscious children, teaching children character building in a creative way through the arts and doing community events so neighbours can get to know one another. Her hobbies are painting and reading and she loves helping people solve problems.



My Future Dream Gone

By Marloes Timmers

A “veterinarian?” the doctor asked, “Not for you girl. You better dream of something else to be.”

There I was in the doctor’s office, fourteen years old and waiting for a brief note that I had to give my parents that would show the results of the examination for my allergies. Dr. Simons was his name, known in The Hague and surroundings as one of the best ear nose and throat specialists. A huge man with hands like hams and he was certainly not gifted with a soft approach. Both my arms were speckled with bumps, some very small some bigger, the results of the materials that were injected in my skin. “How old is the house you’re living in?” was his next question. How would I know? “My father lives there all his life and he is forty-six years old now, that’s all I know.” I said. “So, that is from before the war. An old house it is full with dust-mites. One of the reasons for your sickness.” Of course I didn’t know what to answer him so I only nodded. “Any animals around?” he barked. “Animals, pets, yes we have some,” I said, glad to be able to give him an answer. In the meantime a few of the bumps on my arms were getting bigger. He looked again at them, circled them with a marker and told me that especially house dust mites, the cats, horses, birds and long-haired dogs were the ones I was most allergic to. Tears welled up in my eyes for I slowly understood what he said.

The first memory of animals was the chickens we had in the backyard. It was a yard with a brick wall on the left side and on the right side, a kind of concrete tile and in the back was the workshop of my father. My father is a shoemaker but in those days he did mostly shoe repairs. We lived in a three story house in the main street of a small village. My parents had a shoe shop and a pedicure salon. It was not the aesthetic kind of salon but more for people with serious foot problems. It sounds big, a three story house but actually the house was split up in a strange way. Our living room was behind the shop and so was the kitchen, the salon and the toilet. One flight up was my parents’ bedroom and on another floor was the bedroom of my brothers and me. On that same floor was the bathroom and my grandmother’s living/ bedroom and kitchen.

Backward Glances

In that back yard my father built an aviary for he loved birds too and thought it would be nice for us, the children. I think I was about six or seven years old when, on a Sunday morning, after church, my parents got us all in the car and told us that we were going to get some budgies for the aviary. A brother of an aunt was a breeder and he had promised my Dad a few budgies or parakeets. We were excited for we loved those birds in the white Zodiac. And we didn't mind to go for a one and a half hour drive. After choosing five birds and having had some lemonade and cookies, we went on our way home. We were 45 minutes on our way when my Mom started screaming, "Stop, stop the car!! That bird, that bird! He's out!" My Dad stopped the car on the shoulder of the highway to see what was happening. My Mom tried to get out of the car while my brothers Jacques and Jos and me were shouting not to open the doors. "Stay in the car, or the birds will fly out too!" But my youngest brother Rene and my sister Yvonne were getting out with Mom and at least one of the birds of course. Dad and Jacques caught the birds and when everybody was calmed down we went on our way back home. Jacques and I are still wondering how it was possible that the birds escaped. After all they were put in those little carton boxes and these were standing on the hat shelf behind our heads. Well, we had to see now and then if they were still alive, didn't we?

My parents were working hard but retail was not booming yet and the salon was what was generating most income. But in spite of what people thought in general that retailers were financially in good position that's not how it was those days. With 5 children and the sixth coming, Mom and Dad had to work long days to make both ends meet. And some of the clients knew how hard it could be. Sometimes people brought us some toys or candy and even, because they knew we had a back yard with chickens and birds, some animals like guinea pigs and rabbits. That's how we got two little white bunnies, totally white with only the nose black. I loved to play with them, petting and grooming. Although we were allowed to have animals in the back yard my Mom didn't like them to be in the house. She was not really an animal lover and actually more or less scared of them.

I was nine years old in May 1970 and my Mom was expecting my youngest sister, Lucie. Mom had washed the sheets and blankets of the carriage, a pre-owned one for her own



Me and the Carriage

she had already sold four years after the birth of my sister Yvonne. The carriage was standing outside smelling fresh and clean and Yvonne and I laid down our babies in it and went out for a walk. It was a beautiful sunny day, I remember so well, and Yvonne and I turned around the corner of our street on our way to go around the block. There were two ladies coming our way and when they came closer I recognized one of them as a good client of my parents. I hissed to Yvonne to just keep walking and just smile and say hello very politely but keep going. "Hello Mrs. van Leeuwen, very nice day for a walk isn't it?" I said pushing the carriage. "Hello Marloes," Mrs. van Leeuwen answered. And, as firmly as I tried

to walk on, she held us at a standstill. "Haven't heard anything yet that the baby is born," she went on, surprised, "and now you're already walking the baby? What is it, a brother or a sister?" Oh no, before I could answer he, she peeked in the carriage and she gasped, "What is that?" "Just our babies. Goodbye ladies." I said, pushing the carriage and pulling my sister with me. Yes, in the buggy she had seen Yvonne's doll and the two little bunnies. We walked as fast as we could to be at home before those ladies were walking into the shoe shop for I was very sure that they were right away going to tell my Dad. Mom wasn't very pleased but punishment was surely not severe for I can't remember what it was. Those bunnies were not the only animals I took out on a walk. It was after Easter that the milkman came and gave my Dad a duckling. A retailer in another street had put a few ducklings in his window as an Easter display and gave them away afterwards. So the milkman didn't know what to do with it and gave it to my Dad. I fed this little feathered animal bread, milk, bird seed, grass all mixed together. I didn't know exactly what he had to eat but that was no problem. The duck was growing and growing and turned out to be a gosling. I called him Bertus. And I thought that he also had to learn to swim so I took the sink tub and filled it with water but no matter how I tried, I didn't get him in it. I made a little leather collar and a rope as a leash and took Bertus out for a walk. If I did not get a dog then it had to be a goose.

We also had a black rabbit, a larger breed. Droppie (Dutch word for liquorice) was his name. He was not really a pet, didn't want to be groomed or petted. So the attention towards him was less than for the other bunnies, birds and cavias. And so it happened one day when I came out of school and went over to the rabbit hutch he was not there. Running to my Dad, "Daddy, where is Droppie? He is not in the hutch."

"Yes, I saw that too this morning and when I was helping customers and looked out of the window I saw him going to the field across the street. He was hungry I guess." I called out to my brothers and sister that they had to come with me across the street and start looking for the bunny. We searched and searched until dark and were never able to find him. Two weeks later my Mom send me to bed earlier than other days, for no special reason but she thought I was a little more tired. I couldn't sleep and looked out of the window. I noticed that my father was in the back yard together with my uncle and I watched them being busy with a chicken. But what was that?? Uncle John was holding Droppie and I could only guess what was going to happen. I screamed, ran out of my room, almost tumbling down the stairs and running through the kitchen into the back yard. But I was too late and Dad turned me around quickly sending me back off to bed. Yes, of course, it was two days before Christmas, two days after my birthday. Christmas dinner was for me a very sad time. So Droppie did not run away but Dad had hid him somewhere in his shop behind a machine where we were never allowed to come.

Jacques, my eldest brother, was more interested in the birds we had. He helped Dad building a bigger aviary and could sit hours in front of the aviary and studying birds behaviour. It was not only budgies anymore but also some tropical birds. And I liked to sit in it and feed the birds out of my hands. I tamed one of the budgies, called him Rico and took him in a birdcage in my bedroom. He said his own name and some other little words I taught him. And I let him fly around when I was making my homework, sat on my pencil when I was writing and ate off my apple. Even though I liked the birds and rabbits my biggest wish was to have a dog of my own but that was something my parents wouldn't give me. I did get a stuffed toy, a dog and when finally after many years the filling was coming out and it was missing two legs I had to bid it farewell.

Backward Glances

So back home from the hospital I gave the letter to my parents and told them everything the doctor told me. Moving to a newer house was ridiculous but some things had to change in my bedroom. My pillow had to be hypo-allergenic, my blankets were replaced by a synthetic duvet and my Rico had to go. Luckily a family I knew in the same street we lived in was willing to adopt him. And no, I did not become a vet.



Marloes Timmers. I was born in The Netherlands in 1960. Together with Sjeff van den Berg, I immigrated to Canada in 2001. We have a greenhouse operation in Milton. I love animals and have three dogs and one cat. My allergies are under control after seeing a homeopathic doctor. I also love reading and like to try to capture my past, so far, in words.