

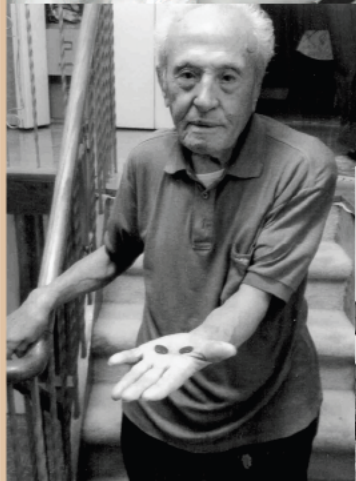
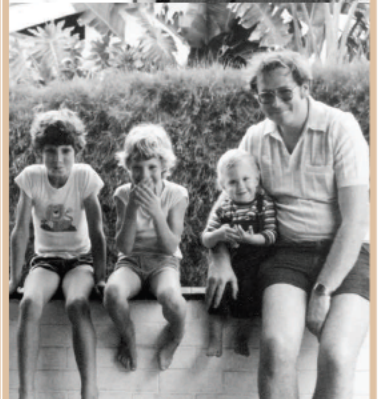


Echoes From the Past

Lifescapes Writing Group

2014

Milton Public Library





*Echoes From
the Past*

Lifescapes Writing Group 2014
Milton Public Library

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

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>The Night of My Coming Out</i> Eva Hegedus	7
<i>Memories of My Grandfather</i>	15
Enza Severino	
<i>A Difficult Journey</i>	19
Mary Cummings	
<i>Foryd Bridge</i>	24
Trevor Trower	
<i>Dirty Dick's: A Crew Layover</i>	29
Trevor Trower	
<i>Paranormal Experiences</i>	32
Ken Marvell	
<i>Long Way Home</i>	41
Judy Osman	
<i>Abba Jan</i>	48
Rubina Ali	
<i>Building Dreams</i>	51
Gillian Reynolds	
<i>My First House Revisited</i>	57
Gillian Reynolds	

Introduction

I hope you will enjoy the third edition of the Lifescapes anthology, *Echoes From The Past*, as everyone's story is worth telling.

Lifescapes introduces participants to storytelling and writing, and is a program designed to help participants write their memoirs. The program responds to Milton Public Library's encouragement of lifelong learning, authorship promotion, and empowering people to be creative. These activities not only enrich the writers, but also the community through the shared stories.

Eight men and women completed this year's program, and over the ten week period they shared stories, learned helpful memoir writing tips, worked on writing exercises, and had a lot of fun. Brantford author, Larry Brown, visited the class and talked about descriptive writing, opening lines, and dialogue. Both his expertise and his easygoing teaching style were sincerely appreciated by all.

My thanks to all the authors for their delightful company, hard work, dedication, and honesty in allowing all of us to enter into their experiences.

Joan Faehrmann
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The Night of My Coming Out

by Eva Hegedus

A young girl, relegated to menial work by a mean stepmother and ugly stepsisters, fantasizes about going to the grandest ball in the kingdom: POUFF, her fairy godmother appears, transforms her rags into a splendid ball gown and sends her off in a magical pumpkin/coach to that very same ball. On her impossibly tiny feet, the fairy godmother has put glass slippers. (A good example of pure fantasy: she has such tiny, dainty feet that she can wear slippers made of glass!) And since we're talking magic and fairytales, the handsome prince spots her immediately at the ball, dances every dance with her until the magic spell wears off and she runs away. Smitten, the Prince pursues Cinderella and her tiny feet all through the kingdom. Fairytales are nothing if not predictable: Cinderella and the Prince are reunited and live happily ever after.

Now turn the Cinderella story on its head and you're coming close to my experience as a debutante. My story, unlike Cinderella's, happened in the real world where fairy godmothers with magic wands are much harder to come by. And by the way, did you notice that even in fairytales, magic sometimes has its limits: the magic spell wears off at midnight and Cinderella has no choice but to return home at once! Also, I need to point out that "coming out" did not have the same connotation in 1964 as it has in 2014 or that it might have had when the Cinderella story was written.

I turned 17 in September of 1963. In early November of that year my real-life mother came into our kitchen as I was toasting bread for breakfast. My caffeine habit would not kick in for another 2 or 3 years and so I was stumbling around the kitchen in a half daze, not eager to converse with anyone. Cheerfully waving tickets in her hand, Anyu (Anyu is a Hungarian word meaning mummy or mom; it is pronounced "Ah – new") took a seat at the table and said, "Eva, sweetie, have a seat. I've got a surprise. I was talking to Uncle Stephen and he reminded me that the Annual Helicon Debutante Ball is coming up in January. Apparently, his adopted daughter Maria will be one of the debutantes. Then he asked me if you will also be a debutante this January."

"And you said I would? But..."



Frank (19), Mary (17), and our mother Susan Cserepy (40) at Mary's Helicon Debutante Ball held at the Royal York in 1959.

“...I don't want to hear any 'buts'! I know you're thinking there's not going to be enough time to get ready. However, Mary was a debutante at 17 so this is the best time for you to be one; she will help you shop for a white ball gown at one of the shops on Spadina. She can also do your makeup for you; you can get your hair straightened at the hairdresser so your kinks and curls get smoothed out (You have the same frizzy hair I had when I was your age). If your dad had lived, he would have been so proud to present his youngest daughter to Hungarian Society. Since he's not with us, I want to make this happen for you.”

My head was spinning even before Anyu had finished sharing her “surprise.” Cold chills ran up and down my body but not in an ecstatic, Cinderella kind of way.

In reply, all I could think to say was, “Wow, are you sure? This will cost a small fortune!” What I was really thinking was: “God help me! I hate the idea. This is ten miles out of my comfort zone. I'm terrible at small talk, especially in Hungarian, and I'm no flirt. Heck, I've never had a boyfriend or gone to even a school dance. The only part of the idea I like

is the dancing and I'd much rather do my dancing with my folk dance group.” But I expressed none of these doubts and fears to my mother. She was now reassuring me, “Don't worry about cost, I've been putting money aside for a couple of years.” Then I realized she hadn't said who my escort would be and I needed to confirm a new fear bubbling up from the pit of my stomach, so I swallowed hard before asking, “But who will my escort be?”

“I've asked Frank and he's happy to do that for you. You know he loves a chance to ham it up. Your brother's a born actor. You'll be the handsomest couple out on the dance floor.” This time, all I could manage was, “Oh.” How can she not know Frank and I are like fire and ice—completely different personalities: I being a shy, insecure introvert and Frank a show-off and extrovert?

He had bullied me mercilessly when I was young, twisting my arm when I didn't give him something he wanted. I still hadn't forgiven him for picking on me: after all, he was 8 years older and should have been more mature! Lately, he mostly took no notice of his kid sister

Echoes From the Past

whatsoever except, to be fair, he sometimes helped me with math or science problems if I asked him for help and he happened to be in a good mood. Once I got to Malvern High School, my teachers still thought of Frank when they knew my last name was Cserepy: he had been the lead in the school drama, *Alexander the Great*, which had won first at the citywide Sears Competition. He'd been on the swim team and excelled at debating as well. He had a steady girlfriend too. I got tired of hearing remarks from teachers like, "Hope you're a star student like your brother Frank!" Let's face it, I had all kinds of reasons to be jealous. I was a very good student but never the star or the lead in anything: those things came naturally to Frank, at least they did at this stage of his life.

Had my dad lived and been my escort to this ball, I would have been proud to enter on his arm; he was so totally comfortable, well known and well liked in Hungarian circles and I was pretty sure he would have made me feel comfortable and would have "had my back." I was his little girl and I basked in his unconditional love right up until his premature death when I was 8 years old. I tend to believe (but I have no way of knowing), that a lot of my insecurity and shyness came from losing my dad at such a vulnerable age. My mother had to go to work so that we could keep our house; she preferred working in her garden on the weekends to having or going to parties. She was somewhat of a hermit and had a very small circle of friends.

Although she knew this ball would be an uncomfortable fit for me, I began to suspect my mother had other motives for wanting me to go to the ball. She felt the boys in my Hungarian folk dance group were a little too rough around the edges, too unpolished for her daughter. There was no truth to this as far as I was concerned. Some were from working class families, others had gone to college or university; however, all of them were respectful and polite—at least they always were with me. Really, I liked everyone in the dance group and felt completely comfortable with them.

But my mother still had a bias in favour of boys from well-heeled families and boys with university degrees who were heading for professional careers as lawyers, doctors, etc. This could well have been what motivated her to spring the debutante thing on me.

What could I do? She had already bought the tickets and would be very disappointed if I said no. I braced myself, and thanked her for the tickets. There was, after all, a very slim chance I



Eva in a white taffeta, full length ball gown, ready to "come out" as a debutante. Jan. 30, 1964



Eva (17) and Frank (25) who is wearing a black tux, white bow tie, shirt and gloves. They are ready to be presented to the head table.

Echoes From the Past

would enjoy the ball and I vowed to keep an open mind about it; I would put my best (size 7 ½ D width) foot forward!

Fast forward to the evening of Jan. 30, 1964 and I am standing with my 6 ft. tall brother Frank in front of the 7 ft. gilded ivory doors of the Royal York Ballroom in downtown Toronto. Frank is handsome, blond, and nicely fills out his long formal black tux with his muscular frame. He radiates confidence and can hardly wait for the evening to begin. I'm still preoccupied by 2 tiny rivulets of perspiration making their way, ever so slowly, in a downward trajectory towards the edges of my dress that lie just below my armpits. I'm thinking, "Please, Lord, don't let the top of my dress get wet and stained...I'll be so embarrassed if that happens!" Several couples have already run the gauntlet inside the ballroom. We are in the middle of the pack and will get the signal in about 10 minutes.

Frank has just joined me after a rather tense photo session during which a Toronto Star



The thirteen debutantes presented on Jan. 30, 1964 in the ballroom of the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto. Eva is third from the left in the back row. A similar group photo to this (but one in which all are smiling) appeared in the Toronto Star in Feb., 1964.

reporter/photographer does everything but stand on his head to get a suitable shot of our group of 13 debutantes. "Ladies, this photograph is something you will treasure for a lifetime! It will be in the Star a week or two from now, with your names underneath and an article about the smashing success of this year's ball! You're the ones who have to make it successful! Some of you look like you are going to a funeral. Please, back row especially (I'm in the back row), stand tall, look into the camera, hold your lovely corsages of miniature pink and white roses at waist level, and for the love of Pete, give me

your best smile!"

The mention of "funeral" was unfortunate. The reporter should have been more sensitive. I'm sure I wasn't the only one for whom it triggered an instant replay of recent scenes from our TV sets: the first scene is the open presidential car rounding a corner in Dallas Texas just after noon on Nov. 22, 1963. Both John and Jackie Kennedy are smiling and waving to the crowds lining the street; next there are popping sounds followed by screams and sheer pandemonium. JFK slumps forward in his seat, felled by a crazed gunman's bullet. His car speeds off to the hospital. Barely an hour later doctors tell us that he has succumbed to his injuries. On Nov. 25th, we watch the funeral in Washington DC. Beautiful Jackie Kennedy is in black, her face is contorted with pain under her veil, and she is barely able to stand as her brave

Echoes From the Past

little son, John John, salutes his dad's coffin. He of course is too young to grasp (as Caroline would have) that his dad is gone forever.

Like millions of Canadians and Americans, I had been enthralled by the fairytale of John and Jackie Kennedy's time in the White House: he was intelligent, handsome and charismatic and Jackie was refined and radiant. Their warm smiles lit up our lives. Their happiness as a couple and as parents seemed genuine. And then, in a matter of seconds, the fairytale and romance was shattered by shots from the rifle of Lee Harvey Oswald. A certain sadness weighed upon our country for months, even years, after JFK's assassination. We were now aware how easily the illusion of safety and security could be destroyed.

In the light of those tragic events, the trivial concerns of this ball seem almost ridiculous. Rumors have already spread to us as we wait outside the ballroom: it is reported (whispered from one debutante to the next) that two ladies at the Head Table (how scandalous!) have shown up in identical dresses. Furthermore, the keynote speaker called to say he was too ill to attend and the Helicon committee had to stick someone else in his place at the last minute. If all of that wasn't enough, Lieutenant Governor Earl Rowe simply didn't show up and Mayor and Mrs. Philip Givens had to take his place. These little tidbits actually made their way into the Toronto Star article which appeared in early February next to the "Dear Ann Landers" column. While our group photo actually was quite flattering, the headline was rather catty. "Women guests wear same dress but enjoy Helicon Ball anyway" was the headline and the very first line of the article stated: "Thirteen proved to be an unlucky number last night!" It almost seemed that the Toronto Star reporter was getting rather bored with her job of reporting on formal dinners, balls and receptions. She seemed to rather relish telling readers about every little mishap that happened at our ball!

Most of our dresses, by the way, showed what a strong influence that Jackie Kennedy's wardrobe had on us during the early 60's. With only one exception, the girl sitting front and centre (who didn't care about Jackie Kennedy and was proud to wear a traditional Hungarian ball gown probably handed down within her family), our white gowns were simple, elegant, clean cut, fitted and flattering on our slim figures, reaching to the floor in a slight flair, and lacking lacey or puffy embellishments. Our necklines were modest



Eva and Frank Cserepy as they have their names announced to the head table including Mayor and Mrs. Philip Givens. According to protocol, Eva curtsies and Frank bows. After the presentations comes the opening waltz of the debutantes with their escorts.

and we all wore long white gloves. If the ball itself wasn't a good fit for me, at least the style of our dresses suited me.

There is an attendant just inside one of the doors which is slightly ajar; he now signals us that our turn has come. Frank says to me, "Come on baby sister. Let's show Fred and Ginger how the waltz is done!" We enter, accompanied by two young men on either side carrying standards of white flowers and we move as one across the ballroom floor which is glowing from the candelabra on the tables. We find our "marks" on the floor in front of the head table and we have our names announced: "Miss Eva Cserepy and her escort Frank Cserepy" (first in Hungarian and then in English). The men at the head table, who are standing, bow to us; Frank bows back as I curtsy. We then assume our position on the dance floor. Finally, when all 13 couples have been presented and the waltz music begins, we turn in smooth circles with our partners and maintain a heart-shaped pattern on the floor. We've actually had to rehearse every single one of these moves, including the dance steps, at rehearsals held in the weeks leading up to the ball.

Reluctant though I am to be a debutante, I have nevertheless prepared as well as any of the other 12 debutantes. I have enough pride to want to carry this off and to want to look good out on the floor. According to my mother and sister, when I ask them how Frank and I did, we were flawless although it is all kind of a blur to me and I don't recall the details. Once the waltz is over, we do a czardas: this is a much livelier and more energetic dance than the waltz. I much prefer it to the waltz. I'm hoping to dance it again with someone other than my brother as the music stops.

I don't know this yet, but once Frank escorts me to our family's table, I will sit out all the dances to come. It's like the ball ends for me after the fifteen minutes in the spotlight that I have just described. No Prince Charming, no family friend, no brother, no uncle comes to my rescue and I feel growing humiliation and frustration with each minute that passes. Each minute, in fact, seems like thirty minutes. I want to melt into the wood paneling or become one with the white tablecloth but I'm aware that my face is turning red with embarrassment and this is something I can't hide. I feel like every person in the room knows that I have no one to dance with and I'm thinking they are probably whispering this to others at their table. I try to look engaged and cheerful but do a miserable imitation of someone having a good time. The keynote speaker drones on and on and in any case I can't focus on anything he says. In my head I'm already screaming, "Please let me go home to my bedroom so I can bury myself in the next chapter of *Gone with the Wind*. I just want to pretend this horrible night never happened."

Frank has gone off to drink and party and I occasionally spot him on the other side of the room or on the dance floor with different partners. Our dinner comes and it's a disappointing collection of cold cuts with salads; my champagne loses its fizz after less than a minute but I "nurse" it (not tolerating alcohol very well) for another hour turning the stemmed glass every which way and alternating sips of flat champagne with sips of water. I fold and unfold my cloth napkin a thousand times and make several unnecessary trips to the washroom and check my makeup. On a couple of those trips, I really do have to reapply my makeup because I've had a wee crying jag on the way.

Finally, at about 9:30 I mention to my mother that I have some school assignments and could we please leave soon. She takes pity on me. "Eva, I can see you are disappointed that you didn't dance and I feel sad that the ball wasn't more fun for you. Frank and Mary know some people from the Helicon, so I guess it was a lot easier for them to mingle than for you. We'll leave as soon as I finish my coffee." I was never more relieved to get away than I was that night.

I don't think anyone even noticed us leave which is something that, in later years, would help me "get over" my sense of failure.

Once I'd taken a few giant steps back from the ball, I could see it hadn't really been the end of the world for me. The night of the ball, I got caught up in my own insecurities (such as the fact that at 17, I had never had a boyfriend). I took the disappointing evening as proof positive that I was a loser when it came to these formal mixers. I couldn't, until years had passed, see the forest for the trees. But eventually I would put the experience in its place. I would even look back at the photographs that were taken and admire how Frank and I looked. I forgave Frank for leaving me stranded. After all, he felt he had fulfilled his role and he had even gone to rehearsals with me.

My being at the ball or not being there, my dancing or not dancing was barely a blip on anyone's radar that night. They were focused on their own families, their own triumphs or failures, and not on Miss Eva Cserepy and her woes.



Eva's handsome brother Frank. Blonde, tanned, trim and smiling, he is about 20 here and is relaxing in the garden at 193 Neville. Sadly, he passed away in 2012 and this photo is how Eva likes to remember him



A photo of Eva taken by her sister Mary in 1970. Apparently she did survive the night she was a debutante. She gave this photo to Zoltan after they got engaged.

Among Hungarian families in Toronto, the Debutante Ball was an important tradition only to a few people. These families wanted to hold on to some of the customs of a Hungary that no longer existed by the time WW II ended and the Communists took over. To them, the Debutante Ball brought back the glory of an Old World and a previous century. In that world, parents would present their daughters at court before the reigning monarch. Hungary was part of a much larger Austro-Hungarian Empire. Debutantes were groomed for months if not years so that they would catch the eye of some young man from a suitable noble family.

This might have been the old way matches were arranged but it hardly applied to the Toronto that I grew up in. Young women in my era dated pretty much who they wanted to date although it was still considered on the bold side for a girl to ask a boy out and it could still be tricky to date someone your parents didn't like or approve of.

Romance would find me six years later, when I wasn't necessarily expecting it. My future husband approached me on a bus trip to Cleveland with the Hungarian Kodaly Ensemble and asked if I'd like to play

Echoes From the Past

a game of scrabble. By then, the memories of a disappointing night had faded and I didn't even bother telling anyone I now met that I had been one of the 13 debutantes at the annual Hungarian Helicon Ball held on Jan 30, 1964 in the ballroom of the Royal York Hotel.

Are there real-life Cinderella stories? Perhaps, but I think they happen only once in a blue moon.



Eva Hegedus (nee Cserepy) was born in Hungary in 1947. Her first memoir in 2012 was about her family's escape from Hungary and their early struggles in Canada. Next she wrote about discovering her love of dance in the Kodaly Ensemble and meeting her future husband on a bus trip to Cleveland with the Ensemble.

This year, it's the Cinderella story turned on its head. Eva goes to the annual Helicon Debutante Ball on Jan. 30, 1964 as one of thirteen debutantes but she is ready to go home again only minutes after dancing the opening waltz!

This story is written in fond memory of her brother Frank Cserepy who died in September of 2012, leaving this world too soon at the age of 73. Eva says, "When all is said and done, we shared a love of music, art and humour. He will always be my one and only big brother."



Memories of My Grandfather

by Enza Severino

My grandfather (nonno), Rosario (Saro) Zambito, is 86 today. Wow, I look at him and he has white hair, to me he looks skinny, but my mom, Leonarda Zambito Piazza, says he has always been that way.

My grandparents (nonni) came to Canada from Sicily in 1964. They came by boat; in those days they could take the boat or fly. It took them eight days to get to Halifax. Then they took a train and arrived in Toronto at the train station. My grandparents had their first daughter in 1954 and their second daughter in 1960. My nonno has five brothers and three sisters. His brothers were: Vito, born in 1912, Francesco, in 1914, Andrea, in 1917, Giuseppe, in 1924, and Pietro, in 1929. His sisters were: Rosaria, born in 1916, Anna, in 1918, and Giuseppina, in 1923. My grandfather was born in 1926.

My grandfather was 28 in the following picture. The bricks below were laid down by these men. My grandfather liked his job. He used to do jobs for many people, but they would go to him after the job was finished and they would say to him, "Rosario, you can have this bag of flour and these gallons of wine for you and your family." My grandfather would thank them and be on his way. He knew in those days he was getting something he could give to his wife and kids to eat.

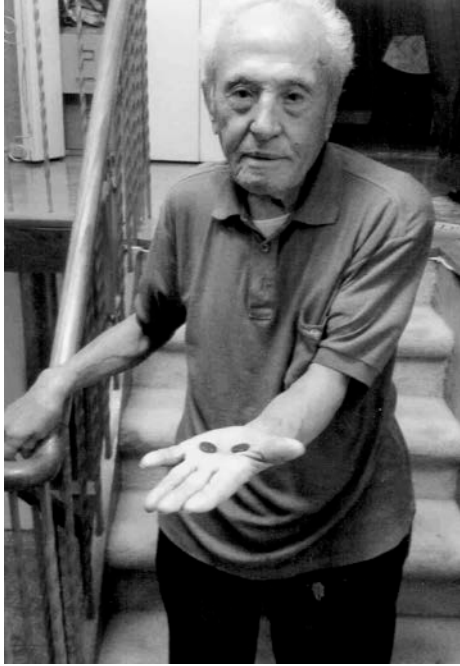
My grandparents are from the town of Montallegro in Sicily, Italy. There were mountains all around Montallegro. One day in 1945,



The third man from the left is my nonno, Saro. This was in the days when he worked laying bricks.

Echoes From the Past

Mussolini said to the people of Montallegro that they would have to dig the mountains and give to the government anything they would find. Mussolini said that many, many years ago there was a mud slide and it covered the little Montallegro town. So the people that made it started to rebuild the town again with houses, stores, roads, etc. The artifacts that they found were silver tea pots, gold, money. The money was not good because they had changed lire. When my



My nonno, Saro, very happy with his coins.



The two coins. You can see the damage from being buried.

grandfather was digging, he found two coins. They were stained with dirt. They had also water damage. He put them in the bottom of his pants, where the hem was. He pushed the two coins where he had ripped a little of his hem. You see, when it was night time and they were all going home, the military men would check everyone to make sure they were leaving with nothing. They also had to take a shower and then would get dressed up in their dirty clothes again. So he was lucky to have left with the two coins he had found. My grandfather still to this day has the two coins that he is holding in the picture. In Toronto they said they were worth \$10.00. Then he had one of his nephews come from California and he took the coins with him when he left; my grandfather wanted to see how much they would be worth in California. They said \$50.00. When my grandparents went to California in 1995, my grandfather picked up the coins from his nephew and said to him, “I am going to keep these with me. At least I have memories of how it used to be.”

My nonno and nonna loved California. They liked the way the city was kept. They also liked the streetcars; they thought these were so nice. The streetcars were open at the side for when the people would have to be picked up. They would whistle with their arm up. They also enjoyed all the orange trees and lemon trees. They went to California that time with Zio Peter, who is younger than my grandfather. Also my Zia Giovanna—Zio Peter’s wife. They went to go see Anna, their older sister.

They were all having a good time. But my Zia Anna was not feeling 100%. She had problems with her walking and something else, but I am not sure what it was. So instead my aunt told her kids to take them out and have fun. They are approximately eight to ten years apart with my nonno and zio.

Their first stop was the beach. How hot it was there in July. They had to take off their shoes and socks at the beginning of the beach. My nonno rolled up the bottom of his pants and made them reach his knees. I could imagine what was going on in his head, “I forgot to put my shorts on and they were right in my bag.” My nonno and nonna found the sand to be very, very hot! So

it made us laugh to hear how they finally made it to the ocean and went straight in. I can imagine what fun they had. My nonna was being very careful in the water and she wouldn't go too deep, just enough for her feet to get wet. They had a good time at the ocean. My nonno came out and went to my nonna saying, "Please give me my shorts. It is too hot!"

They started walking to this picnic bench that had green grass below it and the bench was covered with trees and bushes. They thought it would be beautiful to have a picnic. They all sat down to eat some food that they had brought from home. They wouldn't go out and buy food already cooked. They even brought my nonno's nephew's homemade wine. Wow, homemade wine! My nonno must have been proud of his nephew. They started talking about the olden days, laughing and having a great time. My nonno was now wearing shorts. He also had this straw hat he always wore in the summertime. The band on the hat was green, blue and yellow. He had a pair of sandals with a pair of socks! I'm not sure if they were blue or grey. My nonno got up from the table with the wine bottle. He started to dance around with the bottle and he lifted his right leg and then the left leg he moved around and he started singing a song they used to sing in Montallegro. My nonna and everyone else was laughing also. Being together with all his family must have meant the world to him.

My grandfather loved kids. He would do almost anything they wanted. I can't forget one night at my house, when we lived at 72 Yatescastle Drive in Downsview. My grandfather lived at 4 Peacham Crescent in Downsview. It took three TTC buses to get to his house. All my family was at my house. I'm not sure if it was a birthday, or maybe they decided to come to my house that night. It was June and we were all outside, the kids playing with our friends from our street. My nonno came outside to see what we were doing and he saw me with this big bike. I must have been eight to ten years old. My grandfather says to us, "Enza let me ride your bike."

I started laughing and said to him, "Nonno you don't know how to ride a bike."

He said, "Yes I do." So I got off the bike and let him go on it. He was riding my bike up and down the street like he had no problem. I was shocked, but very proud of him.

I cannot forget one day I slept over at their house. I must have been four or five. Every morning my grandfather would wake up 6:30 a.m. He did not work. He just says if you wake up early the day goes by nice and slow and there's more time to do things. He makes espresso coffee for himself and my grandmother (nonna), Francesca Miceli Zambito. But my grandmother was still upstairs doing the bed. My grandfather says to me, "Enza you want some coffee? I will make for you." He gets a pretty big cup, pours the coffee in it, just a little bit, and then he gets the warm milk and two sugars. I loved it! It wasn't hot so I could drink it all. Well, my grandmother came downstairs and saw me drinking the coffee. She started yelling at my grandfather, "You don't give this coffee to her. Her mother is going to get mad!"

"So ok, you don't say anything about the coffee. We will tell her it was just milk." The things grandparents do for their grandchildren.

He wears a blue golf top and grey pants and he wears slippers. At one time he wore these slippers or sandals that were brown, had an open toe, and the back of the sandal was open. These were his favorite sandals to wear around the house.

My nonni loved to make fresh tomato sauce. When they first came here from Sicily, Italy, they lived on Grace Street in Toronto. They had a small house so the garage was located behind the house. So you couldn't go through the front of the house to go to the backyard. My nonno used to go outside to the backyard from the basement where there was a door. He would walk along his yard where he had a fig tree growing every year as well as tomatoes, broccoli, and lettuce and so on. He would open the garage door. My grandfather did not know how to drive.

Echoes From the Past

They would go walking or take the TTC on College Avenue. He lived a six minute walk from CHIN RADIO. That was the radio station run by Johnny Lombardi. He would go to the garage and take out the iron barrel which was pretty big but empty. The top would be cut out. Then he would bring it to the garden where he had it all set up to boil the barrel by putting it on pile of wood surrounded by metal. Then he would get the newspaper and put it on the bottom and put the jars down. Before putting the jar down he would give the top one last tightening. Nonna and Rosa would have finished making the sauce.

Rosa Miceli is my nonna's younger sister. She is 65 and my nonna is 82. My aunt lived with my nonna since she was eighteen. My aunt brought my great nonna to Canada when they found out that she was very sick. So what they did is the sons and daughters all took care of her



*My nonna, Chichina and nonno,
Saro*

for six months each. That left my nonna & zia, to take care of their mother for a year, because they lived together. Then Maria Miceli passed away in 1973. Her husband had died in Sicily years before my great nonna got sick. My aunt told me he passed away while working at the farm one day. On Sept. 8, 1965 he had spoken to my Zia Rosa, Zia Lilia and Zio Pepe and said to them, "I'm leaving today. I have some animals I have to watch. Tomorrow you three come early in the morning and come to the field." Well, when they made it to the farm they saw in front of the house their father sitting there. As they got closer they realized that he was not breathing or moving. Well the three children started crying. The lady on the other farm heard the cries and called the police. The police went there and took the three children to their mother, while the police had to take this into investigation because the father had died of a heart attack. The police didn't find anything wrong, so they said it was a heart attack. My nonna has a family of seven girls and seven boys.

The thing is, my grandfather is a very good person to everyone even having nine grandchildren, and twelve great grand children. Still, my nonni live on their own. I love my nonni!



Vincenza Piazza Severino was raised in downtown Toronto and Milton, Ontario. She has four sisters and one brother. It started with her, then Francesca, Giovanna, Maria, Antonio Salvatore and little Sarah. They are from an Italian family. Their mother, Leonarda Zambito Piazza, and father, Leonardo Piazza were both from Sicily—Montallegro, Italy. They were a close family. Even though they moved around a lot, they always knew they had someone there for them. Enza now has a wonderful, caring husband, Pietro Severino, and two daughters, Danielle and Isabella. She says, "They are both a piece of my heart."



A Difficult Journey

by Mary Cummings

It's not fair!" I stormed as I slammed my purse on the bed. It had all started some months before in the summer of 1974. I'd ask my husband, Rich, to pick up something on the way home, maybe carrots, bread or milk. I'd always end up with something different. "Sorry, hon, I forgot what you said." Then later, my daughter, son-in-law and I were at the cottage and Rich had a bad cold, bad enough that he needed to go to the doctor's. He came back so disoriented, talking about the eye doctor and how his eyes needed testing. We all looked at each other in alarm and with questions. The cold got better and Rich came back to normal. The next step was a psychiatrist – maybe I had been nagging too much? – and then, in March of 1975, a CT scan. This showed early signs of dementia and evidence of Alzheimer's baskets. These are places in the brain where the strands in the cells, instead of being straight, are tangled and twisted together.

No wonder I was upset. Rich, 62-63, was just coming up for retirement, and we had recently bought a cottage. It just wasn't fair, especially for him.

I was angry with God and had been giving Him a piece of my mind. When my tantrum had exhausted itself and I calmed down, I heard His response, "If you will accept that I have allowed this, I will walk with you and Rich in it and through it." There it was – my choice. So I set my heart to choose His way.

Rich was a quiet man, non-violent, seldom angry.



Richard and I in happier times

Echoes From the Past

He had a strong sense of humour and I loved his gentle teasing. He could make a little remark to



Fun with #1 grandbaby at the cottage, 1975



Dancing with his daughter, Deborah at her wedding in 1976

the ladies at church and set them chuckling. There was a lot of laughter around our meal table. At first, he would still respond to people well and they couldn't understand what was wrong. But eventually his condition became obvious to all.

As I suppose I expected, life became more and more difficult. Rich was hallucinating a lot, and sometimes he would think I was someone else. We'd been to the cottage for the weekend, and one night, driving home in the dark, he thought I was a man, and that I was planning to beat him up. He kept trying to get out of the car and I kept trying to calm him and drive. Thankfully, we got home safely.

His work place was very good and they said they'd try to keep him as long as possible. But then one day, he must have got lost on the way to work, and arrived there very late and so dazed and confused, that they had to let him go.

I lost him once. We went to a bookstore on Cawthra Road, and I left Rich outside for a smoke. When I came out, he was nowhere to be found. I had all the family out searching – and the police. Finally, that evening, my son-in-law, Ian and his wife Anne, found him down by the boats in Port Credit.

I was still working close to home, but would have to turn off the power before I left. Rich was still smoking and would often light up more than one cigarette at a time. He would walk around the block so he could see me at work in the bank, and he'd 'phone me there constantly. At home, he would crash around, knocking the lamps over, and at night, he would keep tugging the covers off of me.

The hardest time was when he broke down and cried out, "What's happening to me?" I held him and cried with him, but I had no good answer.

The time came when I had to quit my job. I had another big concern in my life. My Mum, in the U.K., was dying with cancer. I decided that we would go to be with her. If it got too difficult, we'd have to come home. Rich wasn't too bad but I had to be careful not to lose him. Sometimes he would have accidents in the loo, and would take all his clothes off.

So we set off in November of 1978. And I managed. In the baggage claim I couldn't lose him and we made the trip O.K. Mum was bad. Rich, who was

almost silent now, spoke to her. “You’re very ill, aren’t you?”

Her eyes filled with tears and she was so touched.

Mum was taken to hospital and we would visit her there. Then, when there was nothing more they could do for her, she was sent home and died two days later. My Dad was in hospital too, but we were able to stay for Mum’s funeral and for about a week afterwards.

The flight home was a bit traumatic. At Heathrow Airport, I needed the ladies room but was afraid to leave Rich. I got him settled on a bench, and found a friendly Bobbie and asked him to keep an eye on him for a few minutes but please don’t frighten him. That worked well.

On the aircraft all went well at first. Then Rich went to the toilet and didn’t come out. I went and knocked on the door. No response. I did it again. He was angry. Fortunately, the plane was half empty and everyone was watching “National Velvet.” On my third try, he came out, in his undies, holding his pants. I was able to lead him to another loo at the back of the plane where I could get in with him. I got him dressed, albeit wet. Back at our seat, I continued to press the buzzer for the stewardess, but no-one came and Rich continued to be unhappy in his wet condition. Finally, someone came by to ask if we needed anything. “I’ve been pressing and pressing this buzzer for help and no-one came.” And, horrors, I started to cry.

“So sorry, dear, you don’t press it in; you have to pull it out. How about a nice cup of tea?”

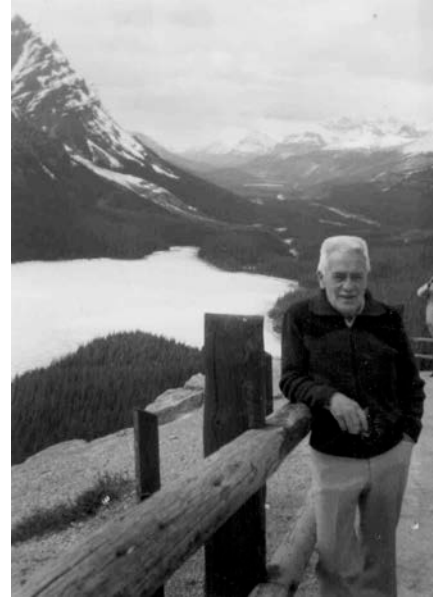
“Oh, yes, please”. She then advised me to stay on the plane when we landed, and they’d get a wheelchair for Rich and help me look after things. So we arrived home, sad, but safe.

Things gradually got worse. There were new challenges every day: getting Rich into the bath, etc.

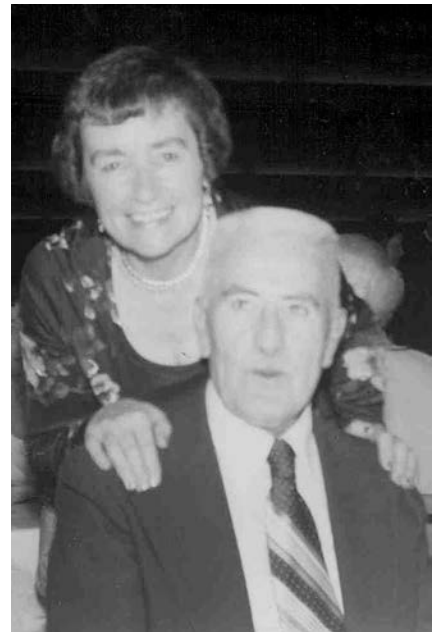
One day Rich had an accident in the bathroom. There he was, standing in the wet, his feet firmly planted, one on each sock. Could I get him to move? Shouting did no good. Finally, I left the situation, leant against the fridge and breathed a prayer for help. I went back and tried again, with new patience, and was able to cope.

My youngest daughter was getting married in Victoria in August, ’79 and I was able to leave Rich at a good place in Stouffville on a trial basis. But after two weeks, they said he was too difficult to handle and I needed to take him home.

It’s not easy to place Alzheimer’s patients. Finally, St. Elizabeth nurses who came to help me told my doctor that Rich was too hard to manage and that he would need to be placed.



Richard on our trip through the Rockies, 1977



Night out for Rich, 1978

Echoes From the Past

It felt as if this was the hardest day of my life. My son, David, and my son-in-law, Ian, came with me in September, '79 as we took Rich to the hospital that was to be his home for the next couple of years. They put him on a stretcher, belted in so tightly that he could hardly move. It was horrible and heart-breaking.

This began a different kind of life for me. Back and forth to visit Rich – Go train and subway or driving Hwy 427, QEW, Gardiner, and University Avenue.

Rich was placed in a ward with three other men, whom I gradually got to know. I was one of the few visitors on the floor, and this almost became my home away from home for quite awhile. I got to know the ladies, too. The Catholic priest, who used to visit the floor, told me I shouldn't be there every day – that I needed to get on with my life. It was good counsel. I even went to Florida for a couple of weeks when Rich was stable.

I found the first three months the most difficult. I'd come home and feel the weight of all those suffering folk – so many young men who'd been brain damaged in various accidents – and it was hard to sleep. Then, one night, as I was leaving the hospital, I heard, "Are all those men your responsibility?"

"No-o-o."

"Well then, they're My burden. As you leave the hospital, give them all to Me – Rich included. Be hands and feet for Me while you're there, then release them to Me".

So I began to do that, and I began to relax and sleep.

But the days, weeks, years slipped by. I wasn't a widow; I wasn't a wife. How long would life go on like this? I'd be walking up University Avenue, and saying to myself, like Job, "Even though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

I had moved to Campbellville, and joined the community at Bezek. They supported me. There were cards, 'phone calls, prayers. There were flowers, there were rainbows, there was encouragement.

Then one day, Rich had a massive haemorrhage, and was moved to Toronto General. Palliative care for him from then on. Back to his regular spot, my daughter, Anne and I went to visit him. Amazingly, this beloved man, who hadn't spoken for ages, looked at me out of clear eyes and said, "Hi, sweetheart" and then was gone from me again. There were times when he would come back to me – almost like a drowning man, he would surface for a few moments and be himself.

I tried to get him moved to Milton. They told me "No chance." Another month went by, then suddenly, "Would you like to get your husband moved to Milton?"

"You said there was no chance?"

"Well, yes, but we think you should apply again."

"O.K."

I then had an appointment with the Milton officer of health. "When would you like to get him moved – today, tomorrow?" I almost fell on the floor with surprise at this miraculous turn of events. Rich was duly brought to Milton District Hospital in February, '82 to a ward with three other men. They told me he'd been laughing. I believe it. I would have loved to have heard him. I'm sure he knew he was in a good place. The care was so much better at MDH, and I was so thankful.

These were the final months of his life and it was so great for me to be living close at hand. I especially wanted to be with Rich in his last moments. On the final Friday morning, the hospital told me I shouldn't wait too long to call the family. I was able to catch Anne as she was

Echoes From the Past

at the Superstore parking lot, just closing the trunk of the car. So on April 30, 1982, together we watched Rich slip away after a long and agonizing journey.

The day of the funeral, May 5th, was beautiful. The trees were in blossom and it was like a glorious summer day. As we stood at Richard's grave, my little granddaughter put her arms around me, and a cardinal sang. The journey was over. God had redeemed a devastating situation and brought life out of death.

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal". 2Cor.4; 16-18



1982 – shortly after the funeral – life goes on – enjoying my grandchildren



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 grand children 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 counsellor at the Christian Retreat Centre in Orangeville, Ontario. She is retired now and lives in the country.



Foryd Bridge

Rhyl, North Wales, 1943

by Trevor Trower

The River Clwyd flows into the sea at the west end of Rhyl. Wellington Road and the Promenade merge and cross the river by the Foryd bridge located about one hundred yards or so further to the west. In those war-weary years it was very rarely used by pedestrians, and vehicular traffic was not that frequent either due to most private cars being laid up for the duration. The Foryd Bridge was part of the main coastal highway connecting the towns and villages from Chester to Holyhead. On the spit of land to the west of the bridge a military camp was tucked away and would be hardly



The Foryd Bridge and Harbour with a rising tide.¹

noticed unless it was pointed out to you. The two closest buildings to the bridge were large public houses, on the east the Foryd Arms, and to the west across the road from the entrance to the military base was the New Inn. Owning these pubs was almost like running your own mint. It is interesting to note that even though we were engaged in total war, and most commodities were severely rationed, beer ran plentifully and cheaply without ration-books or controls and those two establishments were popular

meeting places, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings.

The bridge was a two lane affair with sidewalks on both sides. It was a double humped steel structure and regularly painted "battle-ship grey" to keep it fresh and rust free. I distinctly remember the rounded rivets on its upper surface, which helped the foolish but adventurous male youths to walk over the double humps on a silly dare. At fifteen, I made my first successful bridge walk, the first of many. After my sixteenth birthday, I traversed the bridge-humps on my bicycle. I had no witnesses to my first crossing, so I had to repeat the dangerous performance. I was the only one who had completed that trick twice. Later I surpassed my own stupidity by performing the same foolishness on my B.S.A. motorcycle, a trick which almost ended in my death, but at seventeen we are indestructible. I dusted myself off and my friend Hywll and I repaired my machine and we went about our business.

I would drop my fishing line baited with Lugworm pieces into the flowing river and wait on the bridge until I got a bite. The weather always seemed to be gently mild and the sun shining. The air felt fresh and salty, while the seagulls dipped and circled about with their raucous mewling cries. At low tide you could look down into the water and actually see shoals of flatfish making their way across the sandy bottom and would leave little puffs of sand to mark their trail.

Mostly the fish were Dabs, quite small but very good eating. My favorite catch was the large Plaice which seemed to travel singly. Once in a while Whiting, Cod or Sole would provide us with sport and food. On one occasion a fish called a Lesser Weaver was caught by the fisherman beside me. The fish was only a few inches long and silver in color. The angler grasped the fish in his left hand prepared to remove the hook. Suddenly he screamed and dropped the fish. The Weaver had raised its dorsal fin and its needle-sharp spines had pierced the man's palm, injecting a toxin which caused his hand and arm to swell and redden and cause him awful pain. A passing truck took the man to the Royal Alexandria Hospital for treatment. I have never forgotten that lesson.

About a quarter of a mile from where the River Clwyd enters the sea it widens to form a safe haven for fishing boats, maybe six acres in extent. At low tide only the river channel is water, the remaining area is deep in black smelly mud. Fishing boats lie on their sides and are unreachable until the tide comes in and re-floats them. In many of the small estuaries around our country-side, the small fishing boats are double keeled and at low tide stand upright in the mud until refloated on the next tide, but here the boats were single keeled and lay at an angle in the black ooze. All in all there was very little activity in the harbor.

Under the bridge at both ends, was a comfortable place to shelter from the rain. Several species of birds would nest among the steel girders. Places had been formed amongst the pebbles where occasional itinerate travelers could rest and safely light their fires for cooking their meals. No harm was ever done by those people and mostly they went on their way without being discovered or disturbed. From my vantage point on the bridge, I could see down-river to the sea and across the beach to the Rhyl Pier. You could watch the tide come in, and with astonishing speed it would consume the golden sands which stretched out in places nearly a mile. I would so seldom have company on this pleasant spot, that I would feel as if it was my own personal domain, and even though most of the time I was alone, I was never lonely.

One day while I was fishing at low tide, I noticed across the little bay toward the army camp, down the railroad spur line, a group of children playing. It was a dangerous place to play as there was a drop of about twelve feet into the black ooze if one were to fall over the unprotected wall. There was a narrow row of steps leading down into the ooze and I noticed there was a bicycle which had been thrown into the river. A young girl of about thirteen was

obviously trying to retrieve the bike from where it was partially covered in mud. Realizing the danger I yelled at her to keep off the mud. She was too far away for my voice to reach. I kept yelling when suddenly she went into a soft area and sank to her ankles in the black sucking ooze. It was about three hundred yards around the periphery of the basin. I dropped my fishing gear and ran as quickly as I was able, to help the girl who was now in serious distress up to her knees and sinking while she was struggling to extricate herself. In my panic I had almost exhausted myself by the time I reached the steps. The girl had now fallen onto the soft mud and had stopped sinking but was stuck. I could hear the panic in her voice as she called out, "Help me, Help!" Using the various rubbish which was scattered around I eased myself out onto the mud and standing on a big discarded bus tire I was able to grasp the girl by her hand. She was still yelling and panicking. With my help she eventually was able to join me on the huge tire and from there we took only a few minutes to reach safety, all the while she continued shouting and crying. I was also exhausted and scared but once we were on terra firma, I began to feel the euphoria of saving a damsel in distress. I put my arm around the girl and tried to console her fears. It was then I noticed a fat, middle aged man running towards us, shouting "Hey, you there, that's my daughter, take your bloody hands off her!"

Surprised and a little alarmed I moved away from the crying girl. She did look a sight. From her waist down and much of her right side was caked in smelly black mud. Her hair was unkempt and her eyes were red with crying. The fat man was puffing and red in the face from his exertions. When her dad was just a few yards away she burst out again in tears and ran to him, clinging to him as he continued to curse and abuse me. "I was trying to help, she was stuck in the mud," I muttered. I tried to explain but had hardly enough breath. In disgust I slipped away down to the beach to avoid any more of his anger. Half an hour later I had returned to my fishing and carried on as if nothing had happened (saving maidens in distress was not much fun).

You might ask, how come a bicycle in the muddy river? Every so often while on the bridge, I would see young soldiers, smart in their uniforms with neat puttees and shiny boots, marching in two's or three's, swinging along across the bridge towards the town, out for fun on an evening's pass. Quite often the Queen's Dance Hall was the objective, but a stop at each watering hole was standard procedure. After the entertainments and staggering home to base, often an unattached bicycle would be '*borrowed*' and also standard procedure, the bicycle would be disposed of by being tossed over the fence into the river. Perhaps the bicycle in the river's mud had been stolen from the young girl trying to retrieve it.

Proceeding towards the beach from the bridge, many huge rocks had been placed at the east bank of the river where it flowed into the sea. This was a simple and effective way to prevent erosion of the river-bank where it changed direction. The rocks were perfect homes for Mussels and at low tide it took just a few minutes to harvest a bucket of these tasty morsels. The same area, at high tide, eels could be caught by the score they were so abundant. It was a simple matter to put a piece of Lugworm on a hook, and an eel about two feet long would be caught as soon as the bait was lowered into the water. I would catch about a dozen of these slippery fish, clean and skin them, fry them in a pan with a little pig fat and that was a meal for a king. For the enterprising, food seemed to be around for the picking. Sea harvest was abundant in those days.

From my vantage point on the bridge I could see the big wooden pavilion, which sometimes would host a big band. People would attend the concert in their thousands. Sometimes my friend Albert, riding his old bicycle with a basket on its handlebar, would bring me an ice-cream from his concession by the pavilion and I'd return his kindness with fresh fish still wriggling about. By habit, the side from which I fished was that facing the sea. From the other

Echoes From the Past

side the scene was not as interesting but as the tide came in you could see the narrow tidal river widen until the railway bridge about a half mile away seemed to be floating on a broad lake, and it was past the bridge, south towards Rhuddlan, that often huge flocks of ducks would stop to rest and feed. I would wave as the “Holyhead to London Express” train whistled across that wide bridge leaving a trail of smoke, driven by my Grandad Tom Ballyn, though I am sure my greeting was never seen

I really don't remember why, but by the time I had turned seventeen I no longer went to the bridge. I imagine becoming a young adult, work, military service, and all the other responsibilities that go with growing up, took precedence over my carefree youth-time.



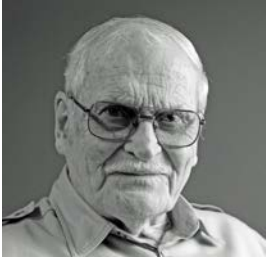
Foryd Bridge with River Clwyd at high tide.² In the background is the Railroad Bridge which carried the Holyhead/London Express. All through the war, it never failed to make its journey.



Photo of the Foryd Bridge taken during the summer of 2013 and published in the local newspaper.³ It shows that boys can still be foolish enough to do dangerous things and cause their mothers pain and anxiety, just as I did all those years ago.

1. <http://www.flickrriver.com/places/United+Kingdom/Wales/Foryd/search> foryd bridge rhyll denbigshire wales by plot19
2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diuCkdf_jzs Rhyll Foryd harbour summer 2013
3. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/freerunner-pictured-running-foryd-bridge-2297697> Geoff Abbott/Alamy

Echoes From the Past



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 57 years, Kay Thompson. They have 5 children.



Dirty Dick's (A Crew Layover)

by Trevor Trower

Old Tom, the doorman of the Kensington Palace Hotel in London, dressed in his working uniform of quasi-military elegance complete with medals and top-hat, had told me that a very nice place to go for lunch was Dirty Dick's pub near the Underground Station at Liverpool Street. He had told me that the pub served typically British food from a huge buffet and that I would not be disappointed. "Just take the number 9 bus and ask the conductor to put you off at Dirty Dick's," he said.

I had no difficulty in finding the pub which from the outside looked not much different from any other except as you approached, you could hear the buzz of friendly conversation interspersed with laughter and cheerful bonhomie. I would much rather have been with one or two friends as I preferred company in this type of situation. It was a bit of a surprise to me as I entered to see the enormous buffet, along the left side of the very large dining room and on the right side of the room, resting on trestles, was a row of huge oaken barrels of a variety of sweet wines from Spain. These sherries, I later discovered, were of the finest quality and aged in oak, had an aroma and taste not usually found in an ordinary pub. At the far end of the room were a few small tables and chairs but most of the large crowd of customers were enjoying their lunch standing at high tiny tables.

Many of the foods on offer you would not find in a buffet in Canada. There were, spread out on this twenty foot long counter, the usual boiled and baked hams where a server dressed in white coveralls would carve you your portion; further along great joints of cold roast beef, leg of pork, geese, turkey, capons and game, then next, was a selection of pies: veal and ham pie, steak and kidney, pork pies with various flavors and many more. There was an array of salads and pickles, piccalilli, pickled onions and chutneys like I had never seen; the sea-food was typically British, great pans of jellied eels, smoked eels, winkles, cockles, clams, mussels, buttered shrimp, crab, lobster and some I could not recognize, all displayed on a table of crushed ice.

The luncheon crowds pressed up to the buffet; when served, they passed along to the interior of the room and paid for their meal, found a free spot and ate their meal and all the while

the loud hum of cheerful chatting and friendly banter. I tried a little of many of the choices and was pleasantly surprised at the modest price. I think that was the finest meal I had had up until that time, though the jellied eel was a bit too gross for my taste. In the line-up I had struck up a conversation with one of the locals and I found myself at his table having my lunch. As he was leaving he said with a wink, "Have you had a drink at the downstairs bar?" I was about to ask him details when he left with a smile on his face. I had finished my meal and as I was feeling a bit thirsty, I started for the narrow stairway which led to the lower level. The downstairs bar was a long narrow room with a bar at the far end. The ceiling and walls of the room were covered with folding money, letters and postage stamps from every country in the world. I spent a few minutes looking at this amazing graffiti and discovered stamps from tiny countries which I had never heard of.

As I neared the bar my eyes were drawn to a board about two feet square beside the bar, on which was fastened the stretched and desiccated, snarling body of a dead black cat. A small sign was attached which said "stroke the cat for luck." There were other dried out small animals about the rafters of the ceiling, which appeared to be rats and mice. They had been there for a long time.

I observed the barman in conversation with an unusually attired black man, with a scotch and soda in his hand. The customer was dressed in what in some circles might be thought of as posh, upper middle class formal wear. His shoes were black patent with yellow spats; black pin-striped pants and a black city jacket; white starched shirt with an air-force striped tie. A furred umbrella over his arm and a bowler topped off his outfit. One foot was resting on the brass bar-rail.

As I approached, the barman continued to encourage the black man to stroke the cat for luck, while he told the story of Dick the tavern owner who, in 1798, on the eve of his marriage to a beautiful young girl, thought he had been jilted only to find to his horror, that his bride-to-be had died in a terrible accident and from that time had never washed or cleaned up his bar. He had also kept the bridal chamber exactly as it had been where a glorious banquet had been arranged to celebrate the nuptials. The cat, a symbol of bad luck if crossing your path at night, had crossed Dick's path when he was at the height of his suffering. He had viciously clubbed it to death and stretched its carcass as it appeared to this very day. As everybody knows however, touching a "dead" black cat often brings astonishing good luck. It struck me at the time that Paddy, the barman, was a very persuasive storyteller.

The black man may have been oddly dressed but he was no fool, and it took quite a while for Paddy to convince the customer to stroke the cat. The crowd in the pub had been listening to Paddy's line and sensing a laugh had gathered closer to the bar. The smile on the black man's face was a nervous one and now it was obvious that he must have wished he was somewhere else. He had reached the point where he could no longer vacillate and must be a sport. What on earth harm could there be in a dead cat, a bag of bones two hundred years old? He leaned forward to touch the cat while at the same time the Irishman pressed on a little switch beneath the bar. Suddenly the cat gave a leap from its rack and at the same time a fearful scream came out of the cat's jaws, followed in a split second by an agonized scream which came from the black man's throat. The African stared and I could swear he paled but quickly he gained composure and joined in the general laughter of the crowd at the bar, most of whom had been caught at one time or other.

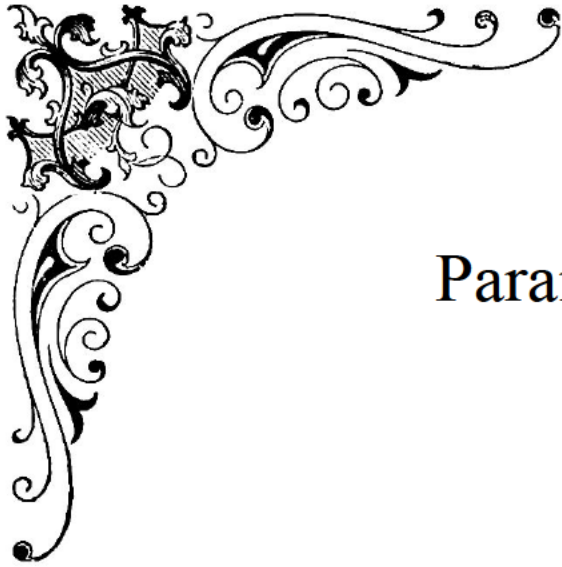
Well we ordered more drinks and still tittering, realized that Paddy had more wisdom to dispense. "Yes Gentlemen," he said, and pointing to a small door in the wall, continued, "Behind

Echoes From the Past

that wall is the bridal chamber, exactly as it was all those years ago, and if you want to have a look at that beautiful chamber, it will cost you only one shilling which will be donated to the RSPCA, cat division.” He continued to tell us more history of Dick and the London of the late eighteenth century. He kept us all entranced as he held our attention as only an Irish storyteller can. The little door in the wall looked more and more fascinating and in a while I found a shilling and putting it on the counter said, “Paddy, I’ll have a shilling’s worth.” Paddy took out the big brass key and unfastened the lock. I stood in front of the door and opened the trap. The door flew open and on the shelf was an old porcelain chamber pot, a thunder mug, a piss pot dirty and cracked and a sign which read “Don’t tell the others.” I stared for a few minutes muttering, “Very interesting,” then closed the hatch. There was an immediate clamour from the others while they plonked down their shillings.



P.S. the dead animals were in fact clever fakes which in the subdued lighting looked very real.



Paranormal Experiences

by Ken Marvell

Prelude

The memoirs (stories) I have selected to share in this year's edition of "Lifescapes" are just three of numerous accounts in which I and, in some cases, various members of my family were personally involved.

Once you read these stories, I am confident you will agree that these true stories are 'ghostly' in nature.

The first story, "The Unexplained Incident at Mrs. Wise's Bed and Breakfast," took place in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The second story, "The Vision," took place closer to home. In fact it took place right here in Milton, Ontario, Canada.

The third story, "The Spirit of Keats," also took place in our house located here in Milton.

Enjoy as you read...

The Unexplained Incident at Mrs. Wise's Bed & Breakfast

Having vacationed in London, England for one week in June of 1970, my wife Christine and I boarded the Flying Scotsman train to Edinburgh. With favourable recommendations from a friend, we had pre-booked three nights' accommodations at a private Bed and Breakfast run by Mrs. Evelyn Wise in her home located at 31 Stafford Street, in downtown Edinburgh.



Mrs. Wise's Bed & Breakfast at 31 Stafford Street, Edinburgh, Scotland

A continuous row of Georgian Style Terrace Block buildings lined both sides of Stafford Street. Eventually, the shiny black taxi pulled up and stopped in front of Number 31. The sky was overcast and the day was gray with droplets of rain continuing to fall as we disembarked from the taxi and stood for a moment, taking in the desolate looking stone building that was to be our home for the next three days.

We walked up the steps and knocked on the solid, dark stained wooden door. Soon, Mrs. Wise, a petite gray-haired Scottish lady, opened the door.

I said, "Hello Mrs. Wise, we are Ken and Christine, from Canada. Our friend, Linda, who stayed here last year, referred us to you."

"A'right. Welcome tae my haem."

"Thank you very much."

"Please come in an' make yoorselves at haem. Let me shaw ye tae yer room."

We entered the house and followed Mrs. Wise to our room.

"Settle yoorselves in an' I'll make a pot ay tea."

The room where we were to sleep was a large bedroom with heavy ceiling to floor drapes which covered the corner windows. From the bedroom doorway, which was located near one corner of the room, I saw a large wooden oak wardrobe standing in the other corner. Kitty corner of the room from the wardrobe was a lady's dressing table with mirrors and a tray for placing rings and similar items of jewellery. Next to the lady's dressing table was a double sized feather bed, and finally, a three foot long dresser was up against the wall. This brought me back to the doorway where I was standing. Being a private bed and breakfast, there were no locks on any of the bedroom doors and there was only one common bathroom.

Later that first evening, we were sitting in the living room drinking coffee and talking with Mrs. Wise. She said, "I am a widow with one daughter who is away at university. To supplement my income, I rent a few rooms. Besides the both of you, I have a man named Malcolm who has been boarding with me for five weeks so far." Then, leaning forward and in a whispering voice she said, "Malcolm is a strange man as he..." At that exact moment Malcolm, a tall, heavy set man with black hair and a pock-marked face, quietly walked by one of the

doorways to the room where we were sitting. He paused for a moment and glared in at the three of us with his piercing eyes. Then, without a word, he continued along the hallway towards his room. While Malcolm was still a guest during our stay, our paths never crossed again.

Mrs. Wise never did finish what she was about to say regarding Malcolm.

An hour or so later, I was looking through some books on a shelf in the living room and noticed one in particular, which I picked up. It was titled, *Thirteen Best Ghost Stories*. I decided that I would read it for a while once we got into bed that night.

A little later, Mrs. Wise came back and sat with us for a few minutes. I asked her, “Do you know of any ghost sightings in the area?” I further explained, “Back home in Canada, there were many stories of ghosts and ghost sightings in Edinburgh.” She laughed a little, then she assured me that there were no ghosts to be concerned about and stressed, “If there was a ghost in this house, it would have to be in your room with you for you to hear it, as the walls to this old stone house are very thick.” A little later, as we headed off to our bedroom, we noticed the interior stone walls between the rooms were easily eight inches thick.



Lady's dressing table with tray

Getting ready for bed, Christine sat at the dressing table and removed her hair clips which she then placed in the small tray on the dressing table. After brushing her hair, she got into bed and soon went to sleep. Meanwhile, I folded my trousers and laid them with my shirt on the dresser by my side of the bed. Then I got into bed and read the first of the Thirteen Ghost Stories.

Eventually, getting sleepy, I placed the book and my glasses right beside me on the dresser. I turned off the toggle light-switch which was located just over the headboard of the bed. As I lay there for a few minutes before falling off to sleep, I noticed how pitch black the room was, with those heavy ceiling to floor drapes pulled tightly closed and across the windows in order to keep any outside light from entering the room.

Sometime in the middle of the night, I awoke to the sound of something rustling. Immediately I remembered Mrs. Wise's comment about the walls being so thick that if we heard a noise, it would have to be from within the room. I quickly sat bolt upright in bed. My heart

pounding as I strained to listen for another rustling sound. Not daring to blink, I stared into the dense blackness which now surrounded me in that room, where not even a glimpse of light from the outside night could penetrate those curtains.

An indefinite time, which seemed like ages, passed as I sat there, motionless, in the dark, trying to control my breathing so as not to make the slightest sound. I don't know how long I listened but eventually I lay back down with my head on the pillow and slipped off to sleep.

The next morning as I awoke, Christine was sitting at the dressing table. She said to me, “My hair clips are not on the tray where I placed them last night.”

Echoes From the Past

I instantly remembered the events which transpired in the darkness of our room, not too many hours earlier, and told Christine about waking up in the middle of the night to that rustling sound. Then I reached for my glasses which I had placed on the dresser immediately beside me before falling off to sleep. However, now the glasses and the book were both on the far side of the dresser, well beyond my reach from in bed.

They had been moved.

I sprung out of bed and in a panic, I checked my wallet to see if any money had been taken and to make sure our passports were still there. Finding those items as they should be, I gave a long sigh of relief. We got dressed and before leaving our room, made an extensive search of the room for those hair clips, but to no avail. The hair clips were gone.

Having decided not to mention anything of this incident to Mrs. Wise, as we wanted to keep it to ourselves for the time being, we ate our breakfast and went sight-seeing for the day. Going through local shops that afternoon, we came across one shop which sold small wooden cases containing twelve four ounce jars of Scottish marmalades. Christine suggested we buy a case to take back home to Canada for souvenir gifts. As we still had a few hours of sightseeing to do, the clerk was kind enough to wrap lots of twine around the case, thus making a makeshift handle.

The second night of our stay at the Bed and Breakfast didn't reveal any signs of those hair clips. When it came time for bed, we used the common washroom down the hall from our room and then we retired to our bedroom for the night. However, before going to bed, I decided to set a trap in the event our late night visitor, perhaps Mrs. Wise, perhaps Malcolm, or...perhaps a ghost, decided to make a second late night visit to our room.

As there were two toggle light switches which controlled the bedroom light, one near the head of the bed and the other by the door, I arranged them so the light switch by the door was in the up position when the light was off. Then I took what turned out to be about 30 feet of twine from the case of marmalades we had purchased earlier in the day, and I tied the twine numerous times around the switch, down to the door knob and back up and around the switch a dozen or more times. I also placed a metal waste can upside down against the door so it would make a loud noise if the door was opened.

I told Christine, "If someone or something opens the door at any time during the night tonight, the twine will pull the toggle switch down and the light will go on – waking us up. Once awake, we can catch the intruder. Also, the sound of the metal waste can falling over might wake up someone else in the house."

All this having been done, we got into bed. Christine went to sleep and I read about the second ghost in that book. An hour or so later, I put my glasses and the book on the dresser beside me. A flip of the light switch placed our bedroom into complete darkness and I soon fell into a deep sleep.

Before long I woke up, lying on my side with my back to the door. I lay there motionless, listening to muttering from somewhere in the room behind me. Slowly, pretending to be asleep with my eyes closed, I gradually rolled over to face the door. After a few more minutes, I opened my eyes, just a little at first, then completely as I saw Christine kneeling at the bedroom door. Yes, it was morning and Christine was patiently trying to quietly untie all the knots in that 30 feet of twine so she could open the door. She now badly needed to go to the bathroom. When she saw me watching her, she said, "Why the hell did you have to use up all the twine? I've been untying knots for the past half hour."

We both had a good laugh about this during breakfast and at different times throughout that day while sight-seeing.

Night three was our last night at Mrs. Wise's Bed and Breakfast. We were flying to Ireland the next day, but that's another story for another time. Before going to bed, we packed our suitcases and got our clothes ready so we could leave early in the morning.

The following morning as we were getting ready, Christine was sitting at the dressing table, brushing her hair when she said to me, "Ken, you are not going to believe this. My hair clips that disappeared two days ago, are now back on the tray where I first put them."

To this very day, we have no idea who or what visited our pitch black bedroom that first night at Mrs. Wise's Bed and Breakfast. No idea who or what could have even seen any of those items in that darkness in order to move them. We also have no idea when or how those hair clips managed to be placed back on the tray for us to find the morning we were leaving Mrs. Wise's Bed & Breakfast in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The Vision

For a number of years my children and I have experienced, in our house right here in Milton, what some people refer to as reoccurring phenomenon. However we always preferred the term, "Shadow People." Most of these occurrences took place in the basement family room area but, on occasion, we also saw these shadow people in the living room which is located on the main floor.

For your reference, a few examples of these shadow people sightings happened with my son, Jon, and with me:

When Jon was young, his bedroom was located on the same floor as the family room. Often, when he was in his room playing on his computer or doing homework at the desk, he would notice, in the corner of his eye, something or someone just as they seemed to move out of his range of sight. Whenever he got up to see who it was that just passed by his bedroom door, no one would be there. This happened often enough that he started closing his bedroom door whenever he was in his room, especially at night.

Another example, which happened to me more than a few times, occurred as I prepared to go to bed. Every night before going to bed, I have the habit of going to the front door to make sure it is locked. Different times, just as I passed the opening to the living room, I would notice the image of someone sitting on the couch in the darkness of the living room. But as fast as I could turn the lights on and look, no one could be seen on the couch.

Jon and I often discussed these happenings to the point we both knew they were real, and not just figments of our imagination. We accepted the fact that shadow people were residing in our house. On the other hand, Christine, my wife, didn't want to hear us talking about the shadow people. Various times she would say, "Stop discussing those shadow people when I'm around or I will get scared and not want to go down to the lower basement to do the laundry." So, out of respect for her and the need for clean clothes, we kept these conversations to ourselves or to occasions when my daughters happened to be home and the subject came up.

One of these times was when Jennifer, my older daughter, came home from the University of Western Ontario and slept in Jon's old bedroom, off the family room. The first night when she went down to the bedroom, Jon said, "Enjoy the ghost, and oh, by the way, we call him Maurice." To which Jennifer replied, "Quiet. Don't freak me out." We all had a good

Echoes From the Past

laugh about it, as Jennifer went down to bed. To this day, we have no idea why the name Maurice was chosen for our ghost.

Late one night, about ten years ago (that would have been 2003), Christine had long gone up to bed, and was sleeping. I was downstairs in the family room using the computer while our six year old granddaughter was sound asleep on one of the nearby couches, also in the family room. So as not to wake her, I turned off the ceiling lights. With just the glow from the computer monitor, the now quiet room was fairly dark.

Suddenly, at about one o'clock in the morning, a movement caught my attention. At first, I thought it was just another of the shadow people but when I looked up, I froze for a moment as I was startled to see, in the dim light of that room, the figure of a tall woman slowly moving... floating, to be more accurate, across the room. I say floating as I never did see her feet. I just saw her from her head down to the lower part of her body.

I watched in disbelief, as I noticed she had long shoulder length blond curly hair and she was wearing what appeared to be an old fashioned, full length white night gown with an open housecoat over it.

Feeling numb and unable to move, I sat there, helpless, watching her as she continued to move across the room towards the couch where my granddaughter was sleeping. When the woman reached the couch, she placed both palms on the back of the couch and leaned forward, looking down at my young granddaughter. The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end as I squinted into the darkness to see what she was doing. Finally, I asked in a whispering voice and with trepidation, "Is that you, Christine?" I knew in my heart that it wasn't Christine, but at the time I didn't know what else to say. The woman never replied verbally to me, but just slowly turned her face towards me and smiled.

Without diverting my eyes from the woman, nervously, I grabbed for the small gooseneck lamp that was on my computer desk. As quickly as possible, my fingers fumbling to find the switch, I turned the lamp on and shone the light towards the woman. When the light penetrated the darkness of the room, the woman was nowhere to be seen. Yes, the vision of that woman had completely disappeared in the brightness of the light.

At that exact moment, I realized, I had just experienced an actual "Face to Face" encounter with a ghost.

I sat at my computer desk for a few minutes, digesting and trying to remember all that had just taken place, then slowly I got up from my computer desk and walked over to where the woman had been standing, behind the couch. For some reason, I placed my hands on the back of the couch where the ghost had placed her palms. Looking down, I could see my granddaughter lying there, sound asleep. She was undisturbed by, and unaware of, the visit by that ghostly apparition that chose to show itself in the middle of the night so many years ago.

Since that night of the visit, till the printing of this story, the mysterious woman has never been seen again.

These days we seldom see shadow people like we used to, but we know they are still residing with us, in the house. Also, depending how the sun's rays strike the couch or other furniture in the house, I have noticed what appears to be undistinguishable, distorted faces blended into the furniture as if trying to hide from view. Quietly watching, perhaps?

The Spirit of Keats

At 3 o'clock in the morning I awoke to the familiar sound of Keats' paws thumping on the wooden floor, as though he was about to climb up the stairs... This story started when my daughter, Andrea, got a four week old Rottweiler puppy. She named this cute little puppy, Keats, after the poet, John Keats. Even for a Rottweiler, as a puppy Keats was very small, in fact I could hold him in one hand.

Before long, Keats grew up to be a 130 pound majestic looking dog with his natural big barrel chest and sturdy body. He had shiny black and tan coloured fur and soulful black eyes. If just seeing Keats didn't make people respect his space, a loud deep gruff of a bark usually convinced them to back away.

Once people got to know Keats' character, they soon realized he was very protective of the family whenever strangers happened to be around. They also got to see that Keats thought he was a person. One example of this was demonstrated one evening when my son, Jon and his friend, Ryan, were sitting on the couch talking. Keats was also sitting on the couch, between them, with his behind on the edge of the couch and his four paws touching the floor. As the boys talked back and forth, Keats turned his head accordingly, as if he knew and understood exactly what the boys were saying. As each of them spoke, they noticed his head moving back and forth like he was watching a tennis match. The boys had a good laugh watching him. One of them said, "We half expected Keats to join in on our conversation."

Keats was very mild mannered and would often let my granddaughter, Brittney, play dress up, using him as the model by putting a tutu, sunglasses and other items of clothing on him.



Brittney playing dress-up with Keats

Unfortunately Keats grew older and developed various ailments which slowed him down. By the time he was twelve years old, Keats had cataracts in both eyes causing him to go blind and he also developed diabetes. The veterinarian put Keats on insulin but the diabetes eventually caused the nerves in his hind paws to die off to the extent Keats could not feel when his hind paws touched the floor as he walked. So that he wouldn't fall when walking, or climbing up the three steps from the living room floor level to the floor where the bedrooms are located, Keats would slap his hind paws on the floor. This slapping let him know his paws had made contact with the floor. His

condition eventually got so bad that whenever he wanted to go up the steps, someone had to stand behind him and literally lift his hind end up the stairs so he wouldn't fall.

Echoes From the Past

Having had Keats for twelve years, he was truly one of the family and loved by all of us but the time came when the difficult decision had to be made to put Keats out of his growing discomfort. We contacted Dr. Goldie, a very compassionate veterinarian who makes house calls, and arranged for her to come to the house to put Keats down.

On his last day with us, we let Keats enjoy eating a large T-bone steak and all the dog treats he wanted. Brittney, who was eight years old at the time, stayed home from school and spent the day with Keats. She would pet him, cuddle him, and talk to him, shed some heartfelt tears and cuddle him some more. Every so often she would play some tunes on the piano that she thought he would like to hear. This was their special time and her way of saying good bye to the dog she grew up with. Sitting here now at my computer, as I type this memory, tears are flowing down my cheeks. As suppertime was nearing, Brittney got picked up by her mother and they went home for the night. Over the following few days, Brittney made a lovely memorial video with words and music of Keats, which was a tribute to his life and what he meant to all of us.

About 7 o'clock that same night, Dr. Goldie came to the house. She had us spread a blanket on the living room floor for Keats to lie on. After relaxing Keats by talking to him for a while, she gave him a sedative to relax him even further so the final injection would not give him any pain. She left the room for a while to allow my wife Christine, our son Jon, our son-in-law Dave and me, some time to say our good-byes to Keats as he continued to relax and doze off. Eventually, she gave Keats the final injection and within seconds, Keats passed away peacefully while lying on that blanket on the living room floor. Jon and Dave helped place Keats in the veterinary's vehicle to be taken for cremation.

That same night at about 3 a.m., I awoke to the familiar sound of Keats' hind paws thumping on the floor and I started to get out of bed thinking I should go help him up the stairs so he wouldn't fall. As I threw off the covers, I remembered that Keats had been put down earlier that same night. Not hearing him again, I figured I must have been dreaming. Thinking fondly of Keats, I eventually fell back to sleep.

Earlier that night, Christine had moved into the guest room to sleep. In the morning while having breakfast, she said to me, "I woke up about 3 o'clock in the morning, last night, and I swear I heard Keats' paws as he started to climb the stairs." I replied, "That was the exact time I heard him. I looked at the clock radio and I noticed the time as I was about to go help him, then I remembered he had been put down."

A few weeks after Keats passed away, Jon said, "I was walking past the couch in the basement family room, on my way to the washroom and saw Keats curled up on the couch. He lifted his head when I said, "Hi Keats," as I continued on to the washroom. Then I remembered Keats had been put down a few weeks ago so I rushed back to the couch, but Keats image was no longer there."

My daughter Jennifer and son-in-law Dave have two dogs: Arthur, a large black Lab/Chow mix and Lola, well she is a smaller black Schipperke/Chow mix. Both dogs knew Keats and the three dogs used to play together every time they came over to our house. The first half dozen times they were here after Keats had been put down, Arthur would walk from room to room throughout the house, looking for Keats.

Eight years have now passed and Arthur can still sense Keats' spirit. Every time Arthur visits he tends to lie on the living room carpet where Keats was lying when he passed away, then Arthur rolls over on his back with all four paws up in the air and twists as he grinds his back and

Echoes From the Past

shoulders into the carpet. While he grinds, he growls and barks uncontrollably. Then, when he is done, he usually settles down and lies there quietly.

Discussing this with our children and granddaughter, we all agree that it is Keats' spirit we hear and that his spirit continues to live contentedly with us in our house.



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 35 years.

I am married with three grown children and five grandchildren.



Long Way Home

by Judy Osman

This elderly grey light hauling itself reluctantly over the horizon these winter months makes me wonder how it came about, how I am here. A fish out of water.

I miss the unique light of Africa - strips of wide open blue and gold sky, subtle in the early morning haze, blazing intensely in the heat of the day and glowing red like an infinite ticker tape across the horizon in its rush to disappear as the day draws in. I remember waking to muffled early morning sounds: snuffles and whispers, breeze and shadows as Africa unfolded itself into the throb of the day. Such promise: look what I bring you, another brilliant day!

And so, from there to here. From youth to grey hair and complaining joints with intermittent return visits to monitor South Africa's evolution from apartheid state to all inclusive modern republic. To see family, to catch time glimpses of children growing into adults, a sister to a widow, a brother to an early grave. To visit friends who stayed behind and share the sadness over their children's departure to parts of the world where they feel they have a better chance at a safe and secure future. To try to come to terms with our decision back in 1981, that right decision. A decision to remove ourselves from a country facing an uncertain but inevitable and likely violent transition. A transition from the oppressive and grossly unjust system of apartheid, to majority rule.

I had once thought California would be a good place to live. In fact, as a teenager I longed to visit this land of the Beach Boys and California girls. I imagined a vibrant busy part of America, where everyone was young, fit, tanned and beautiful and drank copious quantities of Coca Cola, an oxymoron in hindsight. Where hamburger joints on the beach throbbed with pop music and surfers skimmed the peak of silver waves just before the water toppled them onto the beach. There would be no sand bugs to gnaw on my ankles, just abundant sunshine, space and magnificent redwood forests. A real possibility!

At home in Pretoria in late 1980, my husband prepared for another business trip. It was early summer and he would be home in time for Christmas. He would have a few days in California and then make a first visit to Toronto, Canada. I knew about Toys R Us from his previous visits to the U.S. and he left with a list for Santa: Lego for our almost 6 year-old son,

and a lengthy list from his 5 year-old sister. Some things for the baby. We watched Dad go and sat down to read a book about Father Christmas who lived in the North Pole. It was a familiar story about an old man who lived in an impossible to imagine place, in a galaxy far, far away. In South Africa “snow” could be purchased as foam in an aerosol can, to be sprayed on fake pine trees to create an image similar to the one in the book. The children soon tired of the book and returned outside to poke amongst the aloe cactus plants and retrieve their ball. I followed them and put the baby down to nap in the pram under the jacaranda tree, covering him carefully with mosquito netting, protecting him from flies and mosquitoes and a few drooping blooms still clutching onto branches in the summer heat.

While he is gone, Tony phones every few days. He is in Los Angeles, he is tired with the place. How could he be tired of the place?

He tells me it is crowded, loud, without soul, the traffic is horrendous, the air is blue with smog, he has a cough, people are rude. And he says, here in the land of plenty there are lost mortals everywhere, sleeping on the streets, on the beach, addicted to alcohol, drugs. Seriously, he tells me, this would be no place to raise the children.

I am mortified.

“But that’s just Los Angeles. What about San Francisco, any possibility of a job there, or some other town?” I offer.

I’m realizing that this is the end of the conversation. We move on to discuss the children’s activities, how the coral tree has come into full bloom, its cumbersome pods dropping on the patio, how we had hailstones in the worst of yesterday’s spring storm, how I am hoping the gardener will show up tomorrow as promised.

He talks of travel frustrations, uncomfortable flights even in business class. He is excited to be visiting Toronto. He’s heard they are expecting snow.

The next few days are tough. My California dreamin’ is breaking away from me, crashing on the floor around me like a breaking plate. I reach out to grab pieces, hoping to catch enough of them to piece it together again, but I know it’s gone. Where does that leave us?

Perhaps we should stay. We have had this conversation so many times I am weary of it. I play the perhaps we should stay role, and he takes the no, we should go part. But a voice in my heart tells me that I don’t really believe my part. One look at these three children, each of them so precious it physically hurts me to contemplate any harm coming to them, and I know. We should go.

But where?

My friends mostly have young children and live in my neighbourhood. None of us works outside the home. We take it for granted that our job for now is to take care of our kids. Perhaps at some point we will discuss other options, but at our weekly get togethers, the conversation revolves around the children and the minutia of our lives. Each week we meet at a different house, the children play or swim. We sit at the edge of the pool, drink tea, eat cake and chat, the conversation barely interrupted by the frequent need for one or the other of us to untangle a dispute, grab a flaying child whose water wing needs more air, feed a baby, or get more tea.

I have not mentioned that we are thinking of leaving. I dread their reactions. Disbelief, disappointment, and more complicated feelings. A sense of betrayal perhaps. I worry because I do not want to be an instrument of guilt. I have felt guilt when I have heard of other young families leaving the country. I have thought to myself, look what they are doing for their children - they are noble and high minded. Some of us who choose to stay will not sacrifice our

comfortable lives, our splendid climate, the beauty of the country in which we live, our privilege - not even for our children.

A few, but not all. I look around at my group and they choose to stay for different reasons. Some because they want to work to make this country a good place for all its people and they believe in its future. Some stay because they have known no other place. Their parents, grandparents, great grandparents are of this soil, they are African, the white tribe of Africa. Others have moved south from Kenya, Tanzania, Northern and Southern Rhodesia feeling pushed out as these countries have become independent and looked to their own people to run their governments and businesses. If they move any further south, they will be in the ocean. Each of them brings a different perspective and I feel our decision is a deeply personal one, made of our histories and personalities, and it makes us no more noble than they.

Two days later I am at home, running the bath water to get the children ready for bed. The radio is rumbling in the kitchen, I pick up the odd word here and there and I hear the words tragedy, shooting. I immediately think there must be renewed rioting in the black townships, or yet another murder, probably in the streets of Johannesburg. I round up the children and herd them into the tub. I ask them to hold off the splashing while I pop the baby quickly into the warm water between them, lather him up and whisk him out to dry him off. I carry him into his room opposite the kitchen and I can hear the radio clearly now. John Lennon has been shot. One pop star's death is receiving more news coverage than the relentless violence happening all around us every day, violence that has become so common place we barely register it anymore. But this is different, my ears prick up and I carry my towel-wrapped son into the kitchen so that I can hear the whole story. The world is horrified. Black and white South Africa - horrified. John Lennon has been murdered.

Tony calls from Toronto. Initially, it's all he can talk about, Lennon dead, but he's over there not too far from where it happened, the other side of the world. Over here where I am, 360 people died in the township of Soweto in 1976 in the weeks after my daughter was born. Since then we've become inured to violence, the numbers numb us and we tune out.

And then he tells me. His boss in Toronto would help him - help with the immigration process to get us into Canada. They could use his skills, there would be a job.

My mind goes back to school geography class. The Great Lakes, Superior, Erie, Ontario and a couple of others I can't remember, larger than some seas in the world - major industrial centres - cold winters and hot summers. I play my favourite Roger Whittaker record album which includes a song called "Canada Is."

In his smooth baritone voice Roger sings:

"We have faith in our future
We are ready for tomorrow
We have faith in our children
For our future's in their hands
We have a voice that is calling
Telling us to keep on hoping
For time will make this wild land great
And that's what Canada is."

I feel as though warm syrup has been poured over me. My anxiety is temporarily soothed. For a brief moment I feel optimistic. We can make anything work. Isn't this the sort of place we are looking for? The tune is catchy and soon I have the children singing. A few days after that and it's starting to wear thin. I'm ready to hit my head against a rock to rid this

song from my brain. And I'm not buying the message. I knew about Roger, he went to school with my best friend's brother in Nairobi. He sings a lovely song about Kenya, even after his parents were brutally attacked, his father murdered and his mother left for dead in their Kenya home.

My brother has an old radio he drops off at the house to see if Tony can get it going. I pour him a beer and tell him the news. Peter takes his time. Finally he asks if we're really sure about this, if we don't need to discuss it further. He talks about his time in New York City; he was there on a course over the winter months. He describes the severity of the biting cold, his numb fingers and face in the bitter winds, the underground world of subways, shopping and banking. How he yearned to see the sky but would put off coming up into the cold for as long as he possibly could. How happy he was to return to wide open warm South Africa.

I tell him we don't plan to live in the city, we will find a house in the suburbs, the children will love winter, they will toboggan and learn to ski. It will be ok. We will make it work. Of course I am persuading myself as much as him, and he knows it.

Tony comes home and it is Christmas. We sit out under the massive acacia tree that



Last Christmas in South Africa

sprawls itself in front of our bungalow, allowing us summer shade. The rains have come and the grass is lush and thick. Strong, flat Kikuyu grass. African grass. Scarlet bougainvillea flops over the length of the fence and oleander trees block our view of the road. A box of Cape Pinotage wine hangs from a tree branch. An aluminum tub full of ice cools the beer and white wine. A turkey roasts in a clay oven on the smoky barbeque. Good times, laughter, squealing children running barefoot over the lawn, shouting to their cousins, showing off

their new toys. Seems a good time to drop the brick. Shock, awe, silence, and then in an effort to restart the conversation, the jokes and suggestions. Everyone will save their old tennis rackets for us - we will need them to get around on all that snow! We should bring our large collie dog; we could train him to pull a sled! A couple who once visited Calgary asks us in all seriousness if we mean to bring the children. Do we know how cold it is? I find that the efforts to intimidate us, however light-hearted, have the opposite effect. I begin to look forward to an adventure!

Now the only thing holding us back is the tedious and drawn out immigration process.

Echoes From the Past

In April Tony leaves to take up his new position in Toronto. I hang back to allow the children to finish their school term, to sell up what we don't intend to bring and to pack what we will. I finally leave South Africa on a cold winter evening in the early part of July. Through immigration and onto the aircraft I have the baby on my hip and the children follow, each clutching a South African Airways cabin bag full of treasures for the flight. There is no time for tears. The baby won't settle and the first hour of the flight is spent walking him up and down the aisle. After that I am exhausted and sleep and soon we are landing in London, our first stop, for a few days with my sister.

A week later we board the aircraft for the final leg of the journey, a short one this time, from Bermuda to Toronto. We are excited, we are almost there and soon we'll see Daddy and have a new home. The baby sits on my lap and we all start to sing Roger's song. We sing "Canada is the Rocky Mountains, Canada is Prince Edward Island, Canada is a country full of love." And for the first time, we are travelling on Air Canada, or Air Canans - the best my 20 month old son can manage, and the words he chants incessantly as he points out the window. We cheer as we touch down.

At Customs & Immigration we are taken into a separate room to have our papers processed. I tell the official that my husband is at the airport to meet us. The immigration officer picks up the telephone and asks that a Mr. Tony Osman be paged. Shortly afterwards the desk telephone rings. The official has an impish look on his face and I listen to the one way conversation.

"There is a lady here who claims to be your wife. She has three children and she tells me they are yours."

Long pause.

"You're sure now?"

Tony has found us a house to rent in Brampton. The owners are away for the summer and it is a base while we look for something more permanent. The heat in the house our first night is oppressive, it droops like a blanket on our shoulders. Narrow windows and heavy velvet drapes do nothing to encourage air flow. The children wake up intermittently throughout the night, wandering into our bedroom complaining they can't sleep. We search the house and find a rusting box fan which we place on a dark mahogany dresser at the foot of the bed. It puffs out lurching gusts and we all climb onto the bed and arrange ourselves to best avail of the breeze, finally falling asleep in the pre-dawn and not waking until nearly ten o'clock in the morning.

Over the next few days we buy more fans. I enroll the children in swimming lessons and we buy a second car. Tony leaves on another business trip and I decide to take the children to Canada's Wonderland. Terrified, driving on the wrong side of the road, I have my elder two primed to remind me constantly to drive on the right. They take their duty very seriously and every time we slow at a stop street or a red light, they loudly chime in unison "stay right." We make it. Breathe.

I rely on the radio for adult company in these early days. I am perplexed by weather and traffic reports.

"If you're going to the cottage, give yourself plenty of time - traffic is moving very slowly on the 400."

"Weather forecast for cottage country this long weekend is hot. Factor in the humidity and we could be looking at temperatures in the 34 degree range."

I am beginning to visualize one enormous recreational facility situated on a massive lake to which Canadians migrate en masse at weekends. The next door neighbours greet me briefly

on Friday as they climb into their heavily laden car. “Off to the cottage,” they shout in unison. “We’ll have you over next week.” My husband comes home from work and I ask him whether his co-workers have all left for the cottage. He admits there was an early exodus from the office. With four months of life in Canada now under his belt, he explains to me what he has learned about cottage life and I begin to understand the phenomenon. He tells me cottages have often been owned by Canadian families for generations and they are shared within the family. I realize that we will likely never own a cottage; we won’t qualify, too new off the boat. Maybe our children will be sufficiently Canadian in due course.

We spend our weekends driving in ever increasing circles around Toronto. Interest rates on mortgages run at 18%, part of what little money we have is tied up in South Africa and will only be available to us at a devalued rate. Tony faces the prospect of a long commute if we are going to be able to buy even a modest house. We buy a 3 bedroom house in a sub-division in Acton. The town has a pretty lake and the school is walking distance from the house. We are blessed with wonderful neighbours. Nancy and Bryan, their two daughters and a Great Dane dog become our first Canadian friends. Their children play well with ours and soon I notice Canadian terms and expressions replacing South African terms of speech. On a Sunday morning soon after we arrive we are startled to our feet by the wail of wheezing bagpipes. A quick look out the kitchen window reveals Bryan, in full Highland gear, feet planted firmly on his deck, bagpipes slung around his ample chest, giving it all he’s got. We acclimatize to these weekend sessions and Nancy becomes my go-to person for all my needs. With humour and thinly veiled amusement she comes with me to purchase school clothes and winter gear for the children. She keeps me on an even keel in these early days and when it all becomes too much, we have a glass of wine.

School starts in September and the children sound more Canadian every day. There are a few misunderstandings with other children and teachers, but they learn very quickly and settle in with new friends. I buy a bike and with the little guy strapped into the toddler seat behind me, I explore the town. He squeals with delight as we tear down the little hill by Fairy Lake. I revel in my new found freedom. Security concerns would have precluded such fun in South Africa, security and fear of being considered at the very least, eccentric. A crazy white woman.



Excitement at first snowfall

We quickly become busy, taken up with new experiences and opportunities. Our first winter is disappointedly mild. To the amusement of neighbours, new toboggans are used to slide down the tiny bare hill in our backyard, a hill scantily lined with skids of grey watery snow. I am tired of heavy skies by the time April dumps a full winter storm on us. May brings the first real glimpse of spring and by June we are visiting old friends who live in Ottawa, and the children have their first opportunity to canoe. July

Echoes From the Past

brings an invitation to a cottage. Lively days water skiing, delighted children hanging onto a tire flying across the lake behind the ski boat, and wonderful long evenings watching the sun go down, the outline of a fishing boat against the night sky - our men loathe to call it a day. And as darkness becomes established, our first glimpse of the Northern Lights, an awesome turbulent spectacle of green and blue, a spellbinding experience.

A year passes, and then another and we move to a new home in Oakville. The children transform into natural Canadians under our noses. We suspect our way of speech is becoming a bit of an embarrassment to them in front of their friends. Probably too young to find us quaint, they likely see us as odd and wish we were bland like the rest. So we capitulate, the pavement becomes the sidewalk, I start to fill the car with gas, not petrol. I too am weary of being foreign, I want to be void of any distinguishing characteristics. Canada is our new norm, our point of reference. We are where we will stay, where we will grow old and they will grow up.



I was born in Dublin, Ireland. When I was 5 years old, we moved to Africa. My father, a lawyer, worked for the British Colonial Legal Service and over the years we lived in Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, Kenya, Hong Kong and Guyana.

From an early age I became comfortable travelling by air to and from boarding school and I have always loved the thrill of new places and new endeavours. After I finished secondary school and armed with a secretarial diploma, I continued to travel, finally settling down with my husband in Pretoria, South Africa.

We immigrated to Canada in 1982. I now live with my husband in the country outside of Milton, not too far from my children and their expanding families.



Abba Jan

by Rubina Ali

National Geographic magazine had this slogan once: “We talked about the environment before anybody else did,” or something to that effect. When I think about my *Abba Jan*, as I called my grandfather, this is what comes to mind. He was not a famous writer or journalist but he was a visionary in his own right. He could visualize the future. Was it comprehension of life in all its complexity or had he read a lot? I can’t say with certainty. What I can say is that he not only talked about some issues but also wrote profusely to the letters to the editor section of a respected English language newspaper of Pakistan, *Dawn*.

One of his favorite topics was the environment, mostly prudent use of the territory of Pakistan. Pakistan is a country that has mountains in the north and the Arabian Sea in the south. It offers the whole spectrum of the natural world from snow-capped mountains in the north to arid sandy deserts in the south. He had strong opinions about how the resources of the country should be used. For example, he believed that the mineral rich but arid province Baluchistan should have all the industry whereas the two fertile northern provinces of the country should be used to grow crops so that the country is always self-reliant for feeding its populace. This actually is a very simplified version of his ideas. He obviously had elaborate schemes and plans that he liked to talk and write about. Solar energy was already being used in his household since the water was warmed in the sun for bathing purposes whenever it was possible.

The scope of his opinions and concerns was vast and varied. Education was his special interest too, be it on the country level or of his own kids or the kids around him. He himself could not get the education that I think a person of his intellect should have had. He was not a lawyer, engineer or PhD himself but he had this knack of knowing what kind of education would suit a particular child. So not only did he guide his own children into the kind of education that would suit their aptitudes and personalities, he ended up maintaining a household where there were always kids of friends and family living in the house for the purpose of education.

Some of these kids came from underprivileged families also but that was not the sole criterion. If parents thought that they were unable to reign in their child's reckless urges, he was sent to my grandparent's household. At one point when the family members should have been only three, there were seventeen people living in the house.

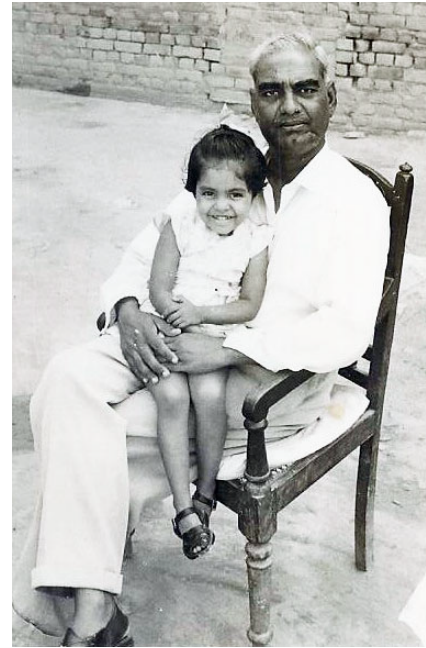
Today when I think about my grandparents' household I realize that they were not people of very substantial means. I don't know how they were able to afford to feed all these extra mouths. Education was subsidized in the country. In undivided India and in Pakistan also, as far as I understand, the fees for graduate level education were not that high. The kids that lived in their household most probably paid their own fees. In a few cases, I think my grandparents helped them with their financial needs. Basically it was the discipline that was needed in those young lives that the household provided.

Incidentally I was also one of the kids that lived in that household for educational purposes. My father, an engineer, had to live in residential colonies adjacent to cement plants where he worked. The cement plants were mostly in the far flung areas of the country. There were public schools in the villages around the plants but my parents wanted to send their firstborn to a good private school hence I ended up in Presentation Convent Hasan Abdal.

When I lived in that household I was the only child living in that house. They were near their retirement age by that time. I was their first grandchild. I know I was their favorite and I enjoyed many privileges but I also have tasted the flavor of that discipline first hand. I suffered during the harsh winter months of Punjab from this chronic cough that would not go away. Abba Jan told my grandmother that the only cure for this kind of cough is Cod Liver Oil. In my opinion, it was a highly toxic substance with a honey-like consistency which nobody could force down my throat. My grandma realized that this feat was beyond her prowess so she told my grandfather that it was his job. I remember after every evening meal, I followed him where "that" extra-large bottle was kept. I use to gulp it down without as much as a squeal. He was a formidable man and you did whatever he told you to do. I really don't remember if there was a doctor involved in this scenario but after that winter and after two bottles of that *thing* I never had that kind of cough again.

The household was always very busy though, at that time when I lived with them, we were only three family members and I think one male help who stayed in the night and a female cook who came in the day but there were kids who came to get religious and I would say cultural education from my grandmother but they also wanted my grandfather to help them in other subjects. So the veranda turned into a busy classroom in the evening. I mentioned cultural because after the education there were poetry recital sessions and sometimes prose of acclaimed writers was also read out aloud.

Though he had very progressive ideas, interestingly, he always resisted new technologies like television etc. Maybe because he hated waste in every shape and form and TV in his eyes was a waste of time. Though I remember eventually, when he bought one, he ended up liking



Abba Jan and I

some of the general knowledge shows a lot. News time also became a very important hour of the day once the TV entered the house.

Abba Jan had phenomenal photographic memory. He could recite paragraph after paragraph from his favorite books. He even remembered news items from newspapers and could repeat them verbatim. Creation of Pakistan was a very exciting event in his life. He was very passionate about Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation. M. A. Jinnah was a bar at law from Lincoln's Inn in London, England. Abba Jan used to relish in the narration of the details of how logically and intellectually M. A. Jinnah or Quaid-e-Azam (leader of the nation), as he was called in Pakistan, handled the *case of Pakistan* so to speak. Interestingly, he was always full of praise for the other dominant nation of undivided India that is Hindus. He praised them for their diligent pursuit of knowledge. The Hindus of southern India held more reverence in his eyes because the percentage of educated people was higher in the southern provinces.

Arithmetic was his forte too. I have not seen anybody who can multiply and divide three digit numbers in their minds and so quickly. On second thought, maybe on TV, few and far between but never in real life. I think as it is, with the popularity of calculators and computers we are losing this skill. It was a game with him and he would challenge people around him to test him. This was part of the evening routine also.

He was very punctual in a society which does not value this trait as a virtue hence, sometimes his ever-loving and obedient offspring would be in situations where they would reach a venue before even the hosts had arrived and would leave before the party ended.

My memories of him are generally pleasant because I was his favorite but if I do an objective analysis of the situation I feel that he had no patience for stupidity even mediocrity. His derision for people who were not very smart could sometime show through his otherwise very pleasant demeanor resulting in uncomfortable situations. I don't think being politically correct meant a lot in that day and age. Besides, I met him in his advanced years when people let go of their filters and usually do not care about how people perceive them.

I think for me the time that I spent in my grandparents' household was full of golden moments. It brought me very close to my grandparents. I wish every grandchild would have that kind of exposure that introduces you to that wisdom and experience that your parents do not have the time to give.



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."



Building Dreams

by Gillian Reynolds

Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." I was moved by those words from the song, "Beautiful Boy" by John Lennon, when I first heard them in 1970, because that has been a recurring theme in my life. 1970 was the same year we bought land in rural Milton.

It was never my plan to build my own house, but somehow I ended up doing it twice, once in England and again in Canada. Maybe it contributed to the divorce of my husband in England, so why on earth would I risk doing it again a second time? Of course, the circumstances were entirely different: the country, the decade, the husband.

I married my childhood sweetheart, Terry, on October 6th, 1962, just about the time the Beatles got their first number one hit, "Please, Please Me" and the Rolling Stones released their first single, "Come On." For the first few years of our married life, we lived with my parents in Water Orton, near Birmingham. Then one day in 1965, some friends told us about plots of land for sale in Meriden (the dead centre of England). And so the seeds of an idea were planted, which grew into our very own bungalow.

We decided to buy the land, have a bungalow built and finish it off ourselves – Terry being a carpenter and me a "Gill-of-all-Trades." The clincher was that it was within walking distance from The Bull, an old coaching inn, and also to the bus into Birmingham, where I worked as a legal secretary. A mortgage of 2,200 pounds sterling (approximately \$5,000) at 6% was arranged with the Abbey National Building Society in 1966. For years, Terry and I had been faithfully making monthly deposits with them. That was the norm back then.

The development was just one road, called the Croft, with about twenty building sites. The other landowners were DINKs like us (Double Income, No Kids). The sharing of ideas and experiences forged a common bond between us.

It was a challenging prospect, but being young, energetic and enthusiastic, we were undaunted. There were so many decisions to make: who should we hire, what colour should the

kitchen cabinets be? Coordinating everything was the most difficult part, but we muddled along, by gosh and by golly.

Every weekend we could hardly wait to visit our little plot of land to see the progress. One Saturday, we went there prepared to make some final touches before ordering the windows. As we crawled up the road in our little Morris Minor van, we thought we were seeing things. "The windows are in our house!" I cried out.

"That's impossible," my husband said. His eyes and mouth were open wide with amazement, as he slowed the car to a stop.

"Maybe it's our Fairy Godmother," I quipped, hopping out.

In a daze, we walked around the bungalow. Sure enough, all the windows were in. Our minds were racing trying to solve this puzzle, when Jim and Linda strode across the road, looking very upset. "What's up?" I asked.

"There's no bloody windows in our house. That's what's up." Jim replied. His face was red with anger.

"Ohhhhh!" was our joint response. The mystery of our magical windows suddenly became crystal clear. A dyslexic glazier had measured up our house and installed the windows in it instead of theirs. Jim and Linda failed to see the funny side of it. We, on the other hand, were delighted, after we had struck a sweet deal with the glazing company. They only charged us for the glass.

Weekends were spent finishing off the inside of the bungalow. Occasionally, we would take time out to walk down to the Bull for a drink. I found the musty smell of the old building almost intoxicating. It was evidence of a by-gone age, when Meriden was a major town, and passengers travelling by horse-drawn carriages would take their rest at this old coaching inn. The aroma of beer and cigarette smoke somehow added to the atmosphere. My favourite drink was a schooner of sherry from an oak barrel, which stood on the bar. I could drink 3 1/2 back then. Don't ask what happened when I was half way through the fourth!

Although it wasn't finished, we moved into our home on March 24th, 1966. I moved out



*Gill's first house in Meriden, England,
March 1966*

on November 23rd the same year. I had known for some time that my husband was having an affair. When things finally came to a head, I decided to leave, but not before visiting a lawyer to make sure of my rights. A year later, we were divorced. I came away from the whole experience with the princely sum of 2,000 pounds and a somewhat jaded view of men and marriage.

That was the end of my marriage, and also the beginning of the end of the Beatles, after John Lennon met Yoko Ono. I survived. Just water under the bridge. Two years later, in March of 1968, I met Bryan, who was everything I was looking

for in a man: kind, thoughtful, sincere, trustworthy, responsible, and good looking into the bargain. We married the next year, and on October 17th we were on the Cunard MS Queen Elizabeth II bound for New York and on our way to Canada.

Echoes From the Past

When people asked: “Why are you going to Canada?” I would tell them, “Australia is too far away and the political situation too unstable in South Africa. Actually, we want to work in America, but you can’t do that without a job lined up. That should be easy when we are living in Canada. Anyway, it’s only for a year.”

Not only did we decide to stay in Canada, but to build our own house. That was the last thing that I wanted to do, because I knew how hard it would be, especially in a country where everything was unfamiliar.

We met Christine and Bill at the East York Ski Club. We had a lot in common with them and so became friends, and remain so to this day. Their plan was to buy a house in the country west of Toronto. Every Sunday, they would drive around checking out properties for sale. At first, we went along for the ride, but soon we got caught up in their excitement and decided we wanted to buy property close to them. One idea was to purchase an old farmhouse between us and split it into two, but that turned out to be impractical.

One Sunday, in October, 1970, we all went off to look at two adjoining fifteen acre parcels of land on the Niagara Escarpment in rural Milton, on the Sixth Line of Nassagaweya. On one of them, stood an old barn. As we were approaching it, the neighbour, an elderly man wearing dirty overalls, ambled up to us saying, “Waste of time looking at that land.....tied up with an estate.” Fortunately, Christine didn't trust the old guy and phoned the real estate agent the next day, who told her, “Take no notice of old Jackson. He's just trying to put you off buying because he's using the barn for his pigs and chickens. You'd better act fast, though, because there's a lot of interest in those properties.” Oh, we were so naive back then!

We met the realtor on Tuesday evening. It was foggy that night, which made it impossible to see what the rest of the land looked like. She described it to us. It sounded nice, so the next day we submitted our offers of \$1,000 an acre, which were accepted.

We could hardly wait until the weekend when we were able to see what we had bought.

There was a cool breeze blowing on that bright autumn day when, as proud landowners, we walked to the hedgerow at the end of the front field, where the farmer had piled all the stones that he had cleared many years before. Crossing over the stream and the lowland, we climbed up over the ridge to another field, past a pond and through the woods to the rear boundary, which was half a mile back. Some of the trees in the old growth forest were adorned with moss or vines of choke cherry and others were in various stages of decay. The limestone rocks were odd shapes and sizes and some were moss-covered. As we trudged along, our senses feasted on nature's bounty. It was a cornucopia of sensual delight.

We were masters of all we surveyed!

It was surreal for us folks who had always lived in the city or suburbia, where boundary disputes were fought over a few inches. The frontage of Chris and Bill's house in Toronto was smaller than the length of their car. Now each piece of land was 330 feet wide!



*Gill on the site where the house was built,
June 1971*

Echoes From the Past

Plan A was to buy pre-fabricated houses, but after adding it all up, it was more than we could afford. Plan B was to build our own bungalows. And so it was “Déjà vu, all over again” for me.

Rather than just finishing off the house, this time we had to orchestrate the whole thing, which proved to be more difficult than we anticipated. Because none of us had any building experience in Canada (although Bryan had an engineering background), we thought it best to make it a joint (ad)venture, learning as we went along, by trial and error. Besides it would be more fun doing it together.

The first problem was which couple would buy the land with the barn on it, which we both wanted, even though we had decided to demolish it later and divide the materials. “Let’s cut for it,” I suggested. We couldn’t think of a better idea, so out came the cards. We lost!

The barn came in useful as a place to camp out at weekends when we visited our land. The neighbours referred to us as “those kids from the city.” We slept in one of the rooms formerly used for storing grain. Bryan and Bill installed an old pot belly stove that helped keep us warm. They found it in a pile of junk.

One Sunday night, Chris and Bill left early. We were inside the old granary, packing up, when we heard a clap of thunder. It wasn’t long before we could hear the pitter patter of rain on the tin roof. As the storm strengthened, water started running down the chimney pipe onto the stove from a hole in the roof. Bryan quickly grabbed a metal pot and, standing on a stool, he tried to catch the drops. Suddenly, the chimney was struck by lightning. Some of the water splashed onto Bryan’s hand, causing him to drop the pot and fall off the stool. The water was charged with electricity. He was shaking from head to foot and I think his hair stood on end, but I’m not sure. “Oh, my God!” I cried. “Are you alright?” I was holding him, trying to calm him down and stop him shaking, which was freaking me out.

“I’ll be O.K. in a minute,” he replied lamely. “Just need to lie down for a bit.”

He quickly recovered, but didn’t feel strong enough to drive home. As a postscript, I must tell you that he actually got struck by lightning again after we had moved into the house - similar scenario: trying to catch water leaking from a window, when the house was struck. He keeps buying lottery tickets, but he’s never won anything!

That reminds me of another time when we had a violent downpour. It had been a hot, humid day and we had been working hard, planting fruit trees. The rain was running off the barn roof in torrents. Christine laughingly suggested, “Maybe we should stand outside the barn and have a shower.”



*“Happy as pigs in a trough”
Bryan and Bill, Sept. 1971*

“What a good idea,” said Bill. We all agreed. After Chris and I had made sure that the men were securely inside the old granary, we quickly stripped off. The cool water on our warm bodies felt luxurious. We hastily dried off, got dressed, let the men out and told them it was their turn.

A few weeks later, we showed them (and everyone else) the photo that we had taken of their naked bodies. They had no idea that we had sneaked out while they were

busy showering while standing in a pig trough. Pity we didn't have a zoom lens! "We were too gentlemanly to think of doing such a thing," Bryan commented.

Throughout 1971, friends and family would come and visit us at weekends. It was a pleasant day's outing for them. They would turn up with lawn chairs, playpens, food and drink. We made long tables out of planks of wood sitting on barn beams. I have fond memories of those times.

We had no toilet. When you "had to go" you had to go to the ruins of an old pig pen. What was left of the four-foot high stone walls afforded some privacy. Inside were rocks overgrown with vines and weeds: a perfect home for snakes. When "nature called," we handed our guests the stick. "What's that for?" they would ask.

"Frightens the snakes away when you bang it on the ground in front of you," we told them.

If nature called in the night when we were asleep in the old granary, you could use the plastic bucket which was in the main barn. One night, I lay awake, listening to the coyotes howling, trying to tell myself that I didn't really have to go. It's no use, I thought, I'll have to get up. I crept out of bed and opened the door, making sure not to make a sound. As I was crouching down, I felt a bat swoop over my head, skimming my hair. I stood up, pulled up my pants and ran into the bedroom faster than a frightened squirrel. "A bat nearly flew into my hair!" I shrieked. I think my screaming may have woken everyone up.

Bill and Bryan stumbled out of bed, grabbing the first things they could lay their hands on: a broom and a shovel. They ran after the bat, shouting. Eventually, they chased it into the other room, which had previously housed the neighbour's chickens.

Chris and I became pregnant sometime during that summer. Because my birth was early and hers was late, it so happened that our babies were born within two weeks of each other. I'm sure we were the subject of much gossip, especially as Chris's son Ross had blond hair like Bryan and my daughter Tamra had dark hair like Bill!

It was difficult for us to decide where in the front fields to build our bungalows. The Escarpment is limestone and some of it is surface rock. After we had finished digging test holes, it looked like a team of groundhogs had been having a field day.

Then along came Mr. Sproule, with his witching tool (which looked like a bent metal coat hanger) to show us the best location for the wells. A temporary hydro wire was hooked up from the main supply on the road.

Bryan and I were lucky to find a house for rent half a mile down the road, which we moved into in May of 1972. That was the year when John Lennon and Yoko Ono released their first album. The Rolling Stones were still rolling along, gathering no moss.



Picnic outside the barn, June 1971

Echoes From the Past

Chris and Bill and their little baby stayed with us every weekend. The men would work on the building site and Chris and I would take turns to help them or babysit and cook dinner. I preferred helping the men.

Mario Casarin built the foundation blocks on our house first, and so we were able to start working on our framework. As luck would have it, the completion of Chris and Bill's basement coincided with the visit of their friends Tim and Wendy from Florida. We left our house and started working on theirs, with the help and guidance of Tim, who was a carpenter. We learnt a



*Gill and Bryan's house on the 6th Line, Nassagaweya,
Oct. 1974*

lot from him on how to speed things up, so it only took a couple of weeks to finish the shell of their house.

We moved into our house as soon it was habitable (sounds familiar), when the inside plumbing was completed. That was in May of 1974, just before our son Shawn was born on July 5th.

It had been three and a half years since we bought the land. That was one of the happiest times of my life. We didn't waste time worrying about how long it was taking or

all the things that didn't go according to plan. After all, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."



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.



My First House Revisited

by Gillian Reynolds

William Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden was born in Wilmcote, near Stratford-on-Avon. That is where I was conceived but I was born in Birmingham at 168 Drews Lane, Ward End. My mother and two brothers, Fred and John evacuated to Wilmcote in 1940, because of the threat of bombing the Wolsely car factory which was at the top of our road. Dad was in the Home Guard and visited them at weekends. Mom wanted to have her war baby delivered in her own home by the midwife, which is the reason they left Wilmcote,

I lived at 168 Drews Lane for nine years. It was a happy, carefree time for me, but not so for my parents, who had to deal with the aftermath of war, including shortages of food and money.

Fortunately for me, I had the opportunity to revisit the old homestead with Fred and John, just before Christmas in 2004. My husband Bryan, our son Shawn and I were spending Christmas with Fred and Maureen. In the thirty-five years that we had lived in Canada, we had never been "over 'ome" for Christmas.

It was Fred's idea. He was in the process of writing his life story and wanted some photos of the house where he had lived for twenty years. I jumped at the chance.

It felt strange walking through the gate to the front door of the semi-detached house. Like most of the others, the wall had been demolished and the front garden paved over to park the car. Other than that, it did not look much different. The window frames and clay roof tiles were original, although after 72 years the tiles were now covered in lichen.

Knowing that "money talks" Fred had decided that a hundred pounds cash might help persuade the owner to let us look around.

We knocked the door. The owner opened it. "Sorry to bother you," I said, "But my two brothers and I used to live here. I'm visiting from Canada, and I wondered if you could possibly let us look around. I realize that this may be inconvenient, so we'd like to give you some money for your trouble." The look of shock was evident on his face. He was speechless.

Fred broke the silence: "Here are the original deeds to the house. Our father bought it in 1934 for three hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds, you say. Well that's kind of you," the man responded. I think he was more impressed with the cash than the original deeds. "I paid 22,000 pounds for it, but that was in the

Echoes From the Past

seventies.” Then he added, “Of course, you can look around, but you won’t be able to go upstairs because my wife’s ill in bed.”

As we entered the tiny square hall that led into the living room, memories of my childhood came flooding back.

The house seemed to have shrunk, but of course I was smaller then. It is only four meters wide.

As you would expect, some changes had taken place. The “living room” had been extended to include the old kitchen and the new kitchen was a brick-built extension, replacing our veranda.

I found it hard to imagine how we managed to get all our furniture in such a small space: a sofa and two easy chairs, a dining room set, a piano and a bookshelf on which sat the wireless. A coal-burning open fire was the only heat source. Chilblains were quite common back then. In winter, my back felt the cold draught coming underneath the door, which would have been worse without the long sausage-like cushion that was placed in the gap. The floor was covered with linoleum with a multi-colored carpet in the middle, worn thin with age.

When I was eight years old, we acquired a television set: a black and white Ferguson nine-inch. I was so excited because I thought that the programs would be the same as on the radio but with pictures. How disappointed to find that I would not get to see what Walter Gabriel of the Archers actually looked like.

Because we were the first on our street to get one, neighbours came round to watch anything that was on T.V. even ballet and opera. The broadcasts only lasted for a few hours each evening. As fillers between programs, they would show interludes of farmers ploughing a field or a potter at his wheel, and test cards. How different to today when we have hundreds of channels and numerous fast-paced high-priced ads.

Sunday tea was the only meal we ate in the living room. It was also the only meal that Dad prepared. We ate it sitting in front of the coal fire. It consisted of bread, toasted over the hot coals with a long toasting fork, lots of butter, a stick of celery, with salt, and, of course, a cuppa tea. We drank lots of tea when I was growing up. I don’t remember drinking much water. We also had “pop” such as Tizer, Vimto, Dandelion & Burdock or Ice Cream Soda as a treat, as well as orange cordial, which was diluted with water.

The piano was an integral part of the living room. I often wonder why we had one, because no one in the family could play it. I have fond memories of singsongs in our living room, accompanied by Bill Hemmings on the piano. That’s where I developed my love of music. When we moved to our next house, my mom made me have piano lessons. She told me, “If you can play the piano, you’ll be invited to all the parties.” Of course I believed her and, because I wanted to be popular, I stuck at it for a short while, until I realized I would have been more popular if I could play the guitar. Playing musical instruments was not my forte, although I did learn the recorder at school. After much practice, producing sounds that sounded like a pig going to slaughter, I learned to play a few simple tunes. The only one I can remember was “Come to my window” or was it “Go from my window” - for heaven’s sake!

We spent a lot of time listening to the wireless. Most of the programs were for adults, but I remember how John and I were riveted to the radio when “Dick Barton, Special Agent” was on. I can still remember the signature tune.

The living room led into the tiny kitchen, containing a wooden table, two chairs, a high stool and a Welsh dresser, all painted green.

The bathroom was off the kitchen. In the early years, because hot water was limited, we all shared the same bath water. Being the youngest, I was the last one to go in. How I hated getting into that murky water. “Don’t throw the baby out with the bath water.” In later years, we had an immersion heater, which was turned on every Friday, providing hot water for bathing. That was when we washed our hair (whether it needed it or not!)

Off the kitchen was the veranda, where we spent most of our time, even in the winter, thanks to the electric fire, which sat on a green cupboard. Dad made it out of reclaimed wood. This piece of furniture, which is nearly eighty years old, has been moved three times. Fred, the collector of all things relating to family, keeps it purely for sentimental reasons.

Echoes From the Past

My mom loved animals, especially cats. We always had one or two of our own, plus several strays, which she fed. We knew which were “our” strays, because they were branded. When the cats came in from the cold, they got a little too close to the electric fire until their fur started to burn. I can still recall the smell. We also had a lovely dog named Digger. Guess what he used to do?

I loved being in the veranda because it was bright and cheerful, compared to the rest of the house. We ate most of our meals out there. For many years after the war, food was rationed, so Mom had a job to make both ends meet (meat). To stretch the meat, it was served with Yorkshire pudding, dumplings or toast, or made into a pie. When things were really tight, she would open a can of Spam (Specially Prepared American Meat), and deep-fry battered slices. How I hated that! We also had fish and rabbit. Chicken was a luxury we could rarely afford. Mom made us eat bread and butter with canned fruit to “fill us up.” Most fresh fruit was made into pies for the same reason. Then there were steamed puddings like spotted dick with raisins or suet puddings like jam roly-poly and of course bread-and-butter pudding. Pasta and rice were made into puddings with milk, eggs, vanilla and sugar.

I remember one dinner in particular. Mom called out from the kitchen, “Tea's ready. Have you seen our John anywhere?” I did remember where I last saw him. It was in the garage at the bottom of the garden.

“Umm. He's in the garage,” I told her. “Josie and I locked him in there for a joke, but I, err, forgot about him. I'm sorry. I'll go and get him.” I ran down to the bottom of the garden to let him out. He didn't make a fuss. If it had been me locked up, I would have screamed the place down.

I have a vivid memory of the day I decided that I wanted short hair, like my friend. When I was much younger, I had cut off my fringe because I didn't want it any more. In my child's simple mind, it seemed a logical way to get rid of bangs. Remembering how upset mom was, I thought it best to ask her to do it this time. She was sitting in the veranda doing some sewing. “Are you sure you want me to cut your hair?” she asked.

“Yes, Mom, I'm sick of my pigtails.” Without further ado, she grabbed the tailor's scissors that were handy and cut them both off. Then, of course, she had to neaten up my uneven hair.

While all this was going on, in walked Fred. Seeing the pigtails, complete with ribbons, he trapped them in the cupboard drawer so that they were hanging out. He ran out into the garden where John was playing, shouting, “John, come quick, Gillian is stuck in the drawer!”

There was a wringer in the veranda for the laundry, which was always done on Mondays. The laundry tub was just outside the door. One day, I leaned over the tub, lost my balance and fell head first into the sudsy water. I never did that again!

As for the upstairs of the house, I don't remember much going on up there - not in my room at any rate! It was so cold in my bedroom that sometimes I got dressed in bed. On Saturday evenings, Mom would come into my bedroom all dolled up wearing red lipstick and her face covered in powder, smelling of Evening in Paris perfume. “Just going down the road. We'll be back in a bit,” she'd say. Then she would kiss us goodnight and give us each a glass of warm milk and an Aero chocolate bar, as a treat. It didn't take a detective to figure out that she and Dad were going down the street to the pub for a couple of hours and leaving my 12-year-old brother John and myself on our own. It didn't take a psychiatrist to figure out her guilty peace offering.

At the bottom of our long, narrow garden was a chicken coop. It was my brother Fred's job to kill the chickens. I'll never forget watching them running around with their heads cut off, which gave rise to another expression.

Next to the chicken house there was a wooden garage, which was accessed by a right-of-way. The new owner had replaced it with a brick one. What he didn't know was that buried underneath it were the concrete remains of an Anderson air raid shelter. He does now!

Beyond that was an old orchard, which was once part of an estate called The Poplars. What was left of the building was owned by a bicycle pump factory named Britton's. The entrance to Britton's from Drews Lane was through pillars, which had once been the main entrance to The Poplars. The same entrance led to the right-of-way. We were amazed to see the poplar trees still standing after all those years.

Echoes From the Past

Behind the orchard was a tip (where they deposited coal slack) and a river with a path leading from a factory. I was told not to venture beyond the tip, but of course I did. My friends and I used to crawl through the overflow pipe of the river, which would change colour periodically, depending on what chemicals they had dumped in there.

There was one lesson I learned the hard way: Josie and I were walking along the path when two factory workers stopped their bikes to talk to us. One of them said to me, "Do you want a ride on my cross-bar?" He seemed like a friendly chap, so I said, "Yes." And off he took me along the path to a quiet spot. That's when I noticed my friend running away. Alarm bells went off when he started unbuttoning my pinafore dress. Luckily, I managed to escape and ran as fast as my little legs could carry me, never stopping to look back. I never told my mom because she would have scolded me for going there. Even my friend and I never talked about it afterwards. I think we felt embarrassed and just wanted to erase the incident from our memories. I shudder to think of what might have happened had we not escaped.

Another lesson I learned was "Never play with fire." We spent a lot of time in the orchard and loved building dens, which we lit with candles. One day, the grass caught fire. "Quick, go and get some water!" yelled Josie. "I'll try and stop it spreading." I ran backwards and forth with buckets of water from the rain barrel which was next to our house. Finally we got the fire out. Thank goodness no one was home.

There was a lot of hustle and bustle back then, I remember, and lots of noise: the rag and bone man shouting "Any old rags? Any old rags?" and the rumbling of his cart as he pushed it along the road and the clip, clop of the horses and the rattling of the milk bottles as the milkman did his daily rounds. Grownups would fight over the horse manure, which they would put on their rhubarb (we had custard on ours). There were lots of callers in those days: the Fuller Brush man, the insurance man, the window cleaner, the coalman and probably others that I have forgotten.

Every weekday, I went shopping with my mom to "the main," which I later found out was Washwood Heath Road. We would stop at the bakers, the butchers or the fishmongers, the pet food store and my favourite, the grocery store, because Mr. Hunt and Flora always made a fuss of me. Mom would hoist me up onto the counter (how hygienic!), and they fed me bits of broken biscuits and some cheese. And so developed my love of biscuits and cheese.

We never had babysitters, but my parents managed to find times to be on their own. On Sundays, John and I had to go to Sunday school at the Bethel, which was a Methodist church. My parents were not religious. On rainy Saturdays, they would give us the fare to go all the way around the outer circle city bus route. We always sat on the front seat at the top of the double-decker bus. It did not take much to entertain us in those days

I hated rainy Sunday afternoons because John and I were stuck indoors and had to be quiet. That was when our parents had their rest. No doubt, they were recovering from a hangover from the previous night's revelry.

Dad liked his privacy and so we were never allowed to bring friends home, but we learned to live with that. He worked long hours building up his tool making business. Every night he stopped off for a drink on the way home. He never got home until long after I was in bed. It was not much of a life for Mom. In some ways she was like a single mother. Every time I asked Dad if I could go somewhere or do something he'd say, "Ask your mother." I soon learned who was in charge of family matters.

Some Sundays Dad would take Mom, John and I for a drive somewhere, which always ended up at a pub. If we were lucky and it wasn't raining, we could play in the grounds or watch the trains or canal boats. If it was raining, we would be stuck in the car with a packet of crisps and a Vimto, which was quite boring. Woe betides any kid who dared to peek inside the pub and shout "Dad, How much longer?"

Our mother was hard working and generous. She showed her love for her family by always putting us first.

At the end of the tour of the house and garden, we thanked the owner again. All the way home in the car, we chatted about the fascinating experience of revisiting our first house after all those years and how fortunate we were to be able to relive some memories of our time there.

Echoes From the Past

What we did not discuss was how our parents did the best they could for us under the circumstances. But I'm sure we would all agree that they gave us as much as they could afford and they loved us as much as they were able. Another thing I think we would all agree upon: how happy and carefree (most of the time) our years were at 168 Drews Lane.