



*Once Upon a
Memory*

Lifescapes Writing Group 2016
Milton Public Library

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

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

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ISBN 978-0-9880631-4-3

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

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Introduction

Milton Public Library's vision is to "inspire through discovery, collaboration, and creation." The Lifescapes memoir program supports MPL's vision by providing participants with an opportunity to come together and share their personal histories with the community.

The Lifescapes group met for ten weeks, sharing stories, exchanging ideas, and sharpening their writing skills. In this collaborative and supportive atmosphere, the eleven participants drew upon their memories to create wonderful stories which, as you will read, are funny, poignant, meaningful slices of their lives. We sincerely hope you enjoy their stories.

Brantford author, Larry Brown, visited the class one evening to share his expertise. Mr. Brown is a skilled and congenial instructor who inspires his students to rediscover long-forgotten memories and to write about them in new and creative ways. Mr. Brown offers writing workshops at MPL several times a year and we thank him for his dedication.

The members of Milton Public Library's Lifescapes writing group are pleased to present *Once Upon a Memory*, the fifth annual anthology of memoirs produced by MPL.

Print copies of the anthologies are available for sale for a limited time. They may also be borrowed from MPL or viewed on the website: www.mpl.on.ca.

Joan Faehrmann
Adult Services Librarian
Milton Public Library
Milton, Ontario

April 2016



A Moving Experience

By Gillian Reynolds

The engine roared as the moving van got ready to leave. The sound jolted me into reality and forced me to face the stark realization that we were really leaving the bungalow we had lived in for thirty years. It heralded the end of an era and the dawn of a new beginning.

I started to panic, thinking that we needed a few more reminders of the old homestead. I ran up to the driver and said, “Is there room for a couple more things? It won’t take a minute.” Quickly I gathered a few of the limestone rocks and weathered tree roots from the front garden and placed them in the only space available in the van. They will help fill in the spaces in our new garden, I thought - until the perennials get established.

You can accumulate a lot of stuff in thirty years, especially if you are packrats like us, and worse still, if you have the room to store it. We had lots of room: a four-horse barn, now deserted, a large shed, and half of the basement. Then there was the old car and snowmobile, which our son intended to fix up one day, hidden in the trees of our fifteen acre property. Both of our children had left home. Most of their possessions had stayed. “You have lots of room,” they said.

I had tried to get motivated to purge some of our surplus stuff by reading books like *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui*, but my half-hearted attempts to minimalize met with minimal success, even though I understood how Feng Shui works: “Holding on to unwanted or unneeded possessions keeps us stuck in life.”



Our Country House, 1976

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Sorting through stuff can be quite draining, physically and emotionally - and having allergies didn't help either. Plus, making decisions has never come easy to me. The secret, I found, was to take a break now and then to clear my head. I would go outside and watch the birds feeding or an ant crawling along the deck.

As we started giving things away, amazing things began to happen. As the bible says: "Give and it will be given to you, a good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38) The more we gave away, the more our lives became abundant in so many ways.

Prosperity came into our lives from various sources and in different forms - an inheritance, gifts, rebates, refunds etc. My health supplement business started to prosper. I remember the day I went to the bank to draw out some money. As I was examining my passbook, I noticed there was a large deposit in my account. I explained to the teller that the bank must have made an error. "I'll go and check to see if I can find out who it was from," she said. Five minutes later, she returned, saying: "It's from Fred Smith, Esquire. He must be a lawyer."

"Fred Smith's my brother in England, and he is certainly no lawyer."

When I got home, I phoned him up to thank him for his generosity. He told me that he had decided to give away part of the proceeds of sale of a business. "I thought it would be a nice surprise," he said.

"Nice!" I cried, "More like wonderful. I was totally gob smacked."

As it turned out, we had a year to sort out all our stuff. It wasn't supposed to happen that way, but having the luxury of time, we decided to do it the hard way. Being "environmentally friendly," there would be no dumpsters for us. Every single thing we owned had to be picked, packed, pitched or parted with in some other way. Apart from some large objects like machinery and furniture etc. which were sold by auction, we managed to give away most of the things we didn't want to someone who did. The problem was finding that certain someone. I lost count of how many trips we took to the goodwill shops, and of course to the dump to get rid of the stuff that nobody would want.

Moving had not really been on our agenda. We were quite happy living in our horse farm on the Sixth Line of Nassagaweya, even though it was a bit remote and required a lot of work. It had been a great place to bring up our two children. Our daughter Tamra had her horses and son Shawn loved dirt bike riding and making tree forts. Now our birds had left the nest, which left the two of us floating about in this big house, and with all this land that we didn't need.

House prices kept going up and up and the worry was, "When will the housing boom bubble burst?" If it hadn't been for that fateful Friday in August, 2001, when I was doing my weekly shop in Milton, we might still be there now. I had read in the newspaper about a group that was fighting a proposed new adult subdivision behind the E.C. Drury schools, called Drury Park. Out of idle curiosity, I drove to the proposed site, which was next to a wooded area. I



Gill packing, 2001

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parked the car and strolled along a trail amongst the trees. I wondered how many of them would be left once the estate was finished. It was a bright sunny day and I had time to spare, so I decided to investigate further. I drove to the site office on Main Street to look at the site plan and was pleased to see that most of the woodlot would remain. Too bad I didn't know about this earlier, I thought. All the best sites have gone. However, on closer examination, there was one site backing on to the school and opposite the storm water pond which had a different coloured dot on it. "What does that mean?" I asked the sales lady.



Centennial Forest, 2001

"Someone just backed out, because the closing date has been delayed," she said.

I think I could live there, I thought. "How much deposit do I have to put down to buy it," I asked her.

"Nothing now, but we need a certified cheque for \$10,000 within ten days," she explained.

So that was that. I went shopping and bought a house. Now all I had to do was break the news to my husband Bryan: a man of routine, who hates change and surprises of any kind. He would have been quite content to stay in our old house forever. I, on the other hand, was fed up with being "asset rich and cash poor" and wanted to take advantage of the healthy real estate market.

When Bryan came home from work that afternoon, he sauntered into the kitchen where he found me singing along to "We Will Rock You" on the radio and chopping up cabbage for a cole slaw dish for the neighbours' pot luck later on. "What did ya do today?" he asked casually, opening his briefcase, removing his sandwich box and placing it on the counter.

"Well actually," I hesitated. "I bought a house."

"You did what?!" he said, with furrowed brow. He looked at my face quizzically, trying to figure out whether I was joking or serious. Seeing my worried look, his expression changed to anger and he shouted, "Have you gone stark raving mad?!" I started rambling on about how it was such a great location and how lucky we were to get that site and how we could live there for a year, make a profit and move on if we didn't like it. "Well, I don't care about any of that. I'm not moving from here and that's that!" With that he stormed off to take a shower.

"Don't forget, we're going to Jim and Marion's for supper tonight," I shouted after him, but I don't think he heard me.

If I didn't have such a strong instinct that this was absolutely the right move for us, I would have dropped the subject, because I knew it was going to be a hard sell.

At the pot luck gathering, it was the major topic of conversation. I showed everyone the layout of the bungalow and the architect's impression, as well as the site plan. Bryan stuck to his guns and insisted that he was going nowhere. This caused much jocularity. I think they all went

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home wondering who was going to win this battle. I knew that I had my work cut out. I would have to pull out all the stops, using all my feminine guile and persuasive tactics.

When we got home, he told me he didn't want to talk about it anymore because his mind was made up.

The following afternoon, we were sitting on the back deck, which overlooked the pond and the hundreds of pine and spruce trees, with the rocky ridge providing an interesting backdrop. I was trying to entice a chipmunk to feed out of my hand with a peanut. Bryan had just finished his beer so I thought it was a good time to broach the subject of moving. "Do you really want to spend the rest of your life cutting grass, cleaning the pool, and fixing fences and other stuff? And then in the winter there's all that wood to be chopped and stacked for the stove. And, don't forget coming home from work and spending nearly an hour clearing the snow from the driveway."

"But, I don't mind doing all that. What would I do in a 1400 square foot house on a lot that's 38 x 120 feet?" he asked, tipping his head back to get the last dregs of beer.

"Well for a start, you could finish the basement," I replied. Sensing his resolve starting to weaken, I carried on, "And there's so much to do in town. There's a Seniors' Centre nearby and the Leisure Centre and Conservation Areas and bike trails."

"I can't imagine living anywhere but here. All the things we've done here over the years: building the house, the barn and the fences, haymaking in the summer, skating and cross-country skiing in the winter. Then, there's the pool. Surely, you'd miss that - swimming, in the nude. You'd miss the privacy."

"Yes, there'd be things I'd miss, like the pool and my walk to the woods every day, but there'll be other things to make up for that," I told him. "This was a great place to bring up the kids and I have so many happy memories, but it's time for a change."

After a couple of days, I sensed that he was beginning to cave when he asked, "So what are we going to do with all the money we'd have left at the end of it all?"

Eventually, he succumbed under pressure and gave way to my browbeating. The completion date was supposed to be January 2002, but that was moved to March, May, July and finally September 22nd. We sold our house by private sale to a couple whose house on the Town Line had been expropriated by the quarry. They were able to stay in it as long as they wanted. One of the conditions of the contract was that the closing date would be flexible, which turned out to be our saving grace.

It was a smooth move and we had lots of help. Finally, after they'd all gone home, tiredness overcame me. I looked around at all the boxes and felt totally overwhelmed. "Where do we start?" I asked Bryan wearily. "Oh, to hell with it, let's open a glass of wine and a bag of chips, while we wait for the Chinese meal to be delivered."

We sat together on the front step overlooking the pond, sipping our wine. The trees were gently swaying in the warm breeze, which were mirrored in the pond. Some of the leaves were already hinting at their autumn splendor. The trees had been planted in 1967 as a Centennial project. Guess what our road was called: Centennial Forest Drive.

I thought I would miss the countryside - the pond, the fields, the stream, the old growth forest at the back of the land, the evergreens behind the house and the maple, walnut and black locust trees at the front, but surprisingly I did not. Our house in Drury Park overlooked the pond and the woodlot beyond. The following year, I couldn't believe my ears when I first heard the chorus of spring peepers in the pond, bringing back fond memories of our old home in the country.

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Changing from country mice to town mice was a surprisingly easy transition. We were so busy exploring our new environment that we didn't have time to think about missing the old place. We began to discover the advantages: being able to walk to the shops and being closer to trains and highways. It felt good to be able to afford to buy new stuff for the house. It was like being newly married again only this time with money. We had built the first house ourselves, contracting out some of the work. Most of our money had been ploughed back into the house.

We had fun exploring the many activities that the town had to offer. I felt like a kid in a candy shop. I became a joiner. I wanted to try everything. I became a bit overwhelmed. I have now settled into a nice manageable, balanced routine.

It was a long time before we could do any landscaping, because our house was one of the first to be built. We had to put up with a lot of inconvenience until the last of the 196 houses making up Drury Park was finally completed. Frequently, trucks would roar past our kitchen window at the back to gain access to the other 35 houses on our side of the street. I always made sure I was decent in the morning when I went into the kitchen to make tea.

Thirteen years later, Drury Park is the pride of Milton. Some people call it "Pleasantville" or "Wisteria Lane" because of the landscaping.

We call ourselves "the early settlers" because we were the second people to move in. Some of the residents have moved on to a condo, a retirement or nursing home or to that big old folks' home in the sky.

Every afternoon when the weather is warm, I sit outside on my recliner, drinking my wine and admiring our back garden. It is a typical English garden: a little overgrown, as plants vie for position. It's a case of survival of the fittest. The chain link fence is covered with ivy and Virginia creeper, which would take over the world, if you let it. Every year the patio stones gather more moss (because they are not "rolling stones") I love the bright green velvet patchwork, especially after a rain. I don't know how the moss got there.

A few weeks ago, I noticed an unusual vine growing next to the lavender plant. Every day I checked to see how much it had grown and then one day a purple flower appeared. Turned out it was morning glory, one of my favourite plants. I wonder how that got there, I thought, maybe a bird dropped a seed. It crept



Our new house, 2010



Tamra, Shawn, Gill & Bryan

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along the ground until it found my old tree root, which it latched on to with great fervor. The tree root is now totally covered. It makes for an interesting landscape feature in our garden, together with the limestone rocks from our old house. A permanent connection to our past.



The creeping vine



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.



Pitou Bigelow

By Ken Marvell

Over the years, my father had many ideas of how to become wealthy. Unfortunately, most of those ideas meant others in the family had to do the work, so his ideas didn't succeed very often.

Back in the late 1940s we had a Springer Spaniel dog named Smoky. Smoky was so named because she had jet black, shiny fur. In my father's mind, her distinguishing feature was that "her tail curled up," and that made her special.

Dad was overly protective of Smoky as he had ambitions of breeding her when the time was right, then selling her puppies for a good price: Dad made sure the white picket fence around our back yard was always in good repair so Smoky couldn't get out of the yard and run lose in the neighbourhood. He regularly walked the perimeter of the back yard, checking the fence line and making sure there were no holes dug in the ground where Smoky might crawl under the fence. On many occasions, I recall Dad saying to us, "You kids make sure the gates are always closed and latched behind you whenever you enter or leave the back yard. I don't want Smoky running lose."

Now, what Dad didn't realize was that whenever Smoky was in heat, which to us kids seemed to be very often, most of the neighbourhood dogs could sense it, usually long before Dad was even aware of it.

There was a family named Bigelow, who lived three houses down the street from us and, alas, they had the most homely little runt of a mutt, named Pitou. Full name, as we kids called it, Pitou Bigelow.

Pitou Bigelow, as dumb and horny as he always seemed to be, sensed whenever Smoky was in heat and it was Pitou's two-fold lot in life to; outsmart dad with his fences and miscellaneous ways of protecting Smoky, and secondly, to 'mate' with Smoky.

We kids used to see Pitou Bigelow crouching along the opposite side of the fence, looking for Smoky, trying to figure out how he could get through, or over, or under the fence to reach the object of his desires. Some days he would lie there for hours at a time.

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Every time Dad saw Pitou Bigelow outside our yard, he would yell, “Get out of here you ugly little mutt.” When Pitou ignored Dad’s yelling, which he often did, Dad would reach for a slingshot he made and grab a small bag of garden peas which he kept nearby. To ward Pitou off, Dad would shoot a hand full of those hard peas in Pitou’s direction. Fortunately for Pitou, Dad’s aim wasn’t all that accurate. Pitou would hear the peas hitting the fence pickets with a cracking sort of a sound, and he would run off – until Dad went back into the house.

Dad’s back-up means of trying to keep Pitou at a safe distance was to turn the garden hose on “full force” and spray cold water on Pitou. As he doused Pitou with the cold hose water, Dad was often heard saying, “This will cool you down, you horny mutt.”

When Dad knew Smoky was in full heat, he kept her in the house and any time she had to go outside to piddle or poop, Dad would say to one of us kids, “Smoky needs to go out, so one of you kids get the leash and take her out into the back yard till she goes, but first make sure that mutt, Pitou, isn’t in the yard.”

The company where my father worked, Canadian Arsenals Ltd., owned the house we lived in. As the house at that time was heated by burning coal in the kitchen stove, the company added to the back of the house, what we called a “coal bin.” The coal bin was about five feet high by four feet wide by six feet long. It was built directly behind the kitchen. There was a small opening cut into the kitchen wall, about 16” x 20” in size with a sliding door allowing us to shovel coal directly from the coal bin and carry it over to the stove, without having to go outside.

On cold nights before going to bed, Dad would shovel some coal from the bin and get a good hot fire burning in the stove, to keep the house warm throughout the night until morning, at which time he would add more coal, if needed.

Late one snowy night, from my bedroom which was located upstairs, I heard Dad exclaim as he started to shovel some coal before going to bed. “There’s an animal or perhaps a rat, in the coal bin. I can hear something moving around in there. Get me a light so I can see what it is.”

Mom brought a lamp from the living room, plugged it into an outlet in the kitchen then handed it to Dad. Dad squatted down in front of the wall opening and moved the lamp around inside the coal bin. A few minutes later as Dad reached into the coal bin, I heard him hollering in an angry tone of voice, “It’s that scrawny mutt, Pitou!”

By the time Dad managed to grab Pitou by the scruff of his neck, Pitou’s body was covered from head to tail in thick black coal dust. Wearing only his pajamas and house slippers, Dad picked Pitou up and carried him outside. Then, while standing ankle deep in snow on the veranda, he “tossed” Pitou over the picket fence into a nearby snow drift.

Needless to say, with coal dust all over his hands and the front of his pajamas, and his feet now cold and wet from standing in the newly fallen snow, Dad was ‘not’ in the best of moods. However, years later Dad often laughed whenever he told someone about that horny little mutt, covered in coal-dust, trying to get to Smoky in the house, by way of the coal bin. We never found out how long Pitou might have been in the coal bin or how he ever managed to get in there, in the first place.

The time eventually arrived when Dad felt Smoky was ready to be bred...SUCCESS! Over the following weeks, we watched with excitement and anticipation as Smoky got larger and rounder while the puppies grew inside her. I remember being nearby when Smoky chose to deliver her pups upstairs, in a blanketed box, under my parents’ bed. As a young boy, just five years of age at the time, it was a site to behold, seeing five, ever so tiny puppies, with eyes still closed, huddling together and nursing while Smoky cleaned them by licking their fur.

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Eventually, four of the young puppies went elsewhere, but we kept the fifth puppy which was just as black as Smoky. This puppy was a male and as he was black, yes black as coal, or coke, we named him Cokey, of course.

Years later, when my sister, Marjorie was a teenager and had a boyfriend, she often reminisced about Pitou always hanging around and the things he did. We all laughed when that boyfriend got jealous, hearing so much about Pitou. He thought Pitou Bigelow was a former boyfriend of hers. You can imagine how foolish he felt when informed Pitou was just a homely, horny, little mutt that lived three houses down the street.



My sisters and me holding the five puppies



Smoky and her puppies



I was born in Montreal, Quebec in 1942, the youngest of six children. My brother Gordon was the oldest, followed by four sisters, then me. When I was young, my family moved to a very small predominately French village called St. Paul L'Ermite, located 20 miles east of Montreal, where I grew up. I now reside in Milton, Ont., where I have enjoyed living for the past 37 years.



129 Yonge Blvd.

By Linda Marie Wallace

I would always get so excited when I knew we were going to visit my mother's parents at their home at 129 Yonge Blvd. in Toronto. Living in the small city of North Bay and heading south to the big city seemed to be such a big deal to me, even though I dreaded the long drive because I became sickly from long car rides.

I recall one of these trips with my younger twin siblings, Michael and Karen who I did not like very much. I do believe the feelings were mutual between the three of us. The twins always stuck together and stuck up for one another whether they were in the right or not. Once they were born, I no longer got all the attention. I did not have the spotlight or the centre of attention wherever we visited. Now it just seemed I was the one all my siblings picked on.



Karen, Linda Marie and Michael, North Bay 1970

You can just imagine: my mom on her own, already stressed and pissed off with three young kids all under the age of six, driving to Toronto from North Bay in a '67 red station wagon—you know, the ones with that wood panelling look—no seat belts, climbing all over the backseat and hanging out the windows. Five hours of fighting, yelling, pinching, hair pulling, pushing and shoving and sticking our tongues out at each other. Oh, all those names we yelled back and forth. The bruised arms from grudgingly playing punch buggy. My sister and I would play patty cake and we all played “I Spy with My Little Eye” to pass some of the time in between the fighting and bickering. Oh...how our mother kept any of her sanity!

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During the drive, Michael somehow climbed over the back seat and found our suitcases. Mom yelled, “What are you doing back there, MICHAEL WILLIAM?”

“Getting away from my stupid sisters,” he yelled back.

“Get back in your seat before you get hurt.”

Meanwhile he had already undone the brown leather straps and clicked open the two metal latches on one of the suitcases. These tan leather, scratched and faded suitcases had seen better days. My mom had thrown these cases in the back long before we left, as she was in a hurry to escape. Michael found my mother’s medication that was hidden in the brown elastic compartment in the lid of the old suitcase. My mother was getting angrier by the minute; my sister and I huddled up to the back passenger door as far away from my brother as we possibly could. Our mother was peering back at him through the rear view mirror, yelling, “You little bugger, put that back, and get back in your seat NOW.”

He just gave my mom a “screw you” look and yelled, “No!” as he climbed—more like fell—over the back seat, kicking me in the head as he clumsily landed in the seat right behind my mom. He still had the medication clutched in his small hand. He then proceeded to pretend he was throwing the medication out the open window. Our mom was livid. “Give me the bottle...now!” she yelled, reaching behind with her right hand while keeping her left on the steering wheel.

“Nooo, what are you going to do about it?”

“If you don’t give it to me now, I am going to tan your hide black and blue.” Next thing we knew, my mischievous little brother had thrown the bottle out the window. I was sure our mom was going to leave us all on the side of the road and head to Grama and Grumpy’s on her own. It baffles me to this day that we are all still alive and seem to have our wits and bits about us.

I found something to take my mind off all the insanity that was going on encased in the confines of this metal contraption on four wheels: watching the scenery on the way to the big city was amazing, all the farm houses with their lush fields of vegetation, the green forest with all those tall pine trees, the rolling hills that seemed to go on forever, the clear blue lakes, the rushing water of the creeks and the waterfalls on the rivers we would drive past. This all kept me amused and gave me some kind of an escape during the long drive. There were also several small towns we drove through. While on old Highway 11 on our way to the big city, you could truly say if you blinked, you would miss these quaint little towns. I also marvelled at the large rock formations that were on either side of the highway. You could still see some of the drilled holes where they placed the dynamite to blast the rocks apart so the highway could travel through.

When we got to the city limits, my stomach was doing somersaults and my heart was in my throat—you know that nauseating feeling one gets when they are afraid of heights. I started to see the tops of all those skyscrapers that seemed to disappear into the clouds, those on and off ramps that seemed to go around and around. Even though our wheels stayed planted on the asphalt, I felt like *The Jetsons*, one of my favourite TV shows (a cartoon of a futuristic family in flying cars.)

Mom managed to get us safely to our destination. I am sure she was more than relieved when she finally pulled up to her parents’ house at 129 Yonge Blvd. I still recall the excitement and relief I felt when we arrived outside my grandparents’ bungalow. I am sure it was not the same level of relief my mom was feeling at that particular time.

I loved my grandparents’ home. I still remember the sparkling stone bungalow, those large, shiny, glistening stones my grandparent's home was built with and the white picket fence

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that encased the front lawn—a home with a white picket fence. I felt safe and comforted whenever I was at this house. It was the same feeling that I would get lost in when I watched *Little House on the Prairie*.

My mother's father acquired the name Grumpy from our oldest brother Richard. My grandfather was anything but grumpy, though he seemed to always have a stout look about him. He looked like a giant to me, probably because, when he stood next to my very petite four foot nothing Grama, he seemed so very tall and slim.

During my visits I would follow my Grumpy out the side door into the backyard. We would sit on the patio together. The patio was located at the back of where the garage once was. My grandfather had finally gotten to turn the garage into his den. It was filled with all his numerous books.

I loved sitting out on that patio watching my Grumpy feeding peanuts to the squirrels and chipmunks, these little furry creatures would be eating right out of Grumpy's hands. It made me wonder, how could this giant of a man be grumpy if these little squirrels and chipmunks trusted this tall, slim, dark haired man so much? These creatures came running from their safe little homes in the trees to be fed by him. Grumpy even let me feed the little critters. I would be so excited. I was amazed they ate out of my hand.

I loved visiting my grandparents. I have such nostalgic memories, not only visual memories, but my other senses come alive as I recall these visits. The smell of Grumpy's garden, the mixture of vegetables and flowers, not only in scents but the colours seem so vivid and alive. I recall the lush green grass under my feet. Everything seemed more vivid in my eyes at my grandparents'. I realize now that it was much quieter, the atmosphere so calming and safer here than back at home with my father and older sibling. No wonder all my senses came alive. I wasn't in alert, run or hide for safety mode.

In the far left corner of my grandparents' yard was my Grumpy's fish pond. I loved just sitting by the pond. I watched these, what seemed to me, gigantic light and dark coloured gold fish, swim in this small pond. It was so peaceful, except when my brother tried to push me in. This did not make my Grumpy very happy. These fish seemed to be a pride and joy to him. I had only seen fish in



Grama & Grumpy's home, 129 Yonge Blvd. in 1951



Grama & Grumpy (Muriel & Sydney Beaney) at their 50th anniversary in Toronto

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lakes and streams and of course in a fish tank in the pet store back home. So I was always awestruck by this pond.

My Grumpy designed the plans for their home. My mom said he had to make some changes to his building plans, something to do with it being the war time in 1940. This is the reason why there was a garage built attached to the house. The plans were for my Grumpy's office/den



129 Yonge Blvd: the garage was made into Grumpy's den

In my grandparents' home I recall standing in the doorway watching my Mom and Grama preparing our lunch. I found it so fascinating that the kitchen cupboards, drawers and counter top were metal, not wood. The fronts were painted beige and the counter top was gleaming steel. Like the rest of the house, it was clean and sterile. My mom would say, "Dad had his own import and export business and these kitchen cabinets were something he had acquired—quirks of being a salesman for your own company."

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I recall the bathroom had black and white tile, a lot like my grandparents. They saw things, it seemed, only in black or white, there were no grey areas. This bathroom had this distinct smell like the old sterile hospital smell. As I got older, I figured it was just an old musty smell. My mom recently told me "Grama loved her carbolic soap and that is the smell you are recalling." I sure can tell you, it tasted worse than it smelled. I unfortunately had my mouth washed out for cursing. I said, "F***." In our own home cursing was used frequently. How was I to know at my young age, you didn't swear in their house? I did not dare swear again at Grama and Grumpy's, at least not in ear shot. Mom and I recently were talking. She shared with me that she also got her mouth washed out when she was younger, with the same horrible soap, for saying "shit." I am lucky I got off so easy.



Grumpy, Grama, Great-grandma, Mom, Grandad and Dad

My Grama was a very quiet and petite and proper English lady. She reminded me of our queen. No elbows on the table.

The table was always properly set with real silverware, napkins, china and crystal when we sat down for a meal.

Once Upon a Memory

She loved cats, really loved cats! Now I know why I loved cats so much when I was younger. She not only had real live cats. The home was filled with all kinds of little kitty knick knacks, pillows, and statues of different cats, except for my Grumpy's den. Every room in their home had something that depicted cats.

I would inherit some of these little knick knacks and figurines every time I visited. I was gifted with my first grey toy cat when I stayed at 129 Yonge Blvd. for my very first visit. I was just a baby at the time. I stayed with my grandparents while my mom went back to the air base in Ottawa so she could be prepared for the transfer to Germany. My father grudgingly had to wait till after I was born, and I had to be a couple months old before I was allowed to fly on a plane.

My father often complained to me, when he was in a drunken stupor, "It's all your fault I didn't get the transfer to Germany." I was an adult with young children of my own when I was finally bold enough to stand up to him, and put him in his place, by barking back, "I recall we spent four years in Germany, so where the hell were you?" My father rarely brought up this fictional complaint in the future.

I still have the grey toy cat. Its name is Guinevere. It is stuffed with these tiny wood shavings. This was a cat that my Grumpy had imported as a gift to my Grama. Its legs and arms moved and the head can do an eerie, scary-carrie turn. Our dog Toby, a little tan terrier, chewed off part of one of the legs, and it's now missing its eyes. Though, over the years I have sewed several different buttons on to replace the eyes, they just keep falling off.

My brother, sister and I were all on our best behaviour for most of our visit—at least when no one was looking or within ear shot. This seemed to happen whenever we visited Grama and Grumpy's home. We became little angels. My mom would comment, "Why can't you ever behave like this at home?"

This visit only lasted for three days—way too short. My grandma, unfortunately, convinced my mom to go back home, and try and work things out with my father. If I had had a say, I would rather have stayed and never returned home.

The drive home was almost a repeat, minus the bottle going out the window. We were probably just a little lower key, due to the dose of calming energy at 129 Yonge Blvd.



Guinevere



Linda Marie, the fourth child of Kathryn and Chester Wallace was born Aug. 6, 1963 in Ottawa. I lived in Germany from Oct 1963-67 where the twins were born in 1965. We were stationed in Trenton 1967-9 then moved to North Bay 1969-83. I moved to Guelph 1983-2006 where I met and married my first husband in 1984-89, second husband 1989-95. I have 3 beautiful daughters who have blessed me with five grandchildren. I owned my own moving business in Guelph from 2001-06. I Moved to Milton July 2006-09 into a home at Regional Rd 25 S. This house would be the first place I truly called, a home. I now reside on the same road at the north end of old Milton.



The Unforgettable Family Trip - 1987

By Sawsan Kondos

The hotel where we had reserved a suite was located in the small town of Vittoriosa on the west of the island of Malta. I opened my atlas to show the family the route we had taken to come here. The island is only a small dot on our globe

It was after midnight when we rode in the taxi to our vacation residence. We could see the Mediterranean Sea surrounding the place on every side, and hear the sound of clapping waves sounding to our ears like messy drums. The unique smell of sea salt mixed with the humid air filled the place with a special night breeze that touched our noses and cheeks. The round face of the smiling moon was preparing to leave saying, “Goodbye, see you soon,” to make room for the sun to shine on the first day of our family summer vacation after a long and hard work year.

To my surprise the hotel, which my son had chosen for our trip, was a huge old castle. It looked like a guard tower for the island. Its big stones were dark green and between them grew random green-yellow plants with purple flowers. Around the castle grew some old fig trees. Their fruits scattered around gave a sweet smell. The castle included some towers which made it look like a Victorian building. The lights around the place were dim, but its hugeness made the castle so clear with the moonlight. With my first sight of the castle, the sound of dropping water or slow waterfalls mixing with the sad singing of birds, and with the initial light of new dawn, I felt scared and anxious.



*The last conference I attended in
Kuwait before our trip.*

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As we entered through the ancient wooden door, we faced a humble entrance. There were no carpets on the old wooden floor. The tables and chairs were made from logs—no luxury furniture. A big black sign (it seemed to be new) written in golden letters: “MALTA, Fort Saint Angelo Hotel.”

Behind the front office to the right and left were stairs going up and down, curving and round. It seemed to be so deep down and high up. On the untouched wall, dark arrows, swords and knives were hanging. Also a big picture hand painted was fixed straight on the wall of a handsome young knight with a look of self confidence, smiling eyes and with his blue suit with two lines of ten golden buttons, as he is real mortal person.

My son, who adores historical places, was so excited. For me, I tried to hide my disappointment at having to spend my vacation in such an isolated place. When the man at reception guided us to our suite, we were shocked to find we had to go down stairs—no elevators. It was dark and narrow and most of stars were not flat.

“What is this amazing place? I hope I don’t sleep so that I can wander around the castle,” my son announced.

“I am dying to put my head on a pillow...so exhausted,” my daughter replied.

After our long trip from Cairo to Malta, it was hard to do another trip down the stairs to reach our room with no one to help carry the luggage.

“Did we land in our suite?” I asked nervously after a lot of stairs.

“Not yet, be patient,” my husband answered.

“Did you count how many stairs we have taken?” my son asked.

“No, did you count?”

“Of course, there are 65,” my son answered.

But, thank God, after eleven more stairs, we were in our nice, clean suite, with two rooms, a fridge full of fruit and cold water.

The windows looked like small circles or square holes with a cover of metal in the shape of crosses. My husband and kids fell into a deep sleeping instantly.

On our first morning, we had to climb up the 76 stairs to go to the breakfast hall. We needed our morning tea. The kids were tired from the trip, so lazy, so my husband encouraged me to go discover the place and enjoy our breakfast early. The dining room was so wide, humble but clean, with huge windows all around so that you felt you were inside the sea. You could watch the big ships coming and going and



The island surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea



My son and daughter in 1978

Once Upon a Memory

every time you heard the high horn of the one ship announcing its arrival. You could watch the rise and fall of the sea, the waves crashing the rocks on the coast. It looked like their favourite game.

The smell of our breakfast—hot, fresh baked bread and coffee—came to us before we started to eat and fill our hungry stomachs with the jam and butter. With the fresh air the wonderful view, we felt so happy, we forgot about last night.

“No eggs or sausages with breakfast?” my husband asked the waitress.

“No sorry, that is it,” she replied politely.

“We need some eggs for the kids. Please.” I completed his question.

“You can pay for that, anything more we have to charge—two dollars for every egg,” she explained to us. We left ten dollars for five eggs at our table for our son and daughter with the normal breakfast.

My husband made a deal with me that we would not tell the kids that story as they don't like to be different or take more advantage than another people.

When they came back from their breakfast I asked, “Did they give you eggs with the food?”

“I'd like to know how many eggs you had,” Dad added.

“No, they gave us only bread, jam and butter. It was a delicious breakfast,” my daughter said.

“How...how can it be happening? We have paid for it, paid for five eggs,” Dad declared nervously.

My son and my daughter couldn't stop themselves laughing. They had discovered that all the tables in the hall were out of eggs and only their table had eggs. So they guessed that we did it and advised to add eggs to their breakfast.

After breakfast, we visited the city, the famous markets of Valletta. We enjoyed the lovely beaches of the island.

We attended and watched the program, “Voice and Light for the brave knights of St. John” and learned how they guarded and defended the island 900 years ago to protect their small island from any attack and how they conquered their enemy who wanted to occupy their land.

We enjoyed the delicious food that was a mixture between eastern and European food, in the small restaurants in small-houses. They are like home style restaurants.

We visited the old small churches of the island and learned about their saint, St. Lawrence. We attended the festival of that saint and saw how they made a procession with his picture around the island in his memory. We attended the masses but we couldn't understand their language, as they don't speak English. Their language is mixed with Greek and Arabic in some words.

We spent ten days on that lovely island. We felt sad to leave the place. We had started to get used to the stairs to go to our breakfast and dinner with the nice view of the sea.



My son and daughter with their father at the Cairo Zoo, 1977

Once Upon a Memory

I would like to visit that place again after my first visit almost 30 years ago. When I made a search with Google, I found the island was changed with many huge, new luxury hotels.

It was the best trip for me with my precious family, before every one choose his special way and started his independent life. Now my son and daughter have nice families. I pray for them to enjoy their lives with their blessed families, and can enjoy some unforgettable trips. Nice memories last forever.



Sawsan was born in 1944 in Egypt; graduated in Economic and Political Science, Cairo University, 1965; Married in 1968; Gifted by a son and daughter; finished her Masters degree in Statistics, 1974; With her husband, she transferred to Kuwait where she worked almost 15 years as a lecturer of Statistics. After her husband passed away, she immigrated to Canada, almost with the new century, to be near her kids, her four grandsons and her only granddaughter.

She enjoys spending time serving in her Coptic orthodox church in Milton, helping newcomers. Also, she likes to read historical books. She has participated many times in the Evergreen adult summer reading program at Milton Public Library.



Mother Confronts Me

By Eva Hegedus

On a raw Saturday afternoon in late November, I returned home from playing with my only friend on Neville Park. Louise was 10, I was 9. We liked to dress up like Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Russell and pretend we were starring in a blockbuster Hollywood film together. We slipped into worn out high heels, a frilly skirt or a long evening dress, added some ruby red lipstick to our lips and cheeks and then pretended her closet was an elevator in the Ritz Hotel. Before we could rehearse our big stage number together, her mom shouted, “Louise, remember that we’re going over to Grandma’s place for dinner. We leave in 10 minutes. Clean up, please, and say goodbye to Eva.”

I had barely stepped into our three by five foot hallway and removed my coat, when I heard fast and furious footsteps coming towards me through the living room. I panicked. I wanted to flee but it was too late. I knew it was my mother before she rounded the corner. My throat had gone dry. I trembled. There she was, a foot away from my nose. Her hands were on her hips and she straightened her back to reach her full height of five feet.

“Stop right there, Eva. Do you happen to know anything about the change missing from my coat? There should be 85 cents. I counted out 70 cents.”

She asked this question as a mere formality. She had already figured out, I’m sure, that I had to be the culprit. Her voice cracked as she spoke. Her eyes narrowed. I could no longer look her in face and I hung my head. Tears slid down my red cheeks. I had never felt this ashamed.



My mom: even at age 16, her stance is defiant

Once Upon a Memory

“Yes, I took some. Only 15 cents. I’m....sorry, I...won’t...ever...again.” I spoke barely above a whisper.

“Was it more than once?”

“Yes.”

“How many times?”

“Three or four.”

“What if I hadn’t found out? Were you going to keep stealing from me?”

“I was planning to stop after the first time. But I just couldn’t seem to.”

“Well maybe this will give you a reason to stop,” and with that, she administered a sharp slap to the left side of my face.

It might sound strange but the slap brought a small measure of relief. I knew that I deserved to be punished. At least now the dread of confrontation was gone.

My mother wasn’t one to give long lectures and review all the sins listed in the bible. She knew that I could tell right from wrong. Nor did she bother to remind me of the fact that she was a widow working very hard to pay for herself, her three children and our home. She skimped and watched every penny. By denying herself any luxuries or frills she kept the wolf from our door.

Her father had been Chief of Police for Budapest. Needless to say, she would never have dared to pull a stunt like this. And now her sweet nine year old daughter was stealing from her. What would be next? How could she control Eva once she was a teenager? She was, of necessity, both mother and father now. All of these thoughts raced through her head.

“Let’s just see what my money bought. I want you to reach into your own coat pocket and pull out whatever’s in there!”

My shaky right hand pulled out a red sour ball candy covered with lint, and a nickel. Some of the red came off in my hand. I’d been caught red-handed, literally.

“Now go in the kitchen. Throw that disgusting candy in the garbage. Wash and dry that nickel off and bring it back to me.”

That’s exactly what I did, sobbing all the way. I was glad neither Mary, who was 15, nor Frank, who was 17, was there to witness the scene of my humiliation.

When I returned, she uncrossed her arms, took the nickel, and asked one last question.

“Why did you want to buy candy in the first place?”

“I...I thought I’d have more friends if I had candies to share. I’ve missed Dad so much. I feel so lonely without him. I have hardly any friends at school.”

She thought for a moment, her face softened and she said, “I know you’re very sad Eva, but stealing won’t bring your Dad back. And you know he would have told you it’s wrong to steal. It’s also not the best way to make friends. Speaking of friends, you can’t see them for the next month and you’ll do extra chores to make up for the money you took.”

The temptation had crept up on me. Back at the start of school in September, I had often seen kids in the



*Me at age 5: the picture of
innocence*

Once Upon a Memory

playground at Balmy Beach sharing candies. I had seen some of those same kids enter the shabby grey frame house that doubled as a variety store on the main floor. I walked past that store exactly four times a day. I passed it not just in the morning and afternoon, but also at midday when I came home to an empty house and would make myself a sandwich. My mother left for work at 7 each morning and didn't get home until after 6 p.m. My sister and I had to get supper on the table.

Each time I walked by, it was all I could do to not cross the road. Finally, I just had to go in and see the candy display for myself. The dime that I had found on the street the day before was burning a hole in my pocket. "Maybe there won't be anything I like. Still, it seems like it's fate that I found that dime." That's what I told myself. That's what I almost believed.

In I went and headed straight for the sugary treats that I could smell from the door. The "almost like" smells greeted me first. The almost grape, almost cherry, almost strawberry smells were intoxicating but, to be honest, were nothing like real fruit. Then came the smell of chocolate, vanilla, caramel, toffee and chewing gum. In five seconds flat, I was standing in front of a two tiered display just off to one side of the cashier. That day, the cashier was the old unshaven man who I regularly saw smoking on the store veranda. I soon learned the routine as two clean cut grade 5 boys came in. Each boy in turn pointed to a particular jar or box, said how many of each candy he wanted. Meanwhile, the old man would fill a small paper bag, giving him a running total as the bag filled up. The second boy didn't have enough money for everything in his bag. Some of it had to be put back. The old man glared at him as he lightened the bag to the right amount. He growled to the boy "Next time, young man, count your change before you get in the store!"

I still studied the display for another five minutes. I salivated at four or five selections like the miniature Tootsie Rolls, the fake pink sugar coated strawberries that were shaped like real strawberries, the multi-colored tiny poppers which came on tin foil sheets, and the sour gum balls that painted your mouth and lips in radioactive shades of blue, purple or red. Finally I selected a small cellophane wrapped bar of sponge toffee. I'd remembered sponge toffee from finding it among my Halloween bounty the previous year. I loved its golden color, its brittle texture, its bubbly and cratered appearance when you bit in. Once the chunk reached the inside of my mouth, the toffee fizzed and popped as it melted into a gooey blob the size of a grape. You could make it last longer by just sucking on it like a Popsicle. If you bit into the bar too carelessly, you risked having a large chunk break off and fall. I couldn't wait... I bit in as soon as I was clear of the store.

I kept enjoying the toffee flavor all day at school as the little bits between my teeth melted. Or maybe they never did melt completely because on my next trip to the dentist I had two small cavities on that side of my mouth. My mother, who was never tempted by sweets, chose that dentist visit to remind me of how bad candy was for my teeth and how expensive fillings were for her.

I was hooked. Step two was to steal a small amount of change from my mom's pocket. One



Mom as she looked in 1956

Once Upon a Memory

evening when she was in the kitchen, I came to the front of the house, reached into her pocket, easily found a dime and a nickel. I transferred it quickly and quietly to my pocket. Then I took a few steps and ducked into the bathroom at the end of the short front hall. It was all so easy!

Now I was hooked on stealing. I reasoned that my mom wouldn't miss such a small amount.

As you already know, I was wrong.

The next time I returned to the candy counter, I had enough change to fill half a bag. But when I offered candy to several girls in the girls' yard at Balmy, they basically helped themselves, said thanks, and went back to playing with their friends. In fact, candy did not buy me a single new friend.

November came and went. I had been caught. I had been punished. I had stopped stealing.

On a day when I had no candy to offer and leaned against a wall waiting for the bell to ring, a girl named Alice asked if I'd like to skip. She and two friends were turning two ropes and chanting, "Apples, peaches, pears and plums, tell me when your birthday comes....January, February, March," and so forth. If I remember correctly, you had to get in and start skipping when your month was called and exit, without disturbing the ropes of course, when your month came round again. Alice and I became best friends. She had unruly, curly hair just like me and,

as luck would have it, she lived on the lower part of Neville Park just below Queen Street. That meant that I could walk down to her house and she could come visit me. When she came to my place, I offered her pickle or fried onion sandwiches that I whipped up in the kitchen. When I went to her house we were treated to home-made cookies that her mother had baked. The great thing about Alice was that she was easy going and game to try anything. We liked to do crazy dancing in the empty school yard. There was no music but we leapt and twirled like Isadora Duncan. Alice was friends with a girl named Marion. Marion also had a mother who baked cookies. Marion was at the top of the class and I brought up my marks to keep up with her. All three of us sang in the school choir and our choir won city wide competition for three and four part singing. That experience started my lifelong love of singing. I cried when Alice moved away at the end of Grade 8 but I was very glad that Marion didn't move away. In Grade 9, Marion and I met Carol. The three of us remain best friends to this day.



My family in 1958

So my mother was right. She was right about not bribing people to be your friends. She was also right to be harsh with me the time I stole. Slapping is not a technique I would recommend, and I regret that I gave my own kids a few whacks on the bum when they

Once Upon a Memory

misbehaved. Back in the 1950s, however, corporal punishment was used even in schools. I saw several classmates sent to the principal's office to be strapped.

I survived my punishment. I never stole again from my mother or anyone else. I have wonderful friends. I learned to respect the adult rules and values that made sense to me. I also learned that food still has an emotional hold on me. I still salivate and can taste certain foods just by thinking about them. Far too often I go and indulge my food cravings and eventually I put on weight that at age 68, is the devil itself to get rid of. Don't we all have at least one vice?



Eva Hegedus has been part of the library's memoir course for several years. She has written about escaping from Hungary with her family, as well as different kinds of experiences as a teenager and young adult. This year's story is about a confrontation with her mother when she was nine years old.



Mother's Day Surprise

By Christa Sampson

I had a plan to be organized for the birth of my first child. Little did I know that the bundle of life inside my stretched abdomen had charted its own course.

My husband Ryan and I were anxiously anticipating the arrival of our “little critter” as we affectionately called our unborn baby. Contrary to popular practice, we chose not to find out the sex because we wanted to be surprised. My due date was May 19, 2009, so according to my plan, I would finish work on May first and use two weeks’ vacation to prepare for the birth of our baby. Following that, my official maternity leave would start. I was fooled into believing that my two weeks’ “vacation” would turn into longer waiting for labour to begin:

“No one ever delivers on their due date,” said one family member.

“You’ll be late ... first babies always are,” said a coworker.

I believed these statements because 1) the thought of pushing a tiny human out of my body absolutely terrified me and 2) I felt great! Overall, I experienced very little discomfort throughout my pregnancy. At nine months pregnant, I honestly thought I could have stayed pregnant for at least another month.

I started the first week of my “vacation” by getting my hair trimmed and coloured. I knew enough about post-delivery and new mommyhood to know that I would not have time to do this after the baby arrived. The next couple of days were spent sorting through clothes, gifts and other baby paraphernalia in the nursery, and shopping for a few remaining essentials. The week ended with a Friday night like any other spent before: lounging on the couch watching TV and sharing a tray of nachos. We didn’t have a plan for the weekend, but after lazily rising Saturday morning, Ryan and I decided it would be a good day to assemble all of the baby furniture and accessories. The crib had been assembled weeks previous, but today was the day for the swing, playpen and ...

“I might as well install the car seat,” Ryan declared.

“Really?” I countered.

“Well, I don’t want to be fiddling with it when it’s time to take the baby home from the hospital,” he said.

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“I suppose you’re right,” I said, conceding to Ryan’s calculated strategy over my tendency to fly by the seat of my pants.

“I’m always right,” he said with a devilish smirk.

“That’s why I married you,” I said sarcastically.

“And for my good looks,” he winked.

“Yes, that too,” I smiled.

And, so went our usual banter for the rest of the day, reading through assembly instructions that were only slightly better than those from IKEA products. Thank goodness Ryan is a natural problem-solver. I have no patience for things that don’t work out easily or right off the bat. Wouldn’t it be so much easier if we could just wave a magic wand so the space capsule-like baby swing could put itself together? I also wished for that same magic wand to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling in my gut.

“Why did we have to have onions on the nachos last night?” I groaned.

“I thought you liked onions,” Ryan said.

“I do, but, they don’t always like me,” I frowned.

Onions do, from time to time, give me heartburn or indigestion. Sometimes I can eat them and be totally fine. Other times, I feel like my guts are being rung out like a wet dish cloth. The latter was one of those times. The feeling did pass by the end of the day and I was able to go to sleep comfortably, but it would not be a restful night. Maybe it wasn’t the onions after all.

Sunday, May 10, 3:30 a.m., I woke with sharp pain in my lower abdomen and an immediate urge to pee. Pushing the body pillow I used for support out of the way, I rolled out of bed and waddled in the dark to the bathroom. The cramping wasn’t that bothersome and in my tired haze I didn’t think much of it, only that it was likely due to the fact that I really had to pee! Crawling back into bed, I haphazardly rearranged the body pillow around me and fell back asleep.

Three hours later at 6:30 a.m., I woke with the same pain and, yes, a strong urge to pee. This time, I think I just pushed the body pillow off the bed. I followed the same path to the bathroom, but a little voice, or rather a little person, inside me told me that I should stay up instead of retreating to my bed. I grabbed Ryan’s Timex sports watch along with the notes from our birthing class and proceeded downstairs to make a cup of tea. I hadn’t been consuming many caffeinated beverages during my pregnancy, but that morning I felt I needed a cup of tea – not a strong one, just something warm and soothing to calm my racing mind.

There it was again – that sharp pain. About 15 minutes since the last time. Yes, something is definitely happening. It was now 7:30 a.m. Leaving my tea cup on the coffee table, I slowly walked upstairs to our bedroom where Ryan was still sleeping, gingerly rounded the corner of the footboard and slowly, but firmly, tapped him a few times on his right shoulder with my index finger. He looked up at me sleepily.

“Um, I think something is happening,” I said quietly, with some apprehension in my voice.

“Oh yeah?” Ryan asked, a little more alert than when I woke him.

“Yep. The contractions are less than 15 minutes apart. Can you take over timing with the watch?” I asked, climbing up to a seated position on my side of the bed.

“Yes,” Ryan said, propping himself up with his left arm.

“Here comes another one. Start the timer,” I winced.

“They are now ten minutes apart, lasting about 30 seconds each,” Ryan confirmed.

“I’m going to call the hospital,” I said.

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At this point I was still in denial. Could I really be in labour nine days before my due date? I did not have my bag packed yet; that task was part of my plan for the following week. I dialed the Milton Hospital Obstetrics department.

“Milton Hospital Labour and Delivery, may I help you?” answered a nurse.

“My name is Christa Sampson. My labour has started,” I said.

“How close are the contractions?” the nurse asked.

“About ten minutes apart,” I said.

“Can you still walk and talk through them?” she probed.

“Yes,” I confirmed.

“Ok. Once it gets to the point where you can’t talk through the contractions, you can come in,” the nurse told me.

I relayed what the nurse had said to Ryan. There’s still time. I still have time.

“I need a shower. But, I don’t have anything packed,” I said.

“You take a shower. I’ll start gathering stuff for the baby and you can pack some things for you after your shower.” Ryan offered.

I went about showering and packing methodically, yet with urgency. The contractions seemed to be getting stronger.

With my bag packed, I retreated to the bed and cuddled a pillow. I wasn’t feeling particularly hungry, but I thought I should eat something to give me energy for the delivery.

“Can you please make me some toast?” I asked Ryan.

“Sure – with what on it?” he asked.

“Strawberry jam,” I said.

That’s what I thought I wanted, but when the plate of toast arrived with a glass of apple juice, I wasn’t that interested in eating.

“Are you going to eat your toast?” Ryan questioned.

“No, no – take it out of here. Get it out of here!” I demanded.

I’m sure that Ryan was puzzled at my sudden strong aversion to strawberry jam, but he complied nonetheless. All of my senses were amplified. My muscles were in spasm and my body was shaking; the contractions were getting closer together, and quickly. I called the hospital again.

“Hi, this is Christa Sampson – I called earlier. The contractions are five minutes apart, lasting about one minute each.” I told the nurse, wincing through another contraction.

“Ok. Come down and we’ll see where you’re at,” the nurse said.

Ryan quickly loaded the car and came back to help me down the stairs.

“Wait,” I said stopping and sitting at the halfway point, breathing through another contraction.

“Ok. Let’s get you into the car before you have another one,” Ryan said after it had passed.

The ride to the hospital was less than five minutes. Leaving the overnight bag in the car, we made our way across the parking lot, into the hospital, down the hall, around a corner and down another long hallway to the Obstetrics department.

“Christa Sampson – we called earlier,” Ryan spoke for me to the nurse behind the desk.

“Um ... another one is starting, I need to sit down,” I said scanning the empty hallway for a chair. I was about to go against my germophobe tendencies and slide down the wall into a seated position on the hospital floor, but I was saved by another nurse who sprang into action.

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“Come and sit in here,” she said calmly, ushering me into an exam room, where I was promptly hooked up to a fetal heart monitor. “Dr. Rajasingham is on call today. She’ll be in shortly,” the nurse confirmed.

It was only a few minutes until Dr. Rajasingham arrived, but it felt like forever. She swiftly entered the room in her usual efficient, feisty, yet reassuringly thorough manner. It only took her about 30 seconds to assess the situation.

“Alright! You’re nine and a half centimeters – you’ll be ready to push in about 20 minutes!” the doctor exclaimed.

“What about an epidural?” I asked.

“Oh, honey, you’re too late for that,” she said shaking her head.

“Oh, SHIT!” I wailed, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling.

“Don’t worry, it’ll be quick, we’ll give you some laughing gas,” she said, waving her hand and instructing the nurse to set us up in a delivery room down the hall.

With Ryan on one side and a nurse on the other, we made our way to the delivery room, stopping when another contraction came. We stood in the middle of the hallway, Ryan hugging my waist and me digging my fingers into his shoulder blades.

Once I was settled on the delivery room bed, things started moving even faster, the contractions were back to back and I struggled to control my breathing. Ryan did a fantastic job of coaching me, but at the time any sensation in my personal space that wasn’t my own was bothersome. How am I going to communicate this to him, in between breaths? Ok, here it goes:

“Don’t breathe ON me.” I managed to say.

“OK,” he said, backing off.

Finally, I saw a nurse enter the room, wheeling a tall mint-green tank of nitrous oxide (laughing gas); however, that one was EMPTY! Five minutes later I was asked to sign the release form for the full tank that had just arrived. Good thing I didn’t experience a reaction to it as I’m not sure if the squiggly line I scribbled for my signature would be legally binding. The gas did nothing to manage my pain, but it took the edge off and allowed me to focus on my breathing.

“Do you feel like you need to push?” asked the nurse who had been at my bedside from the time we arrived at the hospital.

“Yes...no...I think so,” I replied.

“Ok, on the next contraction, you’re going to push,” she said to me. “Dad, you’re going to move down towards the end of the bed and hold her left leg like this,” she instructed Ryan as she demonstrated, holding my right leg at 90 degrees.

This is it. There’s no turning back and only one way out. I pushed until I thought I was going to pass out.

“Good job,” said the nurse. “In a couple of minutes you’ll do that again.”

“You’re doing awesome, Christa! Keep going!” Ryan encouraged.

“The head is crowning,” said the nurse. “Do you want to touch it?” She asked.

Oh. My. God. NO! I remember seeing this in the video at our birthing class. I preferred to focus on getting this baby out of my body, then I could hold all of it.

“No. Nope. I don’t want to,” I confirmed.

Just before the next push, Dr. Rajasingham appeared. It was time to push again. And again. And –

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“Christa, stop pushing,” the doctor said. She needed a break in the action to flip the umbilical cord out of the way so that it didn’t get caught around the baby. I was then cleared to push again. And again. And –

Our beautiful baby GIRL was here! At 12:20 p.m. on Sunday, May 10, 2009, weighing six pounds, three ounces, Charlotte Alexa Sampson was born. Our Mother’s Day surprise arrived nine days early after a fast and intense labour. Knowing her personality today, I’m now not surprised.



Charlotte – hours old



Charlotte and I at home – only a few days old



Christa Sampson is a stay-at-home/"hockey" mom of two energetic children: daughter Charlotte, age 6 and son Morgan, age 4. She and her husband of eight years, Ryan, have lived in Milton near the Niagara Escarpment since 2008. Christa enjoys family time, alpine skiing, interior design shows, Starbucks coffee and reigniting her lifelong interest in writing.



Misty Ingleton: the One of a Kind Cat

By Tanya Ingleton

“What is wrong with my friend?” Misty Ingleton, our cat, must have been contemplating to herself. “I have never seen any of my other family members having to crawl, on the carpet, like myself!” Walking and talking had become such a struggle for me; temporarily, I was wall-walking along the beige walls and crawling on the medium-brown carpet of our house. My speech was ever so slurred. The Victoria Day holiday (May 2-4) weekend of 1997 would soon be upon us, but I did not believe that I would be doing much celebrating or seeing any fireworks. There was an important matter that needed immediate attention: my health.

My parents, Everton and Faylene Ingleton, and my fraternal twin siblings, Astor and Andrea, and Misty were all deeply concerned about me. My family must have been thinking, “Now, what has Tanya done to herself? What is going to happen to her?” Well, having Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for over seven years at that time, for me to have a relapse or exacerbation was not uncommon, but my last one was not that long ago – just over five months ago. And why was I in such a frail physical state? It just did not make any sense, so it seemed, anyway. But in the back of my mind, I had a hunch as to why my body was not quite up to snuff. Now, what do you think was the reason behind my sudden relapse? It was simply due to the fact that I was putting so much stress on myself by trying to pass a university course that I knew I had already been miserably failing. Not good!



“Nice to meet you.” Misty, just taking it easy and posing.

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Aside from her playful, curious, and troublesome ways, Misty, who was mainly white, with black, brown and gray patches, and a black and gray raccoon's tail, was so loving and protective. Whether we were returning home from work or school, Misty was sure to meet any one of the five of us, at the front door with her medium-pitched, elongated and short “meow” greetings. If she was not pacing up and down the white, with a hint of light blue tile floors, Misty would patiently sit and wait along the left side of the medium-brown carpeted, fifth step of the spiral staircase. Misty believed she was the queen of her palace, thus, she was entitled to protect her family.

So typical of all, if not, most cats, Misty basked in her comfort and independence. When she was not sleeping, on the medium-brown carpet, in our family room, beside the long, glass and wooden-based table, by the bay-window, she loved to grace others with her presence. In particular, as my preference was always to read the newspaper, while I was sitting comfortably on the carpet, in the family room, where do you think Misty decided to place herself? Yep! It never failed! Misty always chose to plop herself right in front of me, on top of the article that I was reading. Misty was the constant attention-grabber. As far as Misty was concerned, she was more important, and I needed to forget about what I was doing. Her mindset was, “I am here, now, so rub my head, or just simply pet me, please!”

To say that Misty was a social feline would be an understatement. Misty believed that she was definitely “one of the girls!” In particular, when our Mom, our sister, and myself, were having a discussion, in our parents' master bedroom, in no time, we would hear, her highness, racing up the stairs and then quickly crawl into the bedroom; next, Misty would leap onto the middle of the king-sized bed and then silently observe her company. We would always tell Misty, “You just always have to join in on our conversation, somehow, don't you, Misty?” Of course, Misty could not literally express her opinions, but again, her presence and behavior was always appreciated and loved. Misty was also an attentive listener. I strongly believe that if Misty was born with the ability to speak, she would never have been lost for words.



Misty, not knowing what to do with herself.

It was more than obvious that Misty did not joke around when it came to eating. Yep! Misty loved her food! We all learned that when it came to snack or meal time, we would hear her loud, serious, and almost a growl, “MEOW,” as if it was the end of the world. At the same time, Misty had proven to us that she was fraudulent when she wanted and needed to be.

As previously mentioned, Misty enjoyed sleeping in the family room, so it seemed, sometimes. All I had to do was open the fridge, and lift up the flap of the cheese compartment, to witness, whether or not, Misty was really asleep. Not really! Within a few seconds, I heard the sound of little paws dashing towards the fridge and then Misty staring and “meowing,” at me. I guess you would say that I was fraudulent, too, because I knew she was coming and expecting to have a piece of cheese, but I was not in a hurry to give her some. I was just great at being

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troublesome, as well. Of course, as always, Misty had her way and had her slice of cheddar cheese.

A few days before I was admitted to the Mississauga Hospital, Misty was so quiet and observant of my physical struggles. Because my physical condition had taken a turn for the worst, I had no choice but to stay in my bed.

My second year at UTM (University of Toronto in Mississauga) had finished the month before, and I was more than relieved that it was over because my body was exhausted. My other course, "Ethnicity in Social Organization," which was a Sociology course, did not include the completion of a final exam. Thus, I only had the "Introduction to Canadian Politics 100," final exam to prepare for. Normally, I would have been so satisfied because to have only one exam to focus on was, by far, less stressful. My intention was to somehow ace that exam, but honestly, I knew it was going to be quite the mountain to climb; hence the added pressure causing the extreme weakness in my gait and well-being.

Because I was bed-ridden, my family, including Misty, of course, made sure that I was comfortable and if I needed anything, not to hesitate to ask. The great fascination throughout the two nights before residing in the Mississauga Hospital, for two and a half weeks of medical treatment, physical and occupational therapy was that Misty decided to keep me company, at the foot of my bed, on top of the floral white comforter. Misty pounced into her position on my bed, sitting like a hen who was about to lay a couple of eggs.

I was so appreciative of Misty's presence because it was therapeutic for me. Her deep, yellow eyes with big, black pupils were fixated on the peach wall in my room and her protective nature was quietly informing me that, "You are going to be fine. Don't worry...I am here!"

I would have understood if Misty had to jump off my bed and scurry to the basement to do her business in her litter box and then decide to check on me in the morning, but guess what? After she had finished her business, in no time I heard a low, "Meeeeeeow," at my bedroom door; then Misty had quickly crawled into my room, pounced onto the foot of my bed and made herself comfortable, once again. What a loving, caring and protective cat!

On the evening of Sunday, May 18, 1997, the day before the Victoria Day holiday, which was warm and pleasant, I was instructed by the secretary at my neurologist's office to meet him in the emergency ward of the Mississauga Hospital. My body was in such a weak state that it was obvious I required immediate attention.

Our Auntie Madge and Uncle Lloyd had paid our family the typical Victoria Day long weekend visit, which was always fun and appreciated. Of course, this was one Victoria Day long weekend they would not soon forget, just like our family...Misty included. After my Mom had helped me to get ready to go to the hospital, which was not easy by any means, because the dexterity in my hands was not there, I proceeded to slowly walk down the stairs. When experiencing the loss of the ability to do the simplest tasks such as buttoning a shirt or combing



Misty thinking to herself, "I just love my family."

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your hair, you realize how much we take certain things for granted.

As expected, my Mom, Dad, Astor, Andrea, Misty, Uncle Lloyd, and Auntie Madge, were all at a loss for words about my physical condition. Now, my next challenge for the evening was how was I going to get into our Dad's attractive, gray, 1991 Buick Le Sabre car? And who came to my rescue? Uncle Lloyd! As soon as my parents and myself were ready to leave to go to the hospital, Uncle Lloyd had picked me up and carried me to Dad's car that was sitting in front of our peach and white garage door. We all thanked Uncle Lloyd for his fast-thinking, caring and helpful actions.



*“I just love Christmas!”
Misty Ingleton, my special friend.*

“Where are you taking my friend?” Misty must have been contemplating to herself.



I have lived with the condition, Multiple Sclerosis, for over 25 years. I have had the rewarding experience of being an English tutor for several years. For me, writing has always been both therapeutic and gratifying. Lifescapes has given me the opportunity to further implement those qualities.



My Navy: 1945-46

By Trevor Trower

In early September 1945, my company, British Empire Films, organized a “Welcome Home Fund” to celebrate the end of the war and welcome our heroes home. The idea was to hold an entertainment in the Castle in Rhuddlan, North Wales where we would give our thanks to the heroes who had been the first to come back home from the front. The war in the Pacific was still in progress but the signs were everywhere that the Pacific War would soon be history. I had just received my letter from the Admiralty telling me I was needed. I joined the Royal Navy on October 2, 1945.

A motor car accident caused me to report for duty one day late and while explaining the circumstances to the reporting officer, his facial expression told me that this event would haunt my stay in His Majesty’s Senior Service. In any case, I was eighteen years of age and, tho’ I would have preferred to remain a civilian, this was my duty and I cheerfully swore to serve my country with honour and enthusiasm.

The Royal Navy induction center was located in Butlin’s Holiday Camp, Skegness, Yorkshire. The accommodations had been reduced to a minimum as far as amenities were concerned. The holiday chalets were crowded with double bunks to accommodate us recruits, four to six to a room. The peacetime swimming pools were empty. The dance hall was now a uniform center, the pubs and other social centers were now doctors’ cubicles, dental offices and classrooms for the purpose of lecturing and psychological testing of us sailors-to-be.

The induction center was for the purpose of giving each new recruit a personal file and naval ID number. Apparently this nine-digit number remains with you for life and I know of men, in the throes of senility, who may not remember the names of their own wife and children, or even their own name, can remember their military number. Mine is an easy one; it’s LFX776165. The center also gave medicals, dental exams, vaccinations, psychological and aptitude testing in order to determine what each man would actually do. The centre rigged each man out with two full uniforms, one for working and one for best. The mess provided everyone with three meals per day and the only beverage provided was tea, though it did not taste like the

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tea we drank at home. It was common knowledge that saltpeter and bromide were put in our tea to diminish our libido, this of course was denied by our leaders.

The last part of our processing was being assigned a posting. A final uniform check and a rail voucher, along with a small amount of money.

I was assigned to HMS Gosling, in Warrington Lancashire. It took a few days to get used to Navy terminology. Our rooms were “cabins,” the dining room – “the mess-deck,” the doctor’s office – “the sick bay.” Left and right were “port and starboard” and so on. We were a bit confused at first but after just a few days we were playing the game like everyone else. We lined up for our uniforms, an NCO would look us up and down, shout some numbers to an assistant, we would receive our uniforms, a personal blanket, a kit-bag and hammock and a sewing kit which was known as a “Housewife.” We were permitted to try on the boots before they were issued. Some of the uniforms fitted fairly well, but alterations could be done for just a few pennies. The medicals didn’t take long once they were started. There were no nurses, only sailors who were known as “sick bay attendants.” They took our temperatures, weighed and measured us, shouted at us and vaccinated us. Doctors tapped our chests, held our scrotums, looked up our behinds and pronounced us fit. I saw no-one fail the medical exam.

The dentist was another matter. After the usual line up, I saw a naval dentist who decided I needed one extraction and one filling. He immediately began his professional care. After a while and a lot of pain, I stopped him and asked him if he would mind freezing my jaw. “Not necessary,” he said, “sailors don’t feel pain.”

“Oh yes they bloody do,” I yelled. He reluctantly gave me an injection and then continued with his work inflicting agony. I decided that whatever happened in my life I would never again have dental work done by a navy dentist.

The aptitude and testing took several days. I tried to fit square pegs into round holes, square blocks into circles, tried to listen to dots and dashes over a headset and count the number of each and answer pages and pages of questions and try to figure out which answer would serve me best. We were to make our selection of jobs from a long list of vocations from pilots to cooks. We studied the list, it was all so impressive. How naïve we were thinking we had a choice. When our turn came we were called into the assignment room. The candidate sat in front of a desk behind which several officers sat. What do you want to be,” the head officer asked.

“Well sir, by trade I am a photographer and enjoy that job very much, my second choice would be a physical training instructor as my hobbies include athletics and long-distance running.” After a short discussion, the officer declared that my scores indicated an exceptional aptitude for mechanics and they were assigning me to the Air Mechanics (engines) Course. I immediately begged for re-assignment, to no avail.

At the appropriate time, we were taken in a covered truck to the railroad station where we boys waited for our trains to different parts of the country. I was bound for Warrington, Lancashire and arrived there several hours later. I reported to the ship the HMS Gosling to discover that what was referred to as a ship was in fact a barracks. It was here at HMS Gosling that basic training, more commonly known as “square-bashing” was to be completed.



*Home on leave,
March, 1946*

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I was one of a class of 24 SUTs (sailors under training). Our teacher/instructor was Leading Seaman Hickock. Our divisional officer was a young man of 19 years, Sub-Lieutenant Hubbard of Top Division. Our class was accommodated in a large "cabin" furnished with single narrow cots, each with a foot-locker. Our new home was clean and comfortable, the bathroom and amenities were excellent. We slept well and each morning a seaman entered our sleeping area banging on a dustbin lid with a club and yelling, "Heave Ho Le Ho Le Ho Le Ho, lash up and stow ⁽¹⁾, hands off cocks, on socks. Rise and shine, the morning's fine, breakfast in fifteen minutes." Or words to that affect.

We spent a lot of time on the parade ground learning to march, regular and double time, how that would come in handy for an "Air Mechanic (engines)," I can't imagine. We spent a part of each day doing physical exercise. This activity was enjoyable as my hobbies included a variety of activities which had kept me in very good physical health. We were trained in the use of fire-arms, including the Lee Enfield Rifle, the Sten Gun, Bren Gun and Lewis Gun. On top of the regular training, I joined the Navy Fencing team and was trained in the use of the sabre, the épée and the foil.

The Petty-Officers who dealt with our parade ground training were particularly brutal. One instance of brutalism took place when we were in full uniform and carrying our rifles, marching on the parade ground. Our PO's were displeased with our performance and made us double around the parade ground with our rifles above our heads. After about a half hour of the punishment we were stood to attention and told to remain like that until released. After a while one of the trainees, a tall skinny lad, passed out and hit his head on the ground. He bled quite a lot. A few comrades ran to help him and over the P/A the petty officer screamed out, "Get Back To Attention." The lad was taken to the sick bay where a health problem was discovered and he was released on medical grounds. This behavior was to toughen us up, and I must agree that it did. After just a few weeks we became a tough and resilient group.

Lectures were quite interesting. Eventually we pretended to be ignorant of the most mundane subjects. One instructor began his piece by asking if there was anyone in the class who were animal lovers or farmers. We all kept silent. Then one young lad offered the information that he was a farmer. "Good," said the teacher, "Off you go and clean up the ship's goat's quarters." The goat, our ship's mascot, looked smart in his colorful regalia, but stank like a polecat. Our man spent the rest of the morning cleaning up the goat's quarters while we took turns dismantling an old Lewis Gun. Our shipmate joined us later and you could tell from the stench of him where he had been for the first part of the day. Another lecture was given on the Lee Enfield rifle. The teacher began his class by asking, "Does anyone know anything about this rifle?" One of my high school requirements had been to give a lecture to my class on any subject using flip charts. Because my soldier father told me all about his rifle, I was quite familiar with it. I made the mistake of offering the information that I knew something about the rifle, to which he replied "All-right you smart assed know-it-all, you come out here and tell us all about it." I took up the challenge and after getting started he told me to sit down and stay quiet.

We each were issued with a Lee Enfield 303 rifle and some days later we were taken to the firing range for firing practice. That early November morning, the normal Lancashire fog was particularly thick. The visibility was about thirty feet. We were going to shoot targets at 100, 200 and 300 feet. The instructor was in an unusually friendly mood and gathering us around him in a cluster while waiting for the fog to lift, recounted stories of his experiences. He then asked, "What is the first thing you do when you get to the firing point?" There was silence, after a few seconds I muttered, "gtdhujgd bbevrfdgghakjudn."

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“What did you say?” he shouted.

“Get out the radar equipment sir,” I stated in a quiet voice.

“That man, keep quiet or you’ll get six lace-holes up your arse,” he roared. Actually it turned out that the instructor was quite a helpful person whose bark was worse than his bite. Anyway, the fog eventually lifted and we all finished our assignments successfully even though several missed the targets completely.

We were allowed out of camp on weekends and would present ourselves at the camp guardhouse for inspection. We were always criticized by our POs but rarely was a man denied shore leave because of his appearance. We’d preen for quite a while in our quarters and check each other for faults before marching to inspection. Quite often just outside the camp exit there would be a few ladies hanging about. We had been warned by our POs to have nothing to do with those girls because of the VD. I was, as were most of us boys, quite innocent on the matter of sex and I couldn’t figure out how our leaders knew they had VD. Anyway, I was never accosted and nor were any of my shipmates. Mind you, it would have been a waste of time if the PO had been right, we seldom had more than bus-fare in our pockets. I would take a bus into the city, stroll around down-town. Sometimes pop into the Sally-Ann for a cheap snack. The NAAFI. (Navy, army and air force institute) was another place for a cheap snack. The menu was always the same, tea and a wad (sweet bun). Often I had no money at all and at these places nothing was free.

I had been told about another outfit, the FCF (Forces Christian Fellowship). Food there was free. After strutting around downtown for a few hours, I came across a small plaque on a dingy doorway reading, “FCF All welcome.” I entered what appeared to be a small dimly-lit, musty theatre, maybe 200 seats for an audience. Several elderly ladies wearing aprons were manning a table with a large urn and a stack of cups. “Is there anything to eat?” I asked. The reply was, “Yes, right after the prayer and the speaker.” I took a seat amongst the eight or so that made up the audience. In a few minutes the preacher came on stage, welcomed us, told us we would sing a few hymns and then have a short talk by a famous doctor, then we would be served tea and buns. We sang the songs and heard the brief sermon and then the speaker came onto the stage in the company of the FCF vicar. He introduced the guest as Doctor Alexander Fleming, medical scientist and discoverer of penicillin. Doctor Fleming seemed such an ordinary man, youthfully middle aged and dressed in tweeds. He took one of the several chairs that were props on the stage and dragged it to centre stage by the footlights. In a quiet, dignified voice he asked the audience to gather around closer as he did not want to shout. By this time we realized that today we were in the company of a man who, with his team of scientists, had saved millions of lives and we shuffled around to be closer to where he sat. He seemed such an ordinary person. Alexander Fleming, here he was in person, talking to maybe a dozen young sailors. Dr. Fleming gave us a short history of the drug penicillin and told us about his role in its discovery. We were invited to ask questions but despite his apparent kindly nature we were either too ignorant or awestruck to ask anything. He shook hands with all of us before leaving us to our tea. Can you imagine this man, a national hero, saviour of millions, spending an hour in that dismal place, November, 1945, with a few lonely sailors and me, LFX776165? He did not stay to have tea with us. I imagine he was needed to help others more in need than we. But I do recall that as I walked back to base I walked taller and vowed to be a better man. The memory of that chance occasion remains still vivid.

During our initial training we were given lectures on social diseases. Two hundred trainees about my own age, assembled in a hall containing chairs and benches. Around on the

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walls were life-size posters showing naked men and women in various stages of syphilis and gonorrhoea. The medical officer in charge proceeded to lecture us on every aspect of the diseases with many reference to the posters. Two sailors fainted. I can tell you, that lecture put the fear of God into us. The doctor was talking about gonorrhoea and was describing the symptoms, the first stage, the second stage, then to wind up the subject he said, “The third and final stage is lack of feeling in your extremities. You are unable to feel your hands and feet which become numb.” There was a lot of scuffling and scraping of chairs as we began to stamp our feet to see if we had caught something sinister. Following our dismissal we continued to think this over. I kept clear of females for months, such had been the effects of that awful lecture.

The course of training wasn't all work, even though often we were cursed and abused. There were good times. Our divisional officer, Sub-Lieutenant Hubbard, came with us on the assault course and games of rugby. It turned out that our “Snotty” was a pretty good type. I had some infraction and had been assigned to polish our leading seaman's cabin floor. I was given a can of wax, a toothbrush and a cloth to do the job. Mr. Hickock lay on his bunk watching me do the work and telling me how his son was also in the navy. After a while he probably realized the absurdity of one man polishing another's floor using a toothbrush. He told me to stop and go and have some fun. After that incident I saw our Kilick (leading seaman) in a different light.

I was very friendly with our physical training instructor in charge of fencing. I suggested we put on a bit of a show for the boys. The PTI, a perfect specimen of a healthy man, was about 21. He agreed with the plan. As I recall, there are seven guard positions when fencing with the sabre. One is the en-garde position and the others for protecting six other areas of the body. During rehearsal of our “duel” we would whisper the guard position of the next attack. Of course the opponent would be in a good position to protect himself when the attack came. We rehearsed the show and one evening when the gym was crowded we began our fake match. The system was great. We fought for several minutes before a crowd of about 200 cheering sailors. My, that was good fun.

Eating our meals was something else. We each carried our own cutlery, known as “shooting irons,” and mug. We were assigned ten men to a table. A kitchen worker would supply each table with ten portions of each course and ten plates. It was the responsibility of the two men at the end of the table to share the food. The system sounds good in theory but in practice the two men at the end took a lion's-share before passing the food along and often the last to be served got very little. An officer routinely came around the mass-deck calling, “Any complaints?” Of course there weren't any. The officer had the habit of hitting his leather knee-length boots with his swagger stick and always had a scowl on his face. After dinner we would be off to the NAAFI cafeteria for a cup of tea and a wad. I was sent to do kitchen duties for one day. I peeled potatoes mostly. I also washed dishes and mopped the floor (deck). I watched the cooks making the fruit cakes for our deserts. What I thought were raisins in the cake turned out to be cockroaches, which fled from the ovens in droves before the cooks slammed the oven doors shut. I was turned off deserts for ages after seeing that. But otherwise, the food, tho' bland, was quite edible.

All good things come to an end. We graduated from boot-camp and were shipped off to South Wales. We reported to HMS Gileston which in reality was Wing #4 of the Royal Air Force base and 32nd maintenance unit, St Athen's. It was at this station that our Air Mechanics (engines) training would take place and would be our home for the next six months.

St. Athen's must have been one of the biggest military camps in the UK at that time. Wing Four, the Royal Navy training section, housed several hundred navy personnel at its peak.

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As each class graduated and was posted, a new group of about the same size was inducted. However, by far, the majority at the base were RAF personnel and perhaps a thousand civilian workers.

The mess-deck, wing four, was enormous and three or four hundred personnel could sit down to eat at the same time. The method of serving was quite different than at HMS Gosling. Here, there were serving lines manned by kitchen staff. Large steam tables kept the food hot. We sailors lined up and quickly went past the servers and received our food. It was amazing how quickly 300 or 400 men could be served. Our dinner was usually potatoes, vegetables and a meat dish, dessert and two slices of dry bread. We carried our own cutlery and mug and helped ourselves to tea from an enormous urn. It was our responsibility to return our dishes to the servery when finished. In general, the food was good and sufficient. Tea and water were the only beverages available; milk, coffee, soft drinks or juices were just not available. At St. Athens we were never asked if we had any complaints.

Following breakfast each weekday morning, dressed in our cover-alls, carrying our cutlery and mugs in our left hands, we were marched from our wing to the hangars where our training took place. An Able Seaman (AB) was in charge of us during this one mile march. I don't recall his name, he was a Cockney and he took every opportunity to curse and abuse us. I have no idea what motivated his behaviour but, as time went on, his foul abuse became very personal and included references to our mothers which were not complimentary. One Monday morning we were assigned a different in-charge. We later discovered that following an evening of drinking in a local pub, while staggering back to base, he had been set upon by a group of trainees who had avenged themselves of his abuse by giving him a beating and throwing his body into an outgrowth of noxious weeds. When he recovered he was transferred. We were very pleased.

Our instructors were civilians and were experts in their profession. The officer in charge of the training program was Lt. Commander Ireland. Our first week's training was in the use of metal files. We were given a piece of mild steel and a file and hacksaw. We were to produce a finished piece 2" x 2" x 1/2". This seemingly simple task was probably one of the most difficult projects I have ever done. What this taught us was patience and exactitude, qualities lacking in most teenagers but necessary when working with aircraft engines.

Sixteen redundant pilots had been assigned to our training division. These men were two or three years older than the rest of us. All of the pilots were Canadians who had voluntarily joined the Fleet Air Arm and had undergone extensive training and had graduated as navy pilots. After being given their wings they had been declared redundant. They were a bright and handsome group of young men who were being re-mustered as mechanics. They were most disgruntled when their valuable skills were no longer required by the navy. They let it be known that none of them intended to pass the course but wanted to be released and returned home to Canada. Ultimately, all purposely failed their mechanic exams but rather than be sent home, they were re-assigned as cooks, much to their dismay.

One incident did take place which involved our Canadian friends. Church Parade was compulsory then. We were compelled to meet after breakfast every Sunday wearing our number Ones. We were marched to the camp theater where church service was held. Outside the theater the order, "Catholics and Jews, fall out" was given and the rest of us took our places in the audience seats. Our padre was a Lt. Commander and he and the rest of the commissioned officers sat on the stage. Each exit was manned by NCOs wearing webbing and side-arms. The service got under way. The captain made a short speech in which he criticized us for being dirty and

unkempt. Then the padre gave a sermon which was most un-Christian. He filled in the details of the captain's generalized comments. At the point in his harangue where he called us dirty pigs, one of the Canadians jumped out of his seat and loudly declared, "I'm not listening to this crap." The rest of his pals did the same suddenly the padre screamed out, "Mutiny! Mutiny!" The response was that the POs at the doors drew their side-arms and adopted a threatening stance. There was a lot of milling about and for a while the tension was frightening. After a while things quieted down and the service came to an end and we were all dismissed.

In any group there are trouble-makers. One morning while we were marching to work, we were passing the yard-arm which usually was flying the Union Jack and the navy pennant. This day someone had attached a bunch of inflated condoms to the flagpole. When we noticed this we broke into screams of laughter and started to salute the flag. It took a few minutes for our NCO to quiet us down and to continue on our way. Later that day, the entire wing 4 was paraded and the officers tried to find the culprit. Not one admitted fault so we were all confined to base pending finding who was responsible. There were about five thousand RAF on the base, and as the likelihood of the culprit being one of us was quite remote, the matter was dropped. A couple of days later we were paraded in our number ones and marched off to the far side of the parade ground. We were advised that the purpose being an FFI (free from infection) inspection. "What's that?" we asked.

"You'll find out soon enough." We came to a secluded part of the parade ground and were ordered to lower our trousers while the officers and the navy doctor walked up and down our ranks examining our private parts for signs of STDs. Then we were instructed to get dressed, then dismissed. The navy doctor that day was a lieutenant who happened to be a woman. I find this event almost unbelievable even tho' I was there.

Each morning we were marched to the hangars where we were instructed in aircraft engine maintenance, our first airplane being the De Havilland Tiger Moth with its Gypsy Major engine. Under the guidance of the instructor we removed the engine and dismantled it spreading the hundreds of parts on the work-bench. Our objective was to get to know what each part looked like and then clean and re-assemble the engine. All this was done under the keen scrutiny of our instructor. We were asked to name the engine parts, "What's that called?" the instructor said.

"A connecting rod sir," I replied.

"What does it do?" he asked. We had learned that a connecting rod was a mechanical device for converting a reciprocal motion to a rotary motion. I had learned well and was able to satisfy the leader with my reply. We were pretty enthusiastic about learning the mysteries of how a motor worked. Eventually we got all the pieces back together and managed to get the Gypsy back installed in the Tiger's airframe. After connecting all the controls, with no bits left behind, we felt pretty smug and proud of ourselves. Our joy dampened a bit when the instructor then said, "Now for the moment of truth, we have to start the motor on the first try."

The instructor sat in the cockpit and gave us our instructions: "It takes two to start the engine: one in the cockpit and one to swing the propeller. You, Trower, you know the routine. You will go first. Stand facing the prop and with your right hand gripping the leading edge of the prop. When you are ready you will tell the pilot, "Switches off." The pilot will confirm, "Switches off." You then want to prime the engine so your next call is, "Petrol on." Petrol on, is confirmed. Then call, "Suck in" and you slowly turn over the engine to prime the cylinders. A couple of turns should be about right."

I carefully followed the instructions hardly daring to breath.

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“Set the prop at an angle where you can hold it to give a good swing. When you are ready, call “Switches on.” The pilot will reply, “Switches on.” When he calls, “Contact,” at that moment you, with your feet a short pace apart, give the propeller a good swing and follow through by walking to the side of the plane. You never want to be in front of a turning propeller if you want to live”.

Following these orders, imagine my surprise and joy when the engine coughed into life and with a cloud of smoke disappearing into the slipstream. The motor was alive and ticking over beautifully. Our class gave a loud cheer. The engine was shut down in a few minutes and every trainee had to take his turn to start the motor.

Naturally we were jubilant with our success with the Tiger Moth, which meant we could all proceed on to the next phase of our study: the Rolls Royce Merlin, which was the power plant used in many operating war-planes. We were to become familiar with the Merlin’s engines and the carboretas, supercharger, variable pitch propeller, fuel tanks, instruments etc. etc. Also we were instructed on the maintenance of the Hercules engine, which was a huge radial sleeve-valve motor, which thankfully we were never called on to work with.

We were marched to the next hangar where we were shown the biggest and most powerful of military piston engines: the American Pratt and Whitney 36 cylinder radial. And what was referred to as a secret weapon was in the back of a truck. Some-one peeled back the tarpaulin and exposed a Rolls Royce Nene Jet Engine. There had been whispers about that jet motor and today we were to have it demonstrated. “You men,” the instructor called out, “this is not for general knowledge. You must keep quiet about what you are going to see.”

Someone started the jet and the thing burst into life with a strange whining roar. We could see the hot compressed air being blasted out of the tail pipe and smell the burning kerosene. All the while, we were lectured on its power and successes. Finally, to demonstrate its awful power, an iron bar held by several sailors at each end, was carried into the jet-blast and the bar actually started to bend with the force of the jet. The engine was shut down and covered and carefully hidden from any possible prying eyes.

About half way thru’ the course I received a message from home to the effect that my mother had had an accident and had hurt her arm in a motor car accident. I applied for a leave to go home to see my mother and my request was denied. Being without cash for the train-fare, I sold my personal blanket to an Italian prison of war ⁽²⁾ and left for home. I stayed home with my mom for three days and was planning on returning to base when two naval police came to my home. I was out at the time and my mother refused to tell them where I was. I cut short my stay and took the next train back to St Athens. Reporting for duty I was arrested for being AWOL. The following day I was marched into the Captain’s office, found guilty of being AWOL and, before I could be sentenced, the Captain turned purple and had to be taken to the sick-bay. The following day, the second in command, a Squadron Leader Aitkin, gave me my punishment. “Well son,” he said quietly, “you did wrong and should not have gone AWOL. I realize your mother was hurt but that is no excuse. I punish you to the minimum I am allowed to sentence you – six days in the brig.”

“Thank you, Sir,” I said and was hustled off to serve my sentence. The next few days went pleasantly enough. The head jailer was a neighbor from my town. He treated me well, gave me all the food I wanted and all I had to do was to keep my cell clean. It took me a while to get used to my bed which was three planks of wood with a piece of shaped wood for a pillow.

When released I resumed my training and nothing more was said about the affair.

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While at St Athens, we were able to use the camp gymnasium. I spent most of my free time at the gym, weight-lifting, sword-fencing and gymnastics. The officers in charge of the gym were all Air Force and didn't seem to show any superior attitude towards enlisted men. After a while I used to take a turn looking after the gym while the duty officer was relaxing in the officers' mess. Strange though, not many used the gym even though the camp population was in the vicinity of 5000 men and women. An interesting airman I made friends with was a bit strange. He was about twenty and from Manchester, a tailor by trade. In his uniform he looked quite a stocky man, always looked a little disheveled. Stripped for his weight work-out he was a mass of powerful developed muscle and very strong. He was seen often sitting on road side and when asked, he claimed he had forgotten where he lived. He confided in me that he was working on being dismissed from the service on account of mental deficiency. He played other tricks too and eventually he was released and sent home to Manchester.

There was one sad incident at Wing 4: the trainee two cots to my left in our mess, was a bit of a loner. He was quite tall and had a squint. There had been several complaints made to our NCO that small personal items had gone missing – items such as watches, pens, rings etc. One man had even reported that a writing set given to him by his mother had disappeared. The ship's Master at Arms along with other officers conducted a search of our foot-lockers. When opening our friend's locker he began to cry, great sobs came from his throat when in his locker was found the missing things. He was arrested right away and taken to the guard-house. The following Monday, the boy was tried for theft.

To prepare for the court-marshal, a stage had been constructed in a vacant grassy area of the camp. Seats were placed on the stage for the officers. The order was given that all ratings were to attend the trial in number one uniforms. The man was marched in with an armed Petty Officer on each side of him. The sailor was not allowed to wear his hat and his sobbing was heard by the entire ship's company. The trial was brief, the crime details were given. "Guilty or not guilty," called the senior officer. Between his sobs, he replied, "Guilty." The punishment was handed down: one hundred and eighty days in the detention center in Portsmouth.

The man was led off and the assembly was dismissed. No one represented this unfortunate man. I imagine this was navy justice, obviously the lad had some psychological disorder, but justice must be seen to be done. That was the last we saw of the guilty man. Whether he appealed the punishment, I have no idea. But we all felt deeply that his punishment did not fit the crime.

In our free time, we could take a train ride to Barry or Cardiff, and locally there were a lot of interesting places to spend some time. I was fascinated with the castle near Llantwit Major, a short bus ride from camp. There was what today is known as Atlantic College. Back then during and for a few years after the war, the army had taken over the castle as a military base. The place was called St, Donat's Castle⁽³⁾ and what a magnificent place that was. From the castle main building to the shore of the Severn River, the gardens swept down in tiers, ornamentally landscaped. Starting at the top: a lawn, then a rose garden, one level was decorated with several example of topiary. Further down a small hedge-maze and at the lowest level a large swimming pool. Several of we visitors walked along the beach where the sea had eroded the shale cliffs and many fossils were lying on the beach and protruding from the cliff-face. We collected some of these relics as souvenirs of a beautiful place.

In the village of Llantwit Major is another lovely spot for quiet contemplation: the church of St. Illtyd, said to be the oldest Christian church in the UK. Apparently the original wooden structure burnt down hundreds of years ago and the present stone church was erected. The floor

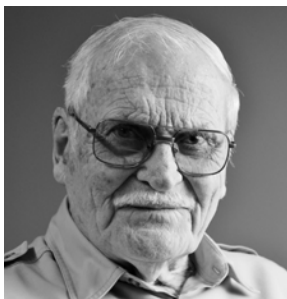
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of the church is paved with grave-stones hundreds of years old, and the vicar who showed us around the church, told us that a secret tunnel led to the monastery located some distance away. Well what wonderful adventures young sailors-under-training can have, at the expense of Our Majesty's Government, if they only try.

But of course we were not there for fun, we were training to keep airplanes flying, and soon our course would be completed. We studied hard and tried our best. I was fortunate in that I was able to graduate with high marks and get to sew a badge on my uniform sleeve indicating that I was now an Air Mechanic (Engines) FC. The badge may have been sewn on a little bit skewwhiff, but my pride was straight and sure. I was one of a group of graduated Air Mechanics who were sent to the Royal Naval Air Service base at Lee on Solent. Unfortunately, the skills learned were not to be put to use. Following a family crisis where I was needed at home, the authorities released me to the navy reserve for an indefinite period and I was no longer needed as an air mechanic first class.

Notes:

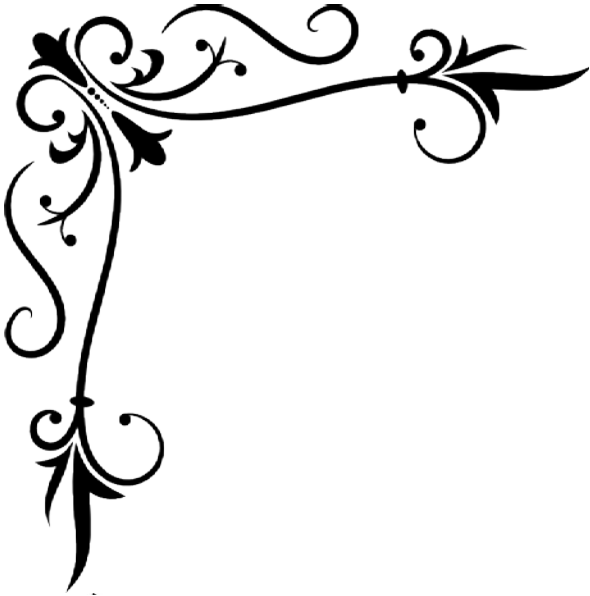
1. The order, "Lash up and stow," refers to the times when ships of the line sailed the seven seas and sailors slept between decks in hammocks which had to be bundled up out of the way when not in use.
2. There were many Italian prisoners of war in this area, working on local farms or working as helpers in the military kitchens. Most would be soon sent home when the Pacific war was over. These men lived comfortably and moved about without let or hindrance. Many had married local girls and never did return to Italy. It was an irony to learn that these men were provided with hot water for their ablutions and sheets for their beds while we sailors enjoyed neither of these comforts.
3. St. Donat's Castle was purchased in the 1920s by the American newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst. Mr. Hearst had had the place refurbished for himself and his friends. It was apparent that a great deal of money had been spent as the condition of the castle, when I was there, was magnificent. We were told that Mr. Hearst did come from his Californian home to visit and he entertained many high level politicians and movie stars there. After the war St. Donat's castle became the Atlantic College



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 59 years, Kay Thompson. They have five children.



Believe It or Not

By Trevor Trower

Sometimes I wonder if these things really happened. How on earth was it possible? And how would anyone come up with these ideas in the first place?

“The world’s largest drug store” closed down a few years ago. They had an unusual circus type show, featuring a pair of dancing Pekin ducks. A quarter in the slot and the music would start. In a few moments the two white ducks enclosed in the cage, would start their dance. We watched them with our kids while that pair of ducks hopped and gyrated and quacked in time to the music. There was another unusual act, that being the “Baseball Playing Chicken”. All this and more took place in Saint Petersburg Florida, in the drug-store known as Webb City. Those of you who witnessed these phenomena will vouch for my veracity. It turned out that the dancing ducks were motivated by an electric current being passed thru’ the floor of the cage. Something similar caused the chicken to play his game. There were other kinds of cruelty taking place which eventually were closed down by the authorities.

The first time I went to New York City (1956), I stayed at the Roosevelt Hotel, right down town near 42nd Street and 4th Avenue. It was about 10:00 pm when I checked in, and after unpacking it was still a bit too early to go to sleep, so I went for a walk. What an amazing city! Even at this time of the day there were crowds downtown and the Broadway Neon lit up the city with its garish flashing colors. I have heard it said that the “Big Apple” is the one city where anything can happen. I was there from Montreal and I thought that city was full of life and action, but there was really no comparison. As I walked the few blocks around the hotel, some stores were still open and occupying the entrances of those that were not open, were transient entrepreneurs selling a thousand and one assorted souvenirs to the unsuspecting and gullible tourist. Further along a man in a straight-jacket, chains and padlocks, was struggling to free himself while his partner was collecting offerings from a gathered crowd, in his hat. Once the amount was sufficient the imprisoned man quickly divested himself of his bondage and the show would start again.

Soon I came upon a man dressed in a full evening suit and top hat who was beside a poster advertising that the “World-Renowned Professor Flea” was about to present his famous

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Flea Circus for the first time, to the people of New York. It wasn't too long before a dozen or so people had paid their quarter and gathered in that store entrance. Extra lighting had been provided by a system of batteries. The audience gathered round the professor's stage. On a small square table draped with a green felt cloth, an enormous lens had been suspended. The lens was several inches thick and its diameter about a foot and a half.

The professor began his spiel. He talked for a few minutes about the history of flea-training, exciting the interest of the crowd, until one or two of the drunken customers started to heckle for the show to start. Extra light was shone on the stage beneath the lens and the first act was introduced. We could see the flea through the lens quite clearly. It looked about an inch long and was dressed in a little pink tutu and it was twirling about the stage in time to a piece of well-known ballet music. When the act was over, the impresario picked up the flea with a tweezers and placed it carefully in a little partitioned cigar box. There was another patter and a couple of fleas, dressed as a male and female were placed on the stage. The music began and the audience was again amazed as the couple began their waltz about the stage. Again at the appropriate time the fleas were removed and boxed and the third act was prepared which was something similar. The final act drew breaths of disbelief from the audience. Six fleas, in colorful uniforms, had been attached to a tiny coach and it was being dragged across the stage by the harnessed team. There was some head-shaking and applause as the audience drifted away into the night.

The professor pushed up the sleeve of his jacket; one by one he placed each flea on his fore-arm as he explained to me that the fleas, feeding on his blood, had developed a higher degree of intelligence, and bonding with him, made it easier for him to teach them tricks. He allowed the fleas a few minutes to have their supper then, boxing them, he moved out to confront the passing crowds to join him in the next show.

Yes, New York City is a wonderful place.....



School Daze

By Diane Bandura Miller

About the time Toronto was becoming a major city, my life was about to take a turn.

The day was Tuesday, September 6, 1949, in downtown Toronto.

“Wake up sleepy head, you don’t want to be late for your first day at school,” my mother called as she opened the bedroom blinds. Sunshine shattered the darkness accompanying the colours of daylight, making me squint as I opened my eyes to see her smiling face. “Time to get dressed, breakfast is ready.”

At the young age of four, what did I know about school? Except that my mother made me a new outfit and bought me new shoes, which were checked for size using an x-ray machine. My hair had been rolled up in little squiggles, held tight with bobby pins.

Jumping out of bed, I skipped along the hallway toward the bathroom. Excitement was in the air. Wafting up the stairs was the aroma of my grandmother’s coffee: Maxwell House, with chicory and a dash of salt, this was her secret brew. The delicious scent filled the house every morning like clockwork. We of course were not allowed to drink it, we were too young. Once in a while my grandmother would sneak us a little sip. As I passed by our kitchen I saw that the table was set for breakfast and heard the song “Buttons and Bows” playing on the radio.

The bathroom was filled with the scent of my father’s Aqua Velva and Palmolive soap.



Diana, first day of school

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I quickly washed and shuffled back to the bedroom where my clothes were laid out for this special day. I put on my new pleated skirt, white blouse, shoes and socks, while my mother dressed my little sister. She then helped me buckle my shoes. Sliding the bobby pins out of my hair she began brushing it; “Ouch, ouch, ouch”, I murmured. It hurt having my hair brushed because I had what everyone called, a very sensitive scalp.

Our bustling home was quiet by the time I got up this particular morning. My father had already left for work at Avro Canada Ltd. in Malton. My grandfather was on his way to his job at Levy Paper. My aunt was gone to work at the Reliable Toy Company, where they were making a Barbara Ann Scott doll. This was to honour the Canadian woman who had won the 1948 Olympic Games figure-skating title. She was known as “Canada’s Sweetheart.” We would always get the latest doll at Christmas. A doll with skates was very exciting!



Grandfather, Father, Grandmother, Carol, Diana, Mother and Santa, Christmas 1949



My sister Carol and I with Santa holding our wrapped Barbara Ann Scott dolls

Our breakfast consisted of scrambled eggs and toast, with milk to wash it down. After we ate, we were called to the kitchen pantry. I stood up to go, hesitating by the kitchen window, glancing longingly toward the deserted park behind our house. “Hurry up,” my mother said. I was procrastinating, knowing that the trip to the pantry meant that it was time for cod liver oil! “Yuck!” My little sister sometimes clamped her lips together and shook her head from side to side, absolutely refusing to take it. The taste of it still lingers on my palate.

My mother then escorted us down the long flight of stairs. “Hold on to the banister,” she instructed. This same banister sometimes served as our personal short cut down the stairs, but not today. It was time for my mother to leave for work, at Tip Top Tailors, where she sewed uniforms for the armed forces, and she was in a hurry.

My grandmother’s eyes sparkled as she watched us trip down the stairs. Her round rosy cheeks filled with smiles as she gave us a hug and said, “Dzień dobry, moje aniołki,” which means, “Good morning, my little angels,” in Polish. As a young child I thought that old people spoke Polish and young people spoke English. I spoke both.

My grandmother or Babchi as we called her, was a quiet woman, never saying much unless provoked by my father or grandfather. They could have been court jesters, having quite a sense of humour. When they joked with her, she subdued her laughter and pretended to be displeased... her jiggling belly gave her away every time.

After buttoning our coats and closing the door to our warm and comfortable home, my

grandmother took our hands, my sister on one side and me on the other. We set out on our five block adventure walking to school, crossing roads and taking shortcuts through laneways. Houses lined both sides of the street looking like tall soldiers standing guard. Occasionally my little sister would stop walking, look up at my grandmother and stretch her arms upward; this meant she had enough of walking and wanted to be carried.

As we walked along, I noticed that under some tall, spreading trees, scattered on the ground, lay round, spiny, green objects. Some were cracked open, revealing a dark, smooth, shiny treasure. Something I wanted to touch, but did not dare. We could not dilly dally or we would be late for my first day of school. I felt excited because my parents told me that school would be fun, with a lot of things to do, and many friends to play with.

As we neared the school I could hear the shrill of children's voices. As we walked up to the school a lady opened a squeaky gate. "Welcome to Grace Street Public School," she said. She then assured my grandmother that she could leave and I would be fine. I was not so sure this was a good idea and clutched her hand a little more tightly. My grandmother reassured me and said, "Go play, I will come back for you after school." My grandmother and sister gave me a hug and waved goodbye. As I watched them walk away I felt frightened and wondered when I would ever see them again. The strange lady then directed me toward an ominous looking paved area, marked with hopscotch chalk. Children were skipping, playing ball and chattering like squirrels. The area was surrounded by a high Lundy fence. This made it seem more like an institution than a school. Scads of girls and boys I had never seen before! Everyone seemed to know one another; they did not know me. Butterflies were fluttering in my stomach.

I found a corner in the schoolyard where I stood quietly watching everyone play. I wished I could have joined them. These were not my familiar friends or family; not a single one of them was here. I felt very alone and was not enjoying this place.

Suddenly startled by a loud bell, I heard a voice, coming from nowhere, "Good morning children, please find a partner, take their hand, and walk quietly into the school, two by two."

Looking around I noticed there was not a single girl or boy left in the entire schoolyard for me to partner with. Everyone, except me, was coupled up and ready to enter the formidable looking building. Feeling abandoned, a sob was welling up inside me. I turned quickly on my heels, opened the squeaky gate, and headed for home. No one noticed.

When my grandmother and sister got home, there I was, on the porch, waiting patiently for their return. My grandmother looked at me and asked, "Sweetheart, why did you come home from school?" In a quivering voice I answered, "I didn't have a partner."

"You didn't have a partner? she reiterated. My grandmother blessed herself and asked "How did you get home without my seeing you?" I just shrugged, because I really didn't know how I did it. I guess it was just instinct, and maybe a different route.

When the rest of our family returned home from work that day, my grandmother told them about my escape from school. At first, they seemed concerned, but then they smiled at me and began to laugh. I myself, was quite happy, because, held tightly in my hand was a dark, smooth, shiny chestnut.

I don't remember how it all transpired, but my family did convince me to return to school that year... I clearly remember making ashtrays out of asbestos!

The following year my parents made arrangements for me to attend what they referred to as "separate" school—St. David's Catholic School. This school was on the same street where we lived and just two blocks away. I remember my family discussing that it would cost extra for me to attend this "separate" school, but I guess they were willing to make the sacrifice. My teachers

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were Roman Catholic, Felician Sisters.

I enjoyed this school so much that even when I was ill, my parents had a hard time keeping me from going to class. I excelled to the point that my teachers wanted me to skip a grade or two. My family agreed not to allow me to skip grades because they thought I should be with children my own age. I had many friends and cousins at this school and was able to join the schoolyard fun. Boys in one schoolyard and girls in another. Boys on one side of the classroom, girls on the other.

What was a rocky start in education, ended up being a lifetime of learning, to this day, 66 years later! ... and I still enjoy finding chestnuts.



My parents, Bernice and Carl with Carol and me



Born at the old Mount Sinai Hospital on Yorkville Avenue in Toronto, to a tremendous and amusing family. Ushering in, the biggest snowstorm, ever to hit Toronto.

Learning to read from comic books, at a very young age, greatly influenced my direction in life. Continued through life in a beatified way, being taught by Felician Catholic Nuns, in the ways of the Catechism. This did not last forever.

My first real job was as a Key Punch Operator for The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, head office. A little bored with this, I married in 1963. The culmination of this union resulted in two bewitching daughters, and four fascinating grandchildren, two boys and

two girls.

Homesteading in Escarpment Country, we raised our daughters, Appaloosa horses, chickens and goats. During this time, I pursued a myriad of activities including college courses, photography, art, teaching modeling and self improvement, growing trees for lumber, and dancing in a chorus line. Working for The Ontario Jockey Club in Publicity and Public Relations I had many pictures taken with horses and other dignitaries, dined with stars and was on TV! All this, and more, during my marriage to a somewhat understanding husband, who taught high school.

After our daughters married I attended the University of Guelph where I studied Art, English and Physiological Psychology, which continues to complicate my life.

I now enjoy doing volunteer work in Milton ON and Nashville TN.

Continuing to learn new things gives me "purpose" ... including writing my memoirs.

Recognizing the joys of writing, I wish I had paid better attention during English class.



My Polish Canadian Christmas

By Diane Bandura Miller

Growing up with my mother's Polish family in Toronto meant that our Christmas combined both Polish and Canadian traditions. Three generations of our family lived in a spacious three story house with the added bonus of a park right in our backyard.

Christmas was truly merry and exciting. Singing in the choir and performing in Christmas plays at our church. There were dance lessons, swimming lessons and Brownies; each of these offered special events at Christmas. It was a bustling time of the year.

Christmas Eve and Christmas day dinner were very special. The season would begin with Advent, about four weeks before Christmas—a time when people remained peaceful and did not indulge themselves, remembering the real reason for Christmas. Our home was cleaned from top to bottom, inside and out, so it would be spotless for this special celebration.

About a week before Christmas day, my mother and father would drive to a Christmas tree lot where we would check out all the trees, picking out the best tree we could find. My father would bargain with the salesman to get the best deal. After bringing it home he would saw off the bottom and place it in a stand that often wobbled. A string tacked it back to the wall so that it would not fall. The tree had to be just the right height to accommodate the Star of Bethlehem. The delicate glass decorations glistened as we carefully took



Christmas play at St. Francis Church, Grace St., Toronto where my uncle was choir master.

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them from compartmented boxes and placed them on the tree with little hooks. A few days before Christmas my Grandmother would hang colourfully wrapped candies; she didn't hang them too early for fear we would eat them all before Christmas.

Christmas Eve was the most important day of the season in Polish tradition. Dinner was not served until the first star appeared in the sky. The meal was traditionally meat free, out of respect for the animals who looked after baby Jesus in the manger. Twelve meatless dishes were served to symbolize the twelve Apostles. I never did figure out what the Apostles have to do with Christmas?

Once the twelve meatless dishes were set on the table and everyone was seated, my grandfather, or Jadzi as we called him, would say a prayer and pass around a large fragile wafer called Oplatek, imprinted with a picture of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. He would then wish each of us good health, happiness and prosperity in the coming year. We would break a piece off and put it in our mouth, letting it dissolve. For dessert we enjoyed poppy seed roll (the poppy seeds symbolize prosperity), cheesecake, chruscili (sweet crisps), and paczki (fruit filled donuts). Sometimes we would have a dish of Kutia (wheat berry pudding made from wheat, poppy seeds, raisins, walnuts and honey.)

After our meal we would all move into the living room where the glittering Christmas tree stood by the window. The adults sat comfortably while my sister and I squirmed in our seats knowing what was to follow. Then as if by magic we would hear the clattering of hooves on the roof and jingling bells! Our parents would say "Listen... Santa has landed on the roof!" Eyes popping out of our heads, we watched for Santa's descent.

Santa, suspiciously resembling a portly uncle, outfitted in his traditional red suit with white hair and a strangely fitted beard and moustache came down the stairs, jingling a row of sleigh bells, shouting, "HO HO HO Merry Christmas!" I remember asking why he didn't come down the chimney into our fireplace. My mother said that he might get stuck because our chimney was so long and much too small for Santa.

Santa would then sit down and call each of us to his knee. He asked if we had been bad or good. We would always tell him we were good because we knew that bad children probably did not get presents. Santa seemed to enjoy my aunt and my mother sitting on his knee most, it made everyone laugh.



Christmas on Shaw Street

After the presents were handed out, Santa would disappear up the stairs calling, "Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night."

Our Polish Catholic tradition was that after we were put to bed the adults would attend midnight mass at our local Polish Church, St. Stanislaus, leaving one adult behind to look after my sister and me.

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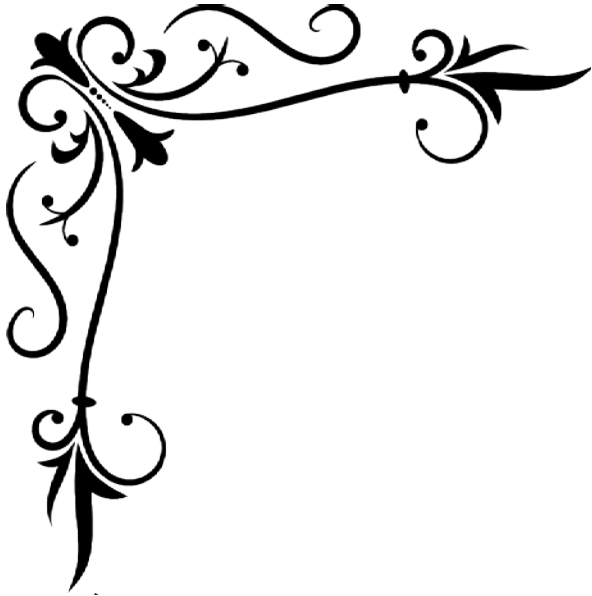
Early Christmas day morning, my grandmother would be in her kitchen preparing our Christmas day feast. As soon as we awoke my sister and I would run downstairs to the main living room and play with our new toys. Then we would have a breakfast of crepes with fruit. Our Christmas dinner consisted of soup, capon and ham with kielbasa, roasted potatoes, gravy, carrots, cabbage rolls, salad and more. This was served in the afternoon.

In Polish we wish each other “Wesołych Świąt” which means “Merry Christmas” or “Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia” meaning “Merry Christmas Jesus is born.”

Remembering Christmas during my childhood years brings me joy. Living with grandparents was awesome. They had a way of balancing things and making everything just a little better.



My sister Carol, Uncle “Santa” and me.



Unforgettable Encounters in the Highlands

By Lyn Unsworth

It all started when my husband retired. He got this idea into his head that he was going to do what his parents did when his father retired as a high school principal. They moved to their cottage in the Laurentian Mountains. We moved from my very favourite house on the golf course in Brantford where I had assumed we would live and enjoy our retirement years, until the Lord called us home. It was a city home in a country setting. But my husband had other plans for his retirement, and we moved to cottage country. I went kicking and screaming up to the Haliburton Highlands in the spring of 1994. We bought a cottage on a big, clear, clean lake, and there we poured into it thousands of dollars, trying to make it as citified as possible. How ridiculous. We should have treated it like a cottage!

One Saturday afternoon in September, with the family all about us, we took a walk into the Haliburton Forest. There was a chill in the air as the autumn leaves drifted down along the trail. Our son-in-law was way ahead of us chatting with a couple he had just met. As we approached, he introduced us to our neighbours, Mat and Fiona Wilkes. Fiona was wearing a beret which covered her head. She wore no make-up except for eyeliner. Mat was an older gentleman. He had rosy cheeks, piercing blue eyes and a pleasant smile. He reminded me of a thin Santa Claus. Somehow, during the brief conversation, Fiona mentioned that she worked at the travel agency in town. I had to book a flight out west in the next few days so she and I made a date for Monday.

Opening the door to the travel agency, I looked around for Fiona. There was only a middle-aged attractive woman sitting at a desk. Her jet black hair was shaped in a Mohawk haircut, and she was wearing bright red lipstick. "Hi Lyn," she said. Oh, my goodness, I thought, *that* is Fiona. She got up from her desk and walked towards me. Tattooed on her right upper arm, was a black lace bracelet, and peeking through her sheer

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white blouse was tattooed a black spider. She wore high wedged heels which made her short form seem taller, and peeking around from her left calf was a bluish green snake. I tried not to stare. A few years later I discovered that Fiona's eyeliner was also tattooed on. That seemed like a good idea if you were brave enough to have it done.

Desperately desiring a friend here in the Highlands, I wondered if we would bond together, but I had never known anyone personally whose body was tattooed. After making my travel arrangements, I thanked Fiona and said, "When I get back from my trip, we must get together since we are neighbours." She seemed to welcome the idea and we waved goodbye.

Knowing that God has a plan and a purpose for each life on this earth, I wondered what He had planned for Ian and me here in the Haliburton Highlands. Why were we here, at this particular lake?

Mat and Fiona became close friends. Often we would go out for lunch together or spend the day in Peterborough shopping and trying new restaurants. Mat seemed to know the better places to eat in the area, and we would enjoy a meal at their cottage or they would walk over to ours for dinner. Mat was in his late seventies when we met, a graduate engineer and retired. He was a storyteller, and many a time I wished I had a tape recorder handy to record the stories he told us of Americans coming up to the Hunt Camp, bears caught in the traps, wolves and coyotes howling through the night. There was a time when Ian and our youngest daughter, Kara, experienced a tornado at the lake. Ian said the lightning flashes were like a venetian blind opening and closing. Trees were falling all over the property, blocking the driveway to the main road. I missed the excitement as I was out in Vancouver at the time. Truly, it was an experience living here in the country.

Fiona was Mat's second wife. She had four children with her first husband. Life had not been easy for her. She and her husband had moved from Scotland many years before. They settled in the Haliburton Highlands and raised their children—three sons and a daughter. One son was killed in a motorcycle accident right outside their house, and the daughter died of an incurable disease at the age of fourteen. Fiona's husband was unable to handle the deaths and took his own life a few years later. Brokenhearted, Fiona's Christian foundation was being chipped away, piece by piece.

A life change was needed. Fiona moved to Toronto where she opened a café south of Bloor Street near Yonge. It was here that Mat met her. Fiona said he kept coming into the café and asking her to go out on a date. Then he found out that she once lived in the Highlands. Now, he insisted on her going out with him. She finally did, and not long after they were married. Fiona moved back to the Highlands, the place that held many sad memories for her.

One morning Fiona called to say she wanted to talk to Ian. She walked over along the sandy beach to our cottage which was only two houses away. She came to ask Ian to drive her to Peterborough. She had some tests to undergo and needed someone to drive her back afterwards as she might feel woozy when they were completed. Naturally, Ian obliged. Fiona discovered that she had breast cancer. She didn't want to let Mat know as his first wife died from breast cancer, and she didn't want to upset him. However, she had to tell him eventually.

Ian became Fiona's principle driver. After surgery and several chemotherapy treatments at the medical center in Kingston, Fiona was doing much better and even

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considering breast implants. Being very proud about her looks, she did have the implants, but infection developed and this laid her back for quite some time.

In the late spring of 2001, life seemed to be more settled for our friends, Mat and Fiona. She was doing well, and Mat wanted to give her the gift of a trip to her homeland, Scotland. With Fiona's expertise and discounts through the travel agency, they booked a flight to Edinburgh, and made arrangements to pick up a luxury barge and sail the inland Caledonia Canal. They had a suite on the eight passenger Scottish Highlander sailing from Inverness. This would be a beautiful and relaxing way to experience Scotland from the water and sightsee as well.

They arrived at the dock, and boarded the Highlander. Fiona wanted to see their cabin immediately, and off she went for an inspection. On the way, she accidentally tripped and fell. The crew scrambled to help her, and the decision was made to call an ambulance. The luxury barge cruise was postponed. Fiona spent two weeks in hospital recovering from a broken leg. They decided to fly home, and once again Ian's services were required. He picked them up from the airport in Toronto, and drove them home to the Haliburton Highlands. With Fiona's leg in a cast, a wheelchair was necessary for many weeks. What a disappointment for them.

Soon we were dining out again. One evening, we picked up our neighbours and drove to a lovely resort where we enjoyed a beautiful meal and good conversation. Fiona was maneuvering quite well with her crutches, and she insisted on doing things herself. After dinner we headed towards the parking lot. There were four stairs to descend. Ian and Mat immediately went to help Fiona, but she put them off, sat down on the top step, gave the crutches to me, and bumped down the stairs on her fanny. We all had a good laugh.

Before we left the cottage to come back to the city and be with our family for Christmas, we drove our friends to Peterborough to do some Christmas shopping. Mat indulged Fiona's every wish. She wanted a Christmas tree that was special, and one she didn't have to decorate. Then she bought expensive gifts for everyone she knew. It was going to be a special Christmas this year. The car was filled to the brim as we wound our way through the Kawarthas and into the Haliburton Highlands, and up the winding, scenic road to the lake. Before we left for the city, we were invited over to the Wilkes. Upon entering their beautiful country home, the Christmas tree took my breath away. It was shaped like a tall cedar of Lebanon, which suited the vaulted ceiling, and it was ablaze with tiny lights, no other decoration, just the lights. It was like a diamond necklace glowing in that corner of darkness.

We sat by their huge fireplace which was an amazing stone structure that extended from the



*Mat & Fiona visiting us in
Haliburton, Christmas, 2001*

basement through the living room and dining room area right up to their loft bedroom on the second floor. The logs sparked and crackled providing soul-comforting warmth on a chilly winter night. We enjoyed the food and drinks but, most of all, we enjoyed being together. It was our last joyful time together.

When we returned to the Highlands in the new year of 2002, Fiona was battling that dreaded cancer again. She and I did have days by the fireside doing a Bible study together. Then she took to her bed. I climbed the stairs to the loft bedroom and ensuite. This area opened onto a balcony that overlooked the lake, just as the living room area also opened onto a wide balcony with panoramic views of the sparkling water. Fiona's sweet spirit was dying inside. She was angry. She wanted to live, but she knew she was dying. She sat up in bed against an array of pillows. There were still no wrinkles on her face, even though she was approaching her sixty-fifth birthday in April. Mat said she didn't have wrinkles because she always slept on her back, never on her side. Her face was never bunched up on the pillow. She really was beautiful.

Fiona never really got excited about anything. I think it was because so much joy had been taken from her over the years. This day she seemed to be throwing papers around, and tossing magazines here and there. She was irritated. People were coming to visit. Friends she knew from the past, people from the travel agency, a pastor from a local church. Where were her two sons? There were no visits from them, and now there was a grandson. She never had a chance to know him. I asked her one day, "Do you know where you are going?" She replied "Yes, but I don't want to go, I'm not ready!"

Fiona died April 12, 2002. Two weeks before her birthday. Her youngest son wrote a poem after her death. One stanza read, "She must leave now, join the others she once held in her hands."

One morning, after the funeral, there was a blaze of fire coming from the Wilkes' property. After inspection, we discovered Mat burning about fifty pairs of wedged shaped shoes. Those high wedged shoes had caused Fiona to trip on the luxury barge. Mat was angry. He was a broken-hearted man.

Ian and I had sold the cottage and moved to a new house in the village. One morning I awoke with an urgency to drive up the thirty mile, winding road to see Mat. His double garage door was always open. We never knew what colour it was painted. The front door was red. I banged on it loudly. "I brought you some food, may I come in?"

Mat looked sad. He had a fire going. We sat down in the two big chairs by the fireside. He said to me, "Can a man love two women in his life?" I looked at him, wanting to hold this old, desperate man in my arms. "Of course, you can love two women in your life." Then he said something that surprised me.

"But I will never forgive those two boys. They never came to visit her in those last days." He was referring to Fiona's oldest son and her youngest son. "They are no good, and I don't ever want to lay eyes on them!" There was silence for a long time, just the fire crackling and the sweet smell of the logs burning. Suddenly, I was prompted to say something I had read in a book recently written by Brother Yun: "A heart of bitterness and unforgiveness is like a prison. It not only binds others, but it destroys you." More silence, the fire spitting out sparks. He seemed pensive. Again, I broke the silence, "Mat, may I pray for you?" He looked at me, but he didn't answer. I took his hand and prayed a prayer for him to forgive Fiona's sons, and for God to forgive him." He repeated the prayer after me. I was surprised, but happy that he did.

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Mat died December 1st, 2002, just a few short months after Fiona. He joined her in eternity. It was the end of a chapter in our lives.

By the way, we drove by the house months later. The garage door was down. It was red.



Lyn Unsworth trained as a private secretary before becoming a wife, mother and grandmother. She has been a speaker for Stonecroft Ministries, but now desires to write her memoirs. Lyn and her husband live in Milton, Ontario.



The Invasion

By Lyn Unsworth

It was May, 1971. My mother was not well. She was seventy-six years old. I made my sister and brothers and their families aware that mother was ill. I telephoned my brother, Vern, who was living with his family on the Val Cartier Army Base near Quebec City. His wife, Mildred, answered the phone. I explained the situation and asked her to let my brother know.

Then I said, "How are you, Mildred?" There was silence. I asked her again, "Mildred, how are **you**?" I heard a faint sniff, then a slight sob. She poured it out. "Not so good here. Vern is bad, his drinking is bad, he is not good to the children, much abuse."

"Can you get help? Is there anyone you can turn to for help?" She replied that the chaplain on the base knew what was going on. I asked if I could have his name. She gave it to me. Then I could only answer, "Mildred, hang in there, I'll help you," and I hung up the phone, having no idea what to do, and immediately I turned to the God of hope. I prayed, "Lord, I don't know what to do, or how to help this family, but you know the whole situation, please, take over."

Phone your pastor, was the next thought that entered my head. We were attending a church near where we lived in North York. I explained the situation to the pastor, and he said, "Give me the name of the chaplain on the army base, and I will call him." A situation that seemed impossible to fix now took on an air of expeditious urgency. This family: mother and five children had to escape.

The chaplain on the army base made arrangements to have trusted neighbours who knew the family and sympathized with Mildred's dilemma, to take keep some of their belongings. For the next few days the Chaplain came around to the Selby home, picked up some items and delivered them to the neighbour. They were careful not to remove anything that would be noticeable. He also informed our pastor in Toronto what was going on and asked for prayer regarding the family and the plans that were being made.

In the meantime, we made the airline in Toronto aware of the situation, and they made every effort to help us. We paid for the airfare for the family, and then informed our pastor of

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the date and time of the flight, and he immediately telephoned the chaplain in Quebec who in turn made arrangements for Mildred and the family to be picked up and driven to the airport on the day of their departure.

Verna, the oldest of Vern's five children, related to me recently what she could recall: "The actual day of our departure, I remember waiting for Dad to go to work, and then we went to get our bags and belongings at a neighbour's house. She had kept them in hiding for us. It seemed we had to run right onto the tarmac as we were late, but by an act of God, the plane waited for us to board."

It was November 8th, 1971, and the plane on the runway at Jean Lesage International Airport was not moving. The passengers were becoming impatient, wondering why their flight to Toronto was held up.

The oldest of the five children remembered the day very well: it was her 16th birthday. "It's kind of hard to bring up some of the past memories, but I find it helpful to see that behind the 'sickness' there was a 'heart,' and I can't help but think that the war 'killed' so many young men (emotionally) like Dad," recalled Verna.

Many of those who came home had gone away as bright young boys, but came home as broken men. My brother was one of them, and alcohol had become his best friend.

Verna described the scene as she recalled that 16th birthday, "You could smoke on the plane then, so you can imagine how much Mom smoked on that fear-filled ride! But all kidding aside, how Mom did this is simply amazing. It was not until I became a mother that I could only somewhat realize her strength and wonderful love for her children. I remember Mom giving me a watch on the morning of our departure, and as I think back about that, imagine her taking the time to get me a birthday gift."

My husband and I lived in a small three-bedroom bungalow with our two young daughters, aged eleven and nine. We had just finished the basement as our family room. Fortunately, we had a small bathroom with a shower installed. This is where the family came to stay. We had a bed sofa already there, and we set up some rollaway cots borrowed from friends.

Brenda, the second oldest emailed me recently with her memory of that time. "I was quite excited about the move to Toronto. I was 14 and had never been on a plane. I remember Verna's birthday because she received a watch as her birthday gift. I thought she was so lucky...wow, a watch!"

Linda, the next girl in the family, emailed me to tell me how she felt that day so long ago. "I just remember the excitement of all of us going on the plane. We were late, and we went straight up the stairs onto the plane, no ramps at that terminal. The thought of going to such a big city and never being there before didn't seem to worry me, as long as I was together with my family, because I was only 13 years old at the time. I thought we were just going on a holiday, not knowing we were leaving Val Cartier, Quebec forever, but grateful now that we did. I am thankful for our beautiful mother who was strong enough to make the decision to follow the guidance from you, and come to Toronto. I have had the opportunity to go back twice to revisit the army base with fond memories...sometimes being young and naïve is a blessing to the mind."

Then the youngest of the four daughters, Sandra emailed me. She was eleven years old at the time of their departure. "I remember the day we moved from Quebec to Toronto. I had thrown up on Verna's dress, because the plane made me sick, and still does to this day. I also remember living in your basement, and I felt it was so cozy, but most of all I remember that

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Christmas. I think it was the best Christmas of all, because my dad wasn't there to beat us up or yell at us, or hurt my mom."

The family arrived with very little baggage. We got them settled. Poor Mildred needed to have some peace in her soul and some rest. My heart went out to her. Now, her youngest, eight-year old Keith, was a different story. He was truly in need of a loving, fatherly figure. Once he settled down and knew the layout of the house, he instructed me in a very harsh manner, "**You get in the kitchen and make my dinner!**" Obliging, I behaved, but we straightened him out later.

The following Sunday we all filed into church. The pastor, who had helped out so much, greeted them warmly. Many of the parishioners who knew about the situation were very kind. The Family, as they were called, was prayed for and it seemed each Sunday money was pressed into my hand, accompanied with the words, "For the Family."

The first priority was getting these kids to school. The nearest high school was in a very wealthy area called York Mills. Verna emailed me with these words about school at that time: "The adjustment to school life was likely very difficult for all of us. At St. Andrew's Junior High we just didn't fit in, as so many of the children were Jewish, and did I mention RICH, very RICH and SNOBBY! I recall on Jewish holidays, it seemed like just us three, (Brenda, Linda and I) were the only ones there! I'm not sure how Sandra and Keith made out at another school."

The pile-up in the hallway of kids going off to school provided a chaotic adventure every morning. The conversation went as follows: "That's mine, no **you cannot** wear it; where are my shoes? And, you are wearing **my** sweater under that coat." Mildred and I would close the door with great glee, sit down, have a coffee, and enjoy the peace and quiet before we set to work doing dishes, laundry, and making beds. Our schedule was busy with not much time to spend on our own. My privacy was spent in the bathtub for half an hour.

The next project was to get this family onto government welfare. Not knowing how to go about this, I went to the North York Council Chambers on Yonge Street and boldly went up to the counter and asked, "How does a family apply for Social Assistance?" I was sent here, there and elsewhere only to find I was not getting anywhere. Finally, someone suggested that I see an alderman named Paul Godfrey. The next day I went back and asked if I could make an appointment to see this alderman. "I'm sorry, Mr. Godfrey is very busy right now, come back in about a month." I explained about this family and that they needed assistance right away, and that my husband and I could not afford to feed them and keep them in our home much longer. Still, I was getting nowhere, until I stopped and in desperation I prayed to God for help, and also asked my church group friends to pray. The next day, I phoned the office, and in a very officious voice, I asked for an appointment with Mr. Godfrey.

Two days later, I sat in Paul Godfrey's office. He served as an alderman in North York from 1964 to 1973. Then he was appointed Chairman of Metro Toronto, serving until 1984, and later became President of the Toronto Sun, head of the Toronto Blue Jays, President and CEO of the National Post, and on to many other positions as a business man and politician.

"How can I help you?" asked this tall man with an extremely long and pointed chin. (A few years later Mr. Godfrey had his jaw surgically corrected.) I explained to him all about the family coming to live with us and how the mother would eventually get a job to support her family of five, but at the moment they were in dire need of social assistance. This very busy man listened carefully with compassion and understanding. "Leave this situation with me, and I'll see what I can do for them. I will call you as soon as I have some information for you," he

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said. I left his office wondering whether he was serious and would he really do something. Two days later, this very kind but busy man called to say that he had broken through some red tape and the family could expect assistance in a couple of weeks. What a relief!

It was time to think about finding The Family a home. It was now March, 1972. I spread the word at church and to friends and neighbours. There was a business man who attended the church. He owned Lansing Lumber nearby. He spoke to me one Sunday and said that one of the small houses he owned near his store would be available for rent in a month. I asked how much the rent would be. He gave me a reasonable figure, and soon we were collecting beds, chairs, tables, lamps from people at the church and friends to furnish the small three bedroom home on Maplehurst Ave. They moved in to their own home at last.

Verna, who was sixteen the day of The Invasion, later wrote about that time, "It was good to move into our little place on Maplehurst. Lots of food came to our door that Christmas and some was left on the front step. Folks from church baked and did many heart-warming gestures for us, getting us beds and furniture and clothing. When I became a believer in the Lord Jesus, I recall asking God how He did not try and connect with me sooner, like why did You wait until I was forty, God? Then I was reminded of all the blessings that had been showered down on us from heaven, from a Holy and merciful God!"

God had provided for The Family and He continued to do so, as the children now attended different schools in their own neighbourhood. There were many other details to attend to such as health care and proper clothing. So many people continued to help. My eyes were wide open to the kindness and care that our church family and friends provided.

What happened to the husband and father of this family – my brother? He did come to visit with his family in March of 1973. He became quite ill at the time, and was hospitalized for a week. When I picked him up at the hospital to drive him to Union Station to get the train back to Quebec City, the doctor said to me "He is an alcoholic and a diabetic. If he takes another drink, it will kill him." He wanted a drink as soon as I picked him up. We went for a bite to eat and then I put him on the train. I never saw him again. He died April 12, 1973 in a diabetic coma. He was fifty years old. He fought in World War II and also in Korea.

Here are two poems he wrote to Verna.

"This one is for your mother.....

PARTING IS SUCH SORROW

If you from me should ever part
Then all this love within my heart
Would cease the functioning of my life
For that strong desire for you to be my wife.

I'm losing faith in all mankind
This sure and does corrupt my mind
But if again we should hap to meet
I'd face you once again without defeat
This knowing heart, would still retain
That love for you, for once again. " VHS

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“Dear Verna,

I try not to remember
That day in December
On that day no children spoke
As I was all alone, when I awoke
My children dear, so nice and fine
I looked all over, but could not find.

No Xmas stockings I could not see
But there was still love in the heart of me.
I prayed to God for some remittance,
To see the light, for some assistance.
He answered back, with words quite true
That all my children are true and blue.

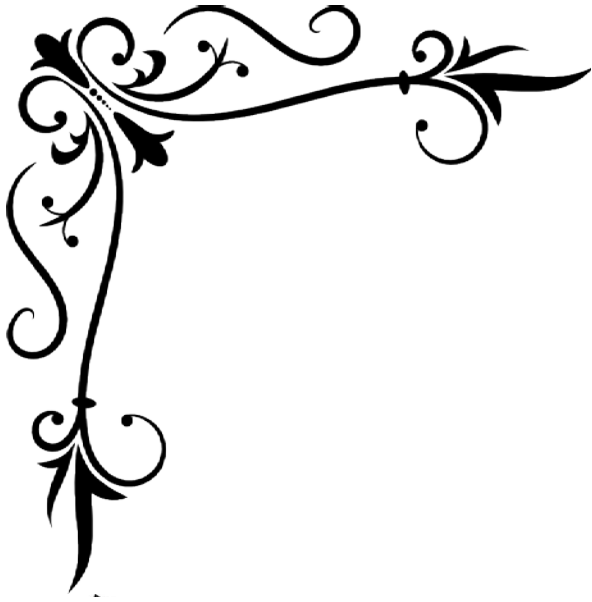
So at night I kneel, and say a prayer
For that good Lord, away up there
So now I close, in my best prose,
And you get dressed in your Sunday clothes.” VHS

My husband and I and our two daughters moved away to Brantford in 1974. This was a good thing as I was becoming too attached to The Family. They needed to grow on their own, to make their own way, and to find their own friends in the community.

This story ends happily as all five children grew up, married, had children of their own and some have become grandparents. The best part of the story is that each one grew to love the God who loved them first.



Brenda & Verna, the two oldest girls in “the family” with me.



Pathways of Life

By Mary Cummings

In the Bible there is a verse that says, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps.139) and I am thankful for that. As I look back on my life, I see that there are things that happened to me, and choices made by my mum and dad, wise choices, that have helped shape me into the kind of person I am today. I have written several memoirs, but none about my childhood. As I thought about it, there were some incidents that seemed significant and which helped give my life purpose and direction.

I was a small baby, less than 5lbs., and contracted whooping cough soon after my birth. The doctor told my Mum, that if she hadn’t been nursing me, and also for her good care, I would not have survived. Many years later, having had this illness turned out to be a great blessing to me.

Between birth and age 5, I cannot recall much. When I was about 3, I fell down an unused well. My Mum rescued me, wrapped me in warm towels, plonked me in a big chair, and rubbed me dry as she sang, “Rub-a-dub-dub, Three men in a tub...”

I think I was a reasonably good child. Mostly I played with my younger brother in our large back garden, catching toads and snails, and watching the “goods” trains as they passed by the fence at the bottom of our yard. Sometimes we would capture our poor cat, Bubbles, and put a bonnet on him, dress him in baby clothes and wheel him around in my doll carriage. He would “Meow, Meow” piteously, so that didn’t last very long. Fed up, he would escape to freedom.

Sometimes I was in trouble for not watching my brother properly – 2 ½ years younger than me. Once he escaped to the



Here I am trying to subdue Bubbles.

front of the house and to the road outside – perhaps that was the beginning of learning to be responsible for me?

It seemed that I loved getting hold of scissors. I was quite small when I cut big chunks out of my hair, perhaps trying to copy my hairdresser aunt?

In our large house, we rented part to a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Zaala. I was fascinated by their living room. Their table was covered with a magnificent red plush cloth, so soft and velvety. What was most exciting was that it boasted a fringe – a fringe of red bobbles, all the way round. One night, I crept out of bed, scissors in hand, and hid myself under the table, savouring the delicious thought of snipping off those trophies, one by one. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I was discovered in the nick of time and that was that!

I was quite small when my teasing uncles gave me some chewing gum.

”Hey, Mary, you want a treat? It’s just like candy, only you mustn’t swallow it.”

Tentatively, I popped it into my mouth. It tasted good.

“Just one thing: you’ll want to keep it for morning, so just stick it on your headboard when you go to bed.”

It seemed like a good idea, but sadly, I woke up with gum all through my hair. With many “Ouches,” and the help of Vaseline and some other stuff, my Mum had to give me an extreme haircut. This, I think, was the end of my love affair with scissors.

One of my favourite memories of my Dad was when I was about 8. He would hold my hand as we skipped home down the hill, laughing and singing as we tried not to step on the cracks in the pavement. But he was also a very practical man.

At age 5, I desperately wanted a doll’s house. My friend had one, and I loved playing with it, moving the furniture around for the dolls. My birthday was coming up, so I was hoping, hoping...But it was not to be. On my birthday, my dad presented me with my first two-wheeler. I don’t think, I hope he didn’t realize my disappointment. I suppose the thought of spending money on a doll’s house would have been more than he could countenance. He duly taught me to ride. Through the years, he bought me several bikes (one got stolen) – and finally, I think I was 17, he bought me a beautiful silver and blue sports machine, as light as a feather, that I could lift with one hand. Bike riding began my love affair with English country lanes, quiet hamlets, villages, and of course, with fantastic pubs. I would often bike, after work, 25 miles to visit and stay with my grandparents in the country.

I started school when I was 5½. We lived in a big house in a somewhat rough neighbourhood. I think the kids were pretty unruly. I don’t remember what happened there – was I a sissy child who got teased, was I a bad kid? – I just don’t know. My Mum’s words, “You had a kind of breakdown.” I never thought about it until later years when it was too late to ask her to explain. What did she mean? Was I afraid to ask? I know that her words have echoed in my mind down through the years. Perhaps this was where I became afraid of being the centre of attention – and especially of having to say something in front of others

About this same time, I got knocked down by a man on a bike. I was being taken to dancing classes by a teenager – Dorothy, a freckle-faced 13 year old – when I let go of her hand



*Mum with my brother John
and me*

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and rushed across the road. The poor man hit me, and I had huge bruises on the inside of my legs. I recall lying on the pavement, with my head spinning. But I was more or less O.K. I remember Dr. Crow coming to the house the next day, and of course, that was the end of poor Dorothy as my babysitter.

Soon after that, I had the measles. I think it must have been about then that the doctor suggested to my mum and dad that it would be a good idea to take me to the sea for recuperation. My grandparents had something to do with this. When we went for the first time, I remember being driven in an open convertible, snuggled in the back seat under an eiderdown, watching the sun go down and the stars come out. No doubt we stopped at a pub on the way down. In later years we always did that; my grandpa would go in – for a Guinness maybe – and the kids would stay in the gardens and drink lemonade and perhaps eat Smith's Crisps – if we were really lucky.

I came to so look forward excitedly to our summer holidays. The sun, the sea, the sand, the sky...you could smell the salty smell miles before you arrived. As a young child of six or seven, it was mostly paddling, learning to swim, building sandcastles, waiting for the tide to fill the moats. I loved poking about in the pools and had fun with my shrimp net, as I pushed it along, hoping no crab would start wiggling under my feet. My patient grandma would cook up these small delicacies, and we would have them for tea!

I would lie on the sand at the edge of the water, and let the waves wash over me. When I was older, even on a blustery day, I loved walking along the shore in the wind, listening to the waves crashing in, and the spray splashing over my face. On hot summer nights, I would sleep on the verandah, and go to sleep, listening to the sighing and the sucking of the tide as the waves kissed the shore. It even pleased me that my skin tasted of salt like the sea!

When I was a bit older, I became friendly with a group of kids, mostly boys, some who lived locally. One boy had access to his Dad's boat, an outboard, and we would fish. Sometimes we'd row out to a spot where the church spire in town lined up with the town hall, and drop anchor. The water was so clear that sometimes we could see the fish coming near to our bait. We'd catch enough flounder or plaice – some very small – which my long-suffering grandma would fillet and cook up with chips for supper – yummy!

Sometimes we'd put out a trot line and get enough fish for everyone's supper.

However, fishing meant digging for worms. I didn't mind the wriggly rag worms, but I didn't like the squishy



I loved to play in Grandpa's car.



At the seaside, paddling with my younger brother, Roger

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lug worms. But I got really good at threading them on a hook. It was that, or no fishing.

I learned to play cricket, or we might go blackberrying or mushrooming on the South Downs. A carnival would usually come to the village green and we would ride the horses and swings, and throw balls at the coconuts. Sometimes there was a circus.

Mostly barefoot, I loved running on the wet sand and poking around in the little pools after the tide went out. At high tide, a couple of steps and we were in deep water, and swimming was wonderful.

In the dark month of August 1939, we were at the sea – my Grandfather decided we should stay for an extra month. So we were there when war was declared. We heard our first serious air raid siren early one morning. We rushed down to the beach and crouched down by the breakwaters – even though there was not an aircraft in sight.

Finally, my grandfather came out of the cottage. “I have an announcement,” he said, “I had a note from Hitler, no bombing until after breakfast” – and we all trooped back inside. I laugh now, because later, we would all carry on until we felt things were getting too risky.

That was our last summer at the sea. The beach cottages were blown up and replaced with barbed wire and cement pillars, part of Coastal Defence. The end of our group, too: a couple of boys straight into the Navy, Tony became an E-boat commander, and the others into the Forces.

I love our lakes in Ontario, but the sea is still my first love. However, I never carried forward my love of fishing – it was wonderful to feel that tug on the line, but it was just too messy a business for me.

Back to age six: after time at the seaside, my parents took me out of public school and enrolled me in a tiny private one, run in their own home by the Misses Wynhall, Beatrice and Ida. Beatrice was the older, small and quiet. Miss Ida was tall, had pink cheeks and a very sharp nose. They both wore their hair in a bun. There were only, as far as I remember, less than 20 kids in the school, and we sat at trestle tables. We were a bit scared of Miss Ida, but it was a good little school. Unfortunately, it was lacking any kind of sports program. The best they could do was to have us run relay races down both sides of the garden and through the arbour at the bottom.

When I was eight, we moved, and from then on I went by train to school. I also had to keep an eye on my six year old brother as we traveled together. A couple of years later, when I was almost ten, my younger brother was born. I loved looking after him and would take him out in his carriage. I played a game. I would let the carriage roll down the hill, then run to catch it up. Mercifully, I always succeeded – with a 100% success rate!

The summer I was 10 ½, I sat for the exam for our local county secondary school. Mostly it took kids from the public system and only a few others. My Dad and Mum were amazed when I passed and got accepted for the fall.

This began a whole new life for me – 600 girls, school uniform, sports, swimming, and gym, etc – all a bit overwhelming. A very good school though.

I walked there at first. And I met another girl, somewhat like me, whose home was close to mine, and we became friends.

But it was difficult. I had never seen parallel bars, or a vaulting horse, had no idea how to play field hockey, netball, lacrosse or rounders in the summer. The only thing I could do at all was swim and play a bit of tennis.

So, I struggled – usually I came about 28 in a class of 30. My friend, Joy, wasn't much help. She would come to my house after supper, her homework done, and encourage me to leave

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mine until the morning. We would go to the park and fool around with the boys. I started going to her church which had a great youth group, Scouts and Rovers, and a wonderful drama club. I was involved a bit with other churches too – the Presbyterian Church, where I went to Guides, and I would usually go with my Mum to early 8 a.m. at our local Anglican church. At Joy's church, even in the services, the guys were always fooling around, unscrewing the pews, etc., and definitely not listening. I began to feel restless. What was the matter with me? The young people were so great. Somehow, I wanted more – more of the holy, more of the sacred. I felt an unexplainable pressure – pressure to leave. What was it? What was my inner voice saying? I finally realized that I wanted to leave and get confirmed.

So I left that church and went to another, a bus ride away. I left Joy and the youth group and a new part of my life began. I took the confirmation classes, the Bishop laid hands on me, and just like C.S. Lewis, I was "Surprised by Joy." I remember being so happy, I would drive around on my bike, singing my heart out.

After this significant event, I made new friends (sadly some died in the war) and my life began to go in a new direction. I was free from Joy's influence. I began to do some work. I went from the bottom of the class to third. Joy and I were still friends but my life began to have purpose.

I can't really tell how much the war changed my life. Because my birthday was in December, I was a year ahead and had university entrance before I was 16. I had credits in everything except "Religious Knowledge" in which I only got a pass. This was curious, since I have always had a love for the scriptures. Special to me, was the inscription emblazoned around our assembly hall – "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – think on these things" (Phil.4) – that's written on my heart.

I could have stayed at school for a couple more years, but because we were sitting down the air raid shelters, I was fed up. It was cold and damp, we were often wearing our gas masks and it was boring. I told my Dad, I wanted to get a job. He agreed. So I started to work the week before I was 16.

I had met a Canadian the previous summer. I was staying in the country, and everywhere I went, I kept bumping into this Canadian serviceman – in the emporium, in the mall, at the outdoor swimming pool. At first, it was a



*At the swimming pool waiting
for a friend.*



In our back garden.

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nod, then a smile, a greeting, and a chat.

At one point, he said, "I'm leaving to-morrow to go back to my unit. I wonder, could I ask you a favour? I'm asking, would you write to me?"

Here he was, in my country, doing his best to help us, so what should I do? But wasn't he too old for me?

"Um, er - I will be pleased to," I answered somewhat reluctantly.

After that, he would sometimes stay at our home when he was on leave, and I came to know him and love his sense of fun.

Richard had a very bad accident on manoeuvres. I visited him in hospital and during that time I realized how much I'd grown to care for him. So much so, that a few years later, I fell seriously in love and married him!

My childhood was over with the war, but I am ever thankful for the wise choices my Mum and Dad made for me, the benefits of a great school and church, the wonder of seaside holidays. Especially for the changes in my life which gave me direction and purpose.

Even the whooping cough I had as a baby turned out to be a blessing when, years later, my husband, our baby and our two little girls all had the whooping cough at the same time and, thankfully, I was immune.

Through it all, God has been so faithful in weaving all the threads of my life together – I truly am "fearfully and wonderfully made."



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 Counselor at the Christian Retreat Centre in Orangeville, Ontario.

She is retired now and lives in the country.