



# DEAD LUCKY

*The Career of 'Dame' Peggy Batten  
An Early Stewardess*

## DEAD LUCKY

### The Career of "Dame" Peggy Batten

#### An Early Stewardess

1993

#### Fragment of Ulysses ... Peggy's Favourite Poem:

*"I cannot rest from travel; I will drink life to the lees ... I am a part of all that I have met; Yet all experience is an arch where through gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades forever and forever when I move. Though much is taken, much abides; and though we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are ~ made weak by time and fate, but strong in will to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield." (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)*

#### Introduction:

Peggy Batten was a dear friend of my Aunt Allie's. Both have passed away now. One day, Allie, my mother Pearl and I went to visit wiry little Peggy at her century-old cottage on Lake Simcoe in Beaverton, Ontario. Over a Sunday afternoon tea, at 40 something, I finally felt like one of the 'older girls.' As the four of us sat swinging on the lounge chair, a summer storm gathered clouds across the lake's horizon, while Peg began to tell us her life adventures. Astounded, I asked what she still wanted to do in life, now that she was semi-retired. "An autobiography!" she mused. Being an Editor and inspired by a Toronto storyteller, I said "Lets!" Taken a little aback, she agreed.

Peg soon had me to dinner several times, afterwards to tell me her many tales over gin with the tape recorder on, while she produced a plume of smoke above her cigarette and that is how her story came to be written. She remarked many times that her life was truly fortunate, "Tremendously lucky" she said, "One lucky break after another. I was just there at the right time" she kept saying. "I was followed by the spirit of goodness."

She was born into the well to do Stockdale family of 1920s Toronto. Her father was an influential financier with important connections in England. Because of this, I came to call her "Dame" Peggy Batten. She began work with the Red Cross during the Second World War in England and went on to become one of Canada's first stewardesses, or "Star Girls" as they were called then, flying round the world in fabulous luxury. These times were the source of her many colourful stories.

After 30 years in Great Britain she was back in Ontario reluctantly 20 years, when I met her. I was never quite sure how much of what she told me was embellishment, so I can't vouch for everything, but she told it with such humour and panache, you just have to read it. I must thank Dear Peg for entrusting me with her life story. Looking over old photos, she began. But here ~ I'll let her tell you in her own words ...

### **The Zoo on Alexandra Street**

I was born on October 4, 1920 at Wellesley Hospital in Toronto. My father's father came from Yorkshire, England and I came to love Yorkshire very much. I had two sisters and a twin brother. We lived on Alexandra Street in upscale Rosedale, in Toronto. Our house was a marvel of design with a large wine cellar and a double garage, both unusual at the time. Father owned many lots down the road and ours was gigantic. Growing up, my brother and I had a Nanny and spent a lot of time at the famous Granite Club, a social club for the rich. We were chauffeured there for swimming lessons with Tarzan's (Johnny Weismuller) teacher and greeted at the door by uniformed footmen, some of whom as children were Dr. Barnardo's Boys (orphans sent to Canada). As a child, animals were my passion but I never wanted to be a vet. Later, I should tell you about my current cat, Sid Vicious! Our basement was fitted with a menagerie of rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, mice and snakes. All wandering dogs I took home.

### **The Immaculate Conception & Me**

At only 12, I was the big rebel. I went to St. Clement's ~ a private Anglican school, where I caused lots of trouble because even then, I had opinions. We learned much about the world, but no Canadian History or Science, which as it happened, I very much needed later. At 16, I left school because the Head Mistress could not explain to my satisfaction, the miracle of the Immaculate Conception! I simply couldn't believe the nonsense, so I quit!

Then I went to Northern Secondary, a public high school, where I was horrified that the students did not stand up to answer the teacher in class. Still, I did not one lick of work there. Later, I got a scholarship to Trinity College, where the Professor of Theology put me straight on religious teachings. He explained the Immaculate Conception was not literal, but was 'poetic' and beautiful. Now this I could accept. I owe my love of the Bible to that man, the St. James version, which nevertheless, I hardly ever read anymore.

However, I wasted the scholarship on an easy "Pass Arts" program. Of course this enraged the Dean. After all, I was destined to be a teacher! But all my friends, the daughters of the rich, had beaver fur coats and I did not because although father weathered the Great Depression ~ by 1934 he lost it all. Some of his friends, facing ruin, even committed suicide behind closed doors. Well, there I was embarrassed by not having a fur coat, so I left Trinity College to get a job and buy myself one!

### **My First Job**

After Trinity College, I worked as a filing clerk in the Records Department ~ where else? At Wellesley Hospital where I was born. Knowing I was capable of more, my boss offered to send me to University to be an 'Almoner' as I had some romantic idea about social work. But I didn't have the 3 Sciences I needed from St. Clement's and when I found out you had to work 6 months in the field first, with husbands who beat their wives and mothers who abandoned their children, I begged off, shocked by reality. It was the wrong thing to do ...

### **At the Red Cross**

While working at the hospital, the war came along and I attended Red Cross courses in the evening. My best friend Phyllis and I soon went off to join the Red Cross in England. Mind you, we didn't know what we were getting into but we stayed 5 years! At first we worked for the Ontario Service Club in London who did hospitality for our Canadian servicemen. I was on reception part-time, so busy you couldn't do more than that. I took calls for Lady Donegal, hoards of people and adored it. It was a plum job.

I told them all how to get around town, while Phyllis waited tables. She was the most popular girl, so many dates she couldn't keep track of them all. I, on the other hand, was no great beauty. At the end of the day she'd say "Fold up, Dearie. I've got two dates tonight!" She felt it was her patriotic duty to show those poor lonely Canadian soldiers a good time and they adored her, because she always found them SO interesting.

During our time there, Phyl and I hit the antique markets and it wasn't long before we went to all the plays in the days of Dame Margot Fontaine, Alistair Sims and Sir Lawrence Olivier, wonderful stuff for little Canadian girls. Then of course, there were weekends away, but we won't say anything more about that!

### **After the War**

Needless to say, when the war ended, we didn't want to go back home to Canada. When I heard they needed a Cook at the Corps House Annex, it was just perfect. The Chef stayed on till all the staff were repatriated, because someone had to feed them. So, I went to see my father's friend, the Ex-Prime Minister of England. I had never met him before, but I mentioned my Army Catering course, you know, cooking for 100 in a small pot! I was there for 3 years and finally it was my last day. Phyl and I counted what little money we had left ~ just enough for a hotel and a good meal.

### **Babysitting the Rich**

Next morning, we phoned round about work and found jobs as Nannies for Proxy Parents, but we didn't tell our by now once again prospering families back in Ontario, as we were basically live in maids. Phyl found a good family but I hated my placement. They made me mend the wife's French lingerie... now remember, when I was a child, I had a Nanny of my own who did all the mending and as it happened, I spent all my money phoning Phyllis to bemoan my fate.

### **Plastic Pat**

As Phyllis walked round London with her little charge, one day she ran into “Plastic Pat” the first manufacturer of domestic plastic products in England. Although by now rich and quite a bit older than us, he was from the lower class and not accepted at the Corps House Annex garden parties. Little did I know, but he had an eye for me and one day a great Rolls Royce pulled up at my employer’s door. I got into the car for a drive and Pat revealed he had just split up with his mistress and wanted ME instead. “But I’m not that kind of girl!” I protested. You see, Canadian girls of my generation were strictly chaste. Later, when Pat and Lady reconciled, he let me stay with them until I found another job and since I was desperate to get out of mending that French lingerie, I accepted. But my employer, the blasted woman, insisted on a week’s pay in lieu of notice and thankfully, Plastic Pat coughed it up, willingly.

### **How I Killed a Man**

Well, then I was summoned to the office of the Ex-Prime Minister, my father’s old friend, who had found out I was staying with Plastic Pat. Taking a parental tone, he required me to return to my father in Canada immediately, to say I had “fallen on hard times.” I challenged “You are NOT calling my father. I refuse to go!” Incensed, he retorted “ No GIRL has ever talking to me like that before!” Next day, he died of a heart attack ... I always thought I should feel guilty ... but I did not!

### **Any Fool Can Type**

Then, I decided I better get serious about finding another job. I simply had to get something decent, as I couldn’t be a third wheel at Pat’s forever. So, I trotted along to Canada House in Trafalgar Square, you know, the nucleus of Canadian business at the time, a very imposing building. The attendants in the ladies’ room there even opened the stall door and presented you with hand towels and soap! Fortunately, I got myself a job as Secretary to the Trade Commissioner. You see, I had taken a business course at Shaw College after high school, something to put in my little bag of tricks. But most of my training was obtained at the cinema! I always had these little certificates to pull out. Actually, I hated typing and the Principal at Shaw once chided “Any fool can type. Why can’t you?”

### **A Lousy Secretary**

So, there I was, a little Secretary. The Trade Commissioner took me under his wing and introduced me to all his friends, most of whom tried to seduce me, and not just me, Phyllis too but that’s another story ... I wasn’t the best of Secretaries like my predecessors, but my boss did his best to put up with e. He even had to read my short hand notes, as I couldn’t! One day, when things weren’t going well, I overheard him in the next room on the phone saying “I’ve got the nicest Secretary, but she’s no damn good. Do you want her?” ... I thought I would do well to depart, rather than be the first woman sacked from Canada House.

## **The Control Commission**

Just about then, Dame Trefussis Forbes (what a name) who was Supreme Commander of the British female armed forces was recruiting women for semi-military jobs with the Control Commission to reorganize post war Germany. It was composed of American, British and French staff. Phyl and I applied and were accepted, but to qualify, we had to repatriate first. So, reluctantly, we came home to Canada by boat, 10 days to New York and then a train to Toronto. When we arrived, the newspapers were splashed with the news "Two Canadian Girls Selected for Control Commission!" Well, I don't know who alerted the press, but we jumped right back on the boat to London.

## **Female Jail Guards**

It was Black November, no lights, simply the worst time after the war. One very terrible hush fell over the Control Commission office when we arrived. "Oh no, you're not back!" They had written to say not to come after all. Funding had fallen through for the project. But we never got the letter. This was a great embarrassment to them as legally, they had to give us a job since we had "letters of promise." But the best they could do was offer us work as female guards in a German prison! Phyl looked at me laughing to the point of tears, joking about the great key rings we could hang from our belts. However, we declined and signed off, even though as usual, we had little money in our pockets.

## **Star Girls Wanted**

Then I was walking down St. James Street one day, when fate once again took me firmly by the hand. The newspaper headlines said "Star Girls Wanted!" I promptly investigated. It was British South American Airways (BSAA) needing stewardesses. Until then, they only had male crew. I picked up an application form. You had to be proficient in 3 languages (French, German and Spanish) which I was not! You also had to be over 5'5" and weigh less than 130 pounds. Well ... look at me. I was 5'3" and weighed 145 pounds! So, I gave the form to Phyllis who was tremendously thin and tall. She passed two selection boards and had a good chance of landing the job.

## **The Air Vice Marshall**

Next, she went to see the Air Vice Marshall, an aesthetic Australian, lean, patrician and with the most beautiful Oxford accent, acquired I might say! He was previously leader of the Pathfinders, a select group in the Bomber Command during the war. (Later, we found out, he was a Pilot without a license for many years!) Until then, Canada flew the Union Jack but we had just redesigned the flag and Phyl blurted out she was Canadian. When the AVM heard this, he patronized "Well, of course, you're really a British subject." Then Phyllis protested loudly, "Absolutely not! I'm Canadian. Now, I realize you'd rather not be Australian since you've changed your accent." This was typical of Phyl really. She stood for no nonsense and needless to say, she didn't get the job!

Then, she encouraged me to apply, which I did. The night before I was to be interviewed, I went to a party where a distinguished gentleman asked "And what are you doing here in London, my dear?" Said I, "I'm just about to go and see the Air Vice Marshall about becoming a Star Girl." To my surprise, he replied "Well, isn't that a coincidence? He's one of my best friends!" And straightaway he gave me a reference. So there I was at my final interview. I was careful to write in "British Subject" on the form. The AVM read further and exclaimed "You know old so and so?" I said "Yes, we've met." And I was IN!

### **My Crossing the Andes Skirt**

Shortly thereafter, Phyl joined a small Charter Flight company where Stews were on probation 3 months before they got their uniforms. Till then, they had to wear a white blouse, navy skirt and heeled pumps. Now, she had no such clothes and was truly unselfconscious. "I'm going to have to borrow your crossing the Andes Skirt" she said. (My culottes.) But remember, I was 145 pounds and she weighed only 102! I said "Dearie, it will fall right off you." Ever the optimist, she replied "Never mind, I'll borrow an old R.A.F. tie as a belt and buy some sandals in Dakhar" and off she went to fly in Africa!

### **Orange Wing Tips**

No sooner did I arrive in Cairo, than everyone asked me if I knew that other Canadian woman who had been through. "She's the strangest looking thing with orange sunglasses, a man's shirt, an RAF tie, an enormous lump on her backside and thongs on her feet!" Here, I must tell you, that Phyl painted her wing tip glasses with a different colour nail polish every week. I laughed saying "O that's my best friend, Phyllis." When I met up with her again in London, I told her she was famous. She's a Stew for long you know, some young man, but that's another story ...

### **Tragedy on a Comet**

Let's go back to the AVM a moment. He was a very forward looking man and bought some of the first jet aircraft, called the Comets. Still building the company empire, he presented all the pilots with their own offices fitted with expensive carpets. But they said they didn't need offices. Regrettably, two Comets went down without a trace, one in the Bermuda Triangle, another over the North Atlantic. Now strangely enough, I was scheduled to fly on the latter, but at the last moment, they replaced me with June Moxam and that was the last we saw of her! Then there was an official enquiry and Comets round the world were grounded. Neville Shoot documented all this in his book "No Highway." Everything vanished and although metal fatigue was implicated, there was no final conclusion about the cause of the crashes.

### **A Gentlemanly Revolution**

So there we were, an airline without aircraft and they replaced the Comets with Canadian DC4s. Soon the British Socialist government nationalized the airlines, bought us right up and we became BOAC, British Overseas Air Corporation. This was the start of a major economic revolution, all done with great speed, no ponderous turning of government wheels. The landed aristocracy were taxed to their knees. But there were no riots in the street. For instance, the Duke of Arundel, the Premier Peer of the Realm, ~ who owned 7 miles of estate before his main gate ~ could only afford to live in one wing of his castle, which dated back to Edward the Conqueror. Sensible aristocrats were forced to open their great homes to the public for a fee, just to survive. The Duke sold plants from his nursery with little tickets which read "Grown just for you by" ... (you know who). Ironically, Prime Minister Bevan who directed the redistribution of wealth was made a Peer of the Realm for this!

## **The Queen of BOAC**

On my first trip with BOAC I met Bobby, a handsome fellow with blond hair, standing at the top of the aircraft boarding ramp. He greeted me saying, "Hello! I'm Bobby, Head Steward and I'm Queen of BOAC. Come in, dear. I'm glad you are early. I have just divorced my husband and I'm sure you would have too! Why? Because he wouldn't buy me a vacuum cleaner! He expected me to sweep the stairs with dustpan and brush. Now, what do you think of that?" ... My God, I was dumbfounded, but it wasn't long before I understood. He told me his life story. His mother didn't want a little boy. She dressed him in girl's clothing till he went to school. Where was father? I didn't ask.

I was soon very fond of Bobby and all his fellow creatures. He used to give these little luncheons, everything to perfection on silver service, with linen, good china, tiny cucumber sandwiches and petit fours. Many of his friends made very good Stewards and were much appreciated for their attentiveness. "O, you do look so chilly" they would say as they wrapped another blanket round the passengers. We became very good friends, Bobby and I.

## **Queen's Gate Mews**

Oh! I have another interesting tale for you. Phyllis and I rented a place at Queen's Gate Mews, over the converted stable and hostelries, behind the great houses in Kensington, all build round great squares. We were lucky to get it, very fashionable, but expensive, so we were always on the lookout for someone to share the rent. One day, the airlines said they were bringing some Chinese girls of good family over from Hong Kong to be trained as Star Girls and would we put up Miss Mai Ling Chong? My goodness, I still remember it and I'll tell you why ...

## **Mai Ling Chong**

To be a Stewardess to the Far East, you had to speak Chinese. So Mai Ling and 7 other young women I think, came to London. It was November, the very wrong time to visit, miserably cold for those used to hot weather. There they were, far away from home for the first time, or so we thought... Well, Mai Ling was the prettiest little thing imaginable and the most agreeable, except she never told us one single thing about herself at all. We thought "Oh well, it's just the inscrutable Chinese."

## **My Brush with a Spy**

However, one day, there came a great KNOCK at our front door. The MI5, the British Intelligence Agency, had come for Miss, Mai Ling Chong, complete with official car and badge. They took her away immediately, with no chance to pack a thing or even say goodbye and we never saw her again! When I reported this to BOAC, I was told it was none of my business and I must not enquire further. I'm sure she was up to no good. But you see, it was BOAC's blunder. They should have known that girls from good Chinese families did not go out to work. In retrospect, I thought it was all rather fun. You know, my one brush with a spy! And how things change ~ back then, the Head of the MI5 was always male but they recently finally appointed a woman! Can you believe it?



## **Making It All Up**

All this time, I wrote back to Mother, cozy in Rosedale. But she said “You must be making it all up, Dear.” It was really quite beyond her comprehension in her insular little world. I used to fly home several times a year for these little parties she would give me. But none of her friends wanted to hear my stories. They were more concerned with the price of refrigerators, which had just replaced iceboxes and just about then, I joined the Union by mistake, but that’s a long story ...

## **Being Royalty**

In those days, the airline crew were treated like royalty. A car was sent to take the Stews to the airport. The company was doing so well, it paid for many staff luxuries. Someone preferred Italian hairdressers so when in Rome ... while we were in London, Elizabeth Arden did our facials. As “Ambassadors” we had to appear nightly in the hotel dining room, dressed in full uniform, ready to sociable to all. We were never off duty till we got home. But since many Stews had worked previously on the prestigious “flying boats” they thought this was really “coming down” in the world!

## **Grand Hotels of the World**

Flying from Rome to Cairo for a week, until the next flight arrived, we then went off to Calcutta for 5 days and on to Hong Kong for seven. The whole route took about a month and since BOAC was doing so well, they were splashing money around really quite delightfully. We stayed in the best hotels of the world at company expense: Sheppard’s in Cairo, Raffles in Singapore, the Peninsula in Hong Kong and the whole top floor of the most divine hotel in Rio on the Copa Cabana, right on the beach, was ours ~ for weeks!

## **Rancheros, Favellas & Yellow Mimosa**

We flew down one coast of South America and up the other ~ Rio, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Lima and Santiago, visiting the rancheros and favellas on our stopovers. Montevideo was astonishing! The cafe life of the mannered classes, aperitifs on the marble piazzas, festooned with great hanging balls of yellow mimosa, everyone dressed as if for the opera. And Beirut! One of my favourites was madly international.

## **Missing Australia & Russia**

The more I saw, the more I wanted to see and I saw it all, when sightseeing was at its zenith in the world of the 1950s ... now gone. Learning so much, I had no time to feel home sick and I wondered why others didn’t travel more, except to say maybe they were more sensible, worrying about the future. But I never ran into anyone who thought a young woman shouldn’t be doing this work... I never did make it Australia. I’ll tell you why later, and Russia wasn’t open in those days. It was all a tremendous adventure and although we had tremendous responsibility, we knew we were very privileged.

## **Gold Bars**

Travelling internationally, it was of course inevitable, that some of the crew began to smuggle. I don't know how many were actually involved. But I do know that the Flight Steward, who looked like a tortoise with big flat feet ~ who had once been a waiter at the Dorchester Hotel did so. One day in Calcutta, the customs official came aboard and took him aside. I knew he had a whole vest of gold on his person. He was finished for sure. Can you imagine being locked away in an Indian jail? ... But I saw him walk out with a big smile. He'd given half his gold to the customs official and after that, he went whipping round the world, smuggling as if it was all a big game!

## **The Mysterious Souk**

Once ... the Head Steward even asked me to assist him by taking some gold certificates to the Souk, the Egyptian Bazaar! He knew I wouldn't tell and I stuffed myself with paper notes, worth maybe what and trundled off with my instructions. Now, no sensible woman would ever have gone there, never mind alone! But I wasn't afraid, just a foolish idiot who couldn't resist an adventure. Thinking back, I'm horrified! It was a serious offence, so I never went again, I might say. Once was enough. But emboldened by my excursion, I did smuggle chandeliers in Rome, a little business of my own, on the side.

## **The Wide Boys**

Shall I tell you another story? We started out from Lima, Peru once, vastly interested in Vicuna carpets, you know, those little camel like animals? Of course, we had our secret sources. We set forth all nicely loaded down and zipped over to Cuba on our way home. What a fantastic place that was, always jumping and lots of Rum. I don't know what else the Captain and First Officer had on board for their personal use and profit. We called them "Wide Boys" ~ real wheeler dealers. The Captain wanted to get back to England fast with his contraband, so we didn't stop to refuel. They took some big chances in those days since they were used to flying in the war, but you still hoped they knew what they were doing. We were on a huge plane like a Lancaster, but there was nowhere except an air force base in the north to land and the runway was too short, but it was our only chance ...

Finally, we landed, just before the storm broke. After touchdown, the First Officer disappeared on the bus with his illegal stock and there I was, stranded with all those passengers! I don't know if this strikes you as outrageous, but remember it was a PUBLIC airline! Well, we managed to arrange for a bus and there was an awful ride home, creeping through the fog, with someone guiding us down the road. But this was only one, of so many mad, mad trips ...

## **Rough Diamonds**

BSAA specialized in flights to South America and stationed Crew in Nassau for months at a time, with very large living allowances. We only flew from there to Miami or Lima. Crazy isn't it? There were 3 rotating crews of Captains, Second Officers, Stewards, Star Girls and Radio Operators, so we hardly ever worked! During this time, we rented a "rest home" called Turquoise Haven. I must go back and see it one day, if it's still there. It was absolutely fabulous, with turquoise marble floors and pink walls and with only the push of a button, the living room bar glided out into the patio! We even had a maid and her daughter living in, just to look after us.

## **Outdoing the Joneses**

As you might know, people lived in Nassau and still do, as a tax dodge. They had so much money that for recreation, they bought bigger and bigger boats just to outdo the Joneses. Still, they were terribly unhappy. This convinced me there was no joy in having a great deal of money in itself. It's nice to have, but not the most important thing. Of course, Nassau was interesting, sociologically speaking. With nothing to do, the rich were so bored they stooped to wife swapping and couldn't wait to grab the new Stews, as their latest diversion.

## **A Murder Mystery**

Well, Sir Harry Oakes was a Canadian, another friend of my father's. Oakes made his fortune prospecting for gold in the Yukon. In protest over high taxes, he moved to Nassau and became a Baronet but eventually he was murdered. His daughter's husband, a French Count, was suspected of the crime and it was still a scandal when I arrived a few years later. Even the Duke of Windsor, who was then the Governor of the Bahamas, was implicated in a cover up ~ and to this day, we still don't know the truth.

## **Exiting Gracefully**

Lady Oakes welcomed me to dinner one evening, although I had never met the family. This was my entree to social life on the island and I was invited to every party, every night of the week after that, each requiring a new dress, which I thought was ridiculous. Horrified, it took me exactly 10 days to withdraw from the social whirl. You see, I either like people or not. But was hard to exit gracefully ~ until I met the Radio Officers, whose last name was the same as mine, Stockdale! He also disagreed with the goings on and since we had loads of time off, we rented a boat and had a lovely time sailing about the islands. But you see ... he was married and I was already engaged, so it caused a great flurry, I can tell you!

## **Miscarrying Mid-Air**

En route to Australia, one of the few places I never got to, I lost another pregnancy. Since I was Head Stewardess, this caused a lot of trouble on board. But Mr. Win Williams, the Queen's Gynaecologist was interested in my case, since the doctors could find nothing wrong. He really strove to help me, even planting me with hormones. Then I was sent off to Women's College Hospital in Chelsea, where I up and miscarried again. Afterwards, he sat on the edge of my bed and wept. So I patted him on the back saying "There is a purpose in this. Don't be distressed. You have done your best."

## **Resigning Flight**

Realizing it wasn't safe for me to fly anymore if I wanted a child and feeling that 7 years in the air was getting repetitive, I decided at last to resign and I remember well the day. The Chief Steward said "You can't stay out of this. You'll be back!" But I never looked back. I wasn't sad about it, even went on to adopt 3 children, 2 boys and a girl. The circumstances were Dickensian but I won't go into that right now ...

### **How Phyl Left Flying**

Well, some man was pursuing Phyllis like fury with telegrams, flowers and proposals but she wasn't interested. I don't remember which one he was ~ there were loads of men. Fed up with it all, she said to me one day, "I wish he'd just go away. I really must quit flying and go back to Canada." Then she got a job as at Ticket Agent in Montreal, selling charters to Finland. Later, she came to visit me at my mother's in Toronto, loaded with gifts in paper bags, which mother considered déclassé.

### **Losing a Husband**

By now, things were not going well for Jim and me. His business had fallen off and we were struggling financially. He was even worse with money than me. We thought maybe life would be better in Canada and I always wanted to run a motel so we bought one in a small town in cottage country, Ontario. But unfortunately, Jim drowned in the Thames before we left England. Devastated, I came back to Canada by myself, to start life all over at age 52. As it turns out, I shouldn't have left England. It's the one thing I regret. But we had already sold our home and the motel was waiting for me. I had to go.

### **Dull Sinning & Narrow Pettiness**

After a few days at the motel, I thought I was in hell. I had been all over the world, but I was shocked by rural Ontario, such dull sinning and narrow pettiness. My telephone was no more than hooked up, when I had 3 calls from the most socially influential women in town, in rapid succession. "You really ought to know about so and so ..." Then, the woman they didn't want me to talk to, called. They all looked like such upright churchgoers, but after that I thought "God, what kind of people can't wait to be nasty to each other?"

### **Buzz Off!**

Not only that, but the Mayor owned half the town and couldn't string 2 sentences together grammatically. His daughter was dead keen on my son Peter and if I hadn't sent him away, he would also be delinquent like her. Peter is now a Pilot for a major Canadian airline, following in his mother's footsteps. They were from the founding families in town, lumber millers living in huge houses. Another of their daughters was friends with my daughter Susan, so I was horrified when one night she rented the first room at the end of my motel, furthest away from my office. At 2 am. In the dead of winter, she staggered out half drunk into the snow, maybe drugged, with no socks on, screaming someone had run over her boyfriend! Then some young kid drove off and rammed the police car. And what run-ins I had with the OPP. As if they didn't have enough to do. They hung around and waited for the teens to do something wrong, so finally I told the cops to "Buzz Off!"

### **Doing Real Estate**

From the first, I couldn't stand life at the motel, but I stuck it out for 2 years. I was lucky enough to sell it finally, but there was no other work to be had and a local branch of Ogden talked me into real estate. After only a week, I head the owner "do" a little old lady out of some money in a land deal and it wasn't my idea of what to do in life, so I just couldn't wait to get out of town.

## Leaving Town

Finally, I got up the courage to move back to Toronto without work and took a basement apartment on Laird Drive downtown. But I had a monstrously large Samoyed dog and the neighbours screamed all the time "Keep that Dawg off my lawn!" My family helped me out, but we were strangers by then. I had hardly seen them over those 30 years, just now and then. You know, there is a lot of truth in being able to pick your own friends, but not your family. Still, never lost touch with my twin or my sister.

## Cooking Without a Degree

I did my best to find a teaching job since I had Certificates in this and that, so high and in England did almost anything I wanted, but in Canada, I was turned down a lot and I wasn't used to that. Dear old U of T told me I couldn't even teach a craft like cooking without a degree. Well, really, I was very annoyed and I realized then that I should have done another year at Trinity College so long ago, when I was young. But it was far too late.

## Visiting Phyl in Montreal

Well, the upshot was, I stayed in real estate in Toronto and did well. Now I am semi-retired and live happily by myself in an upscale Richmond Hill apartment. What ever happened to Phyl? She became a Psychiatric Social Worker and still lives in Montreal, where she met her husband, a Greek, larger than life, but that's another story. I visit them once a year. I didn't want to remarry and never did. You know, I never understood why some women need a man to make them happy?

## Posterity Destroyed

I will never recover from leaving England. I miss so much its beauty. I'd like to go back and live in Yorkshire for a year, visit my old friends and see the countryside. There are many more stories, but I'm sure I don't remember them all just now. My sister burnt all my letters to my parents after mother died. What destruction. I suppose posterity never occurred to her. It would be nice to see those letters now ...

## Postcript

***After I left Toronto for Bancroft in 1993, Peg contacted me to do more on her biography, but I was 3 hours away and she was a demanding editor. I referred her to someone closer but she never pursued it. The last time I saw Peg, she was in hospital with bruises on her face, looking a little embarrassed and resigned. I suppose she had fallen as so many elderly folks do. In her heart of hearts, she still felt English. In 1999, I tried to find Peg to inform her of my Aunt Allie's passing and was saddened to find that Peg was recently gone too. I had a brief email from her son, Peter, whom I didn't know and the trail ends there ... Thank you Peggy for enriching my life. I didn't know you long enough. KR.***

*Transcribed & Edited by Karen Richardson  
For Memories to Memoirs  
613-338-2153 or [k.rich5@live.com](mailto:k.rich5@live.com)  
Bancroft/Lake St. Peter*