



*Roads  
We've  
Travelled*

Lifescapes Writing Group 2011  
Brantford Public Library





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

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# Introduction

*Lifescapes* is a program of the Brantford Public Library created to help seniors and adults write their life stories. This is the fourth year we have run the program and the fourth book of memoirs that we have published. All four *Lifescapes* anthologies are available to be checked out of the library or to view on our Website at:

<http://brantford.library.on.ca/adults/lifescapes.php>

Two local authors, visited to speak to the Lifescapes group this year. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to Selkirk author, Cheryl MacDonald, and to Brantford author, Lorie Lee Steiner, both for her talk on writing from the senses and for her expert advice and assistance with editing the stories.

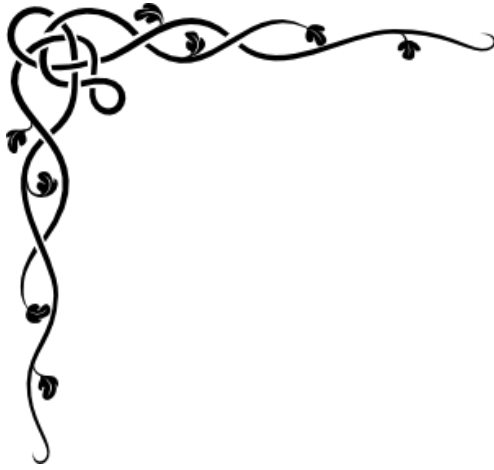
Fifteen people completed the program this year. They worked hard to remember and express their memories. These are *their* memories; friends and family may remember certain events differently, which is understandable because people may experience the same events in different ways. But, they have done their best to tell their stories as they recall them. Very little editing was done in terms of their style of writing because it is important that they write the way they speak so that the reader may hear their voices.

Each story is a little glimpse into the soul of the person who wrote it. My thanks go out to all of the authors for allowing me into their lives and for working so hard to write their stories.

I hope everyone will enjoy the fourth edition of the *Lifescapes* anthology, *Roads We've Travelled*.

Joan Faehrmann  
Adult Services/Readers' Advisory Librarian  
Brantford Public Library  
Brantford, Ontario





# My Mother's Bicycle

Bill Van Gaal

I was approaching my 69<sup>th</sup> birthday, and doing research to compile our family history, when I first learned an unusual fact – my parents had requested and received special permission from the parish priest to have me baptized on the day of my birth. The story, I discovered, starts out sadly but finishes happily with a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

My parents, Sjef Van Gaal and Anne Verbeten, were married in Oploo, North Brabant, Netherlands on April 26, 1939 while rumblings of unrest stirred in Germany and throughout Eastern Europe. For the young newly-weds, and most residents of Holland, the events of the next six years were totally unimaginable. On the 13th day of April 1940 a son was born. There were complications and the baby died of undetermined causes. Grief-stricken, but determined, they settled in the little village of Stevensbeek close to their childhood homes. They had both been raised on farms so it was natural that farming was their chosen way of life. Dad supplemented the family income with a part-time job. He worked for the Catholic nuns' convent picking up milk and laundry from a wide area with horse and wagon. The milk was processed at the convent and made into cheese and other milk products. The laundry was washed and folded there, and returned to the customers on his next rounds. As a side-line, and means of earning more income, he became a salesman of livestock or a drover of sorts. Through his farm contacts he became the middle-man; when farmer "A" had live stock or anything else for sale, Dad found farmer "B" who was in the market for it and delivered the goods to the buyer.

The Nazi invasion of Holland started early in May 1940, when German planes first flew overhead in great numbers, bombing bridges and other strategic targets in the area. Life continued to get more difficult as rationing of food and all other commodities was instituted. Food stamps were needed to purchase the few staples of food that could be found in the grocery stores. People started disappearing from the community, some of them never to be seen again. Many were taken to work as forced labour in German factories and others to concentration



camps. The Nazis soon tightened their iron grip on the whole of Holland by instituting travel and movement restrictions and conditions deteriorated quickly.

The fact that Holland did not have a large standing army when the Nazis invaded, did not mean there was no resistance to the occupation. All over the country, resistance groups were organized and set into motion a series of actions that were meant to impede the enemy's efforts. In our part of the country, a group called the "Young Farmers" was set up. My father became a member of this group, whose objective and purpose was to form an underground movement aimed at sabotaging German activities and helping their own countrymen. One of their first efforts was to organize a strike against the Nazis by refusing to deliver supplies to the Germans – including milk. They did make a token effort at delivering small amounts of milk to the processing plant, trying to avoid repression. The Germans however started rounding up some of the group and threw about 25 of them into a detention centre. The leaders of the group had avoided capture and the prisoners were released after 4 days and having their heads shaved.

Over the years, Dad spoke very little of his actual activities, other than details of times when he was close to being captured and how they avoided it. At one point, he and a companion spent many days in and around an abandoned and badly damaged farmhouse, while the German army was encamped in the area. During this particular period, he and his companion spent many hours hiding in a fireplace chimney while German troops were in the house. He always said, "We did whatever we had to do to avoid capture, such as starving for lack of food and going without water for as long as needed, because if we were not outright killed immediately, we would have been put into forced labour camps."

I was born on Feb. 24, 1942, during what my parents described as, "Terrible weather conditions with heavy snows and cold freezing temperatures." A quote from a book published in 1984, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stevensbeek, and describing wartime activities states: "24 Feb. 1942, because of bad weather and slippery roads, the priest, Father Van Delft of St. Anthony Parish approved the baptism of the infant of Sjef Van Gaal in the rectory at Stevensbeek." Being devout Roman Catholics, my parents wanted to make sure my soul went to heaven if I were to die before being baptized. I was given the same name as the brother who had passed away in 1940.

The war raged on into 1944 with a vengeance, not only from the dreaded Nazis, but also from the weather. The conditions were so bad that the local population wondered if all the bombings and their resulting fires, as well as numerous plane crashes, were having an adverse effect on weather patterns. There was constant rain, mixed at times with snow and cold winds. The population, who were short on any type of food and fuel, as well as the many homeless and displaced, found the conditions dreadful. 1944 was to become the cruelest year of the war, by far. Our area was under the flight-path of the allied bombing runs to Germany and planes from both sides were constantly being shot down by the opposing armies and crashing in the area. The locals rescued survivors and tended to them as best as they could. The casualties were buried in marked graves and recorded for future reference.

On the 20th day of January 1944, a brother was born. He was called Cornelius after my maternal grandfather. Shortly after this blessed event, the fighting and movement of German troops intensified and the family was forced to permanently abandon their home. Before leaving house and home behind, Mom and Dad gathered their treasured belongings and keepsakes, sealed them in a container and buried it in the garden. The house, which backed onto the woods, was eventually used as a Nazi field hospital and area command centre.



My mother's wartime travel document

Beginning in mid-1941, the Nazis required and issued identity documents to all Dutch citizens. Only the women, and men who were too old, or not healthy enough to be taken to Germany for the forced labour, applied for and carried these papers. Able-bodied men and young adults avoided travel at times when there was danger and stayed in hiding as much as possible. With no place to call home any longer, we were constantly on the move from one shelter or safe place to another, always looking for food from handouts and friends, family and neighbours. Dad was not always with us, due to his clandestine activities and need to keep out of sight. Mom describes this period of time as, "A time from hell, when we were constantly hungry, cold, wet and tired, and carrying a sick toddler and a nursing baby from place to place." She used her bicycle to carry her children, clothing, scarce food supplies and other necessities from shelter to shelter. Usually these migrations consisted of women and children and the old and sick, making progress slow and difficult. Extended family tried to stay together for support from each other.

One day the group came upon a Nazi checkpoint and were forced to show their I.D. papers and questioned at length about their activities. Before the group was allowed to continue, the German soldiers confiscated all their valuables including food and every bicycle. No amount of protesting and pleading changed the situation and the refugees were forced to leave at gun point, minus the stolen goods. As they continued along their path, they took note of a big Nazi encampment close by, with many troops and equipment amongst tents that had been set up. Travel, which was difficult before the encounter with the German "host," now became nearly impossible. Having the children, and lack of



A wartime drawing depicting German soldiers confiscating Dutch citizen's belongings

any means of carrying anything other than on their backs, caused them to stop at a farm close to the German troops. Mother was upset and furious with the cruelty that had befallen them that day, and wondered how she would be able to continue the journey under these conditions. As night fell she hatched a plan and was determined to carry it out. She told no one what she was planning to do, because she knew that if the group found out they would surely stop her. Finally, when her children were asleep and her group had all settled down, she put her plan into action. It was getting dark as she observed the German camp. She could see no activity and all fires had been put out. Mother got up, walked slowly and quietly to the enemy encampment and, seeing no

movement, found her bicycle and carried it back to her group's resting place, while the Nazi thieves slept around her. She then settled down and slept better, knowing that at the least she would have some means of moving children and belongings to the next "safe" place. Desperate times demanded desperate actions now and then.



Artist's depiction of Dutch citizens homeless and on the move

Before dawn the next morning, they were awakened by the noise of the German camp being packed up and all the equipment moving away from them. The rest of the group, upon seeing Mom with her bike back in her possession, could hardly believe that she had the nerve to actually go into the enemy camp and steal it back from them. Dad, when he rejoined the refugees, was very upset that she had put herself into such a dangerous situation. He pleaded with her to think about his situation in the future stating, "How do you think I would have been able to look after a sick 2 year old and an infant?" As we grew up, I recall a number of times

Mother telling the tale and my Father getting upset about it all over again. Looking back on her plight, I don't blame her for her action. She really had no choice if she wanted to keep her family with her. At the time I suffered from rickets and jaundice brought on by malnutrition and cold, damp living conditions.

We all survived the war, but were never able to return to the family home. During the



The family home after liberation from World War II

aftermath of operation Market Garden, and the subsequent battles for the liberation of Holland, our home suffered much damage. There had been a few major scrimmages between opposing forces in close proximity to our "field hospital home." My parents tell of all the rooms looking like a slaughter house from medical operations being performed in them. The walls had holes that went in one side and did a lot of damage as they exited the other side. All

the belongings they had buried in the garden had "disappeared" when Mom and Dad could finally attempt to retrieve them. Two more children were born in 1945 and 47. Dad returned to what he knew best and continued farming along with his milk wagon job. They had lost all they possessed during the war and they concluded that a fresh start far from the bad memories of World War Two would offer the family a better future. We immigrated to Canada in Feb 1951, as a family of 6, and, after an initial period of adjustment, have never regretted the move.

Total bewilderment confronted the “new residents” of Canada, as we were helped through the red tape of Pier 21 in Halifax, and the immigration process. The family had taken some language courses to help them but found it almost impossible to use what they had learned. Interpreters were available to help sort through the procedure and make sure the whole family got onto the right train to the final destination. Everyone wore a name tag that also had information as to their transfer points en-route to meet the farmer who sponsored us. Our sponsor was living in Quebec, on an Island in the Ottawa River, across from Pembroke, Ontario. He met us at the station, late at night, during a blizzard of howling winds and driving snow. Our transport was a big bob-sled pulled by a team of horses. Mother of course had dressed herself and children in their Sunday best, and cleaned us up from spending the best part of 3 days on trains to get to this point. Once on the sled, we were all bundled in blankets and bear hides to keep the snow and wind off of us. When the horses had pulled the sled through town and we were on the river, the farmer got under the covers with us and the horses got themselves across the river to the island and home. We were not the clean children who had got onto the sled by the time we arrived at the farmhouse, and it was a welcome shelter from the cold wind and snowstorm.

A big meal was served to us that evening by the lady of the house. I don't recall the menu but I do recall the pickled crab apples and dill pickles we were served. I had never had anything like that before and the taste stuck with me. Most of the food was different than what we were used to, and the meal was served without the customary first course of soup. Desserts were to die for and again not something we had back home. Another memory is going to church on our first Sunday. Mr. Kennedy, our sponsor, whose home we were temporarily staying in, took us to church with the sled that had picked us up at the train station. The “road” was somewhat cleared and the snow was piled and drifted so high that it would have been easy to touch the hydro and telephone lines. The Sunday Mass was in French, as was the school that we children, who were of age, attended.

Our “living quarters” were enough to discourage the most strong-hearted and optimistic people. We were taken by sled again, onto the farmer's fields to an old dilapidated house. On entering we found nothing but disappointment and disgust. The house had at some time been used to store potatoes and other root crops that had rotted after being frozen, and had to be scraped from the floors and lower walls with sharp shovels. Sheep had at one time also been residents. No hydro was in the house and the outhouse toilet was a good distance away, given the weather conditions most of the time. One wood stove heated the place and cooking was also done on a wood stove. Mom and Dad made the most of a bad situation and made the place as comfortable as possible. They questioned our situation and the expectations they had when they planned the immigration, but they persevered and over-came the difficulties. Mr. K. provided us with some supplies and meat in the beginning, and later made sure that transportation to get groceries was available when needed.

Dad had signed on with this sponsor for a period of one year, to be a farmhand and tend to livestock and other farm chores. In actuality, he did no farming for Mr. K at all. His job was to be a logger, cutting pulpwood with hand tools far from home. In the morning he took a horse and sleigh to the cutting destination and spent the day cutting and stacking pulpwood. He always had a shotgun close by, because on his first few days he had been watched by wolves that were plentiful and not fearful of human presence. They especially were a problem when he stopped for a rest or to have his lunch; the lack of noise must have made them more daring. He never shot any, nor did he try, but he did shoot over them a few times when the situation warranted. He

certainly had not signed on to do this kind of work. Mr. K. had told Dad, "I do not have any farm work for you to do, but I will keep you working in the bush until your contract is fulfilled next February."

Early in May of our first year in our new country, Dad's best friend, who had come to Canada earlier, paid us a visit. He spoke a little English and challenged Mr. K. about breaking the terms of the contract in respect to housing and type of work Dad was expected to do. They of course did not agree with each other and resolved to take the issue to the next step. Upon his return to his home, Dad's friend consulted the authorities responsible for Immigration and concluded our family could leave there whenever we wanted, as long as we found a new sponsor to sign on with. Late in June, Dad's friend came back, this time with a truck and a car and proceeded to help us move all our possessions and us to our new home on a farm at Churchill Ontario, where we stayed for a year. Dad worked the farm, a nice home was provided and we children had a school close by, where we proceeded to learn another new language and start over in grade one again.

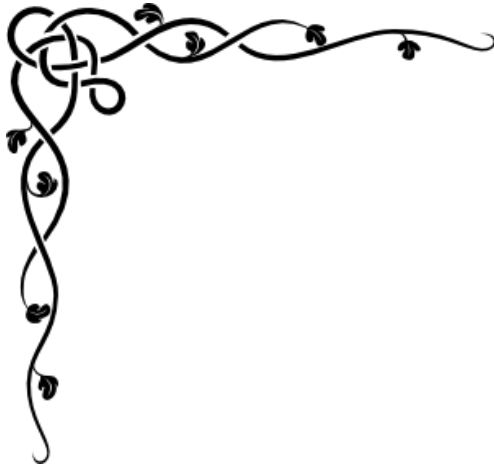
My parents, after the initial difficulties, never regretted the move to Canada. Sure there was some homesickness, especially Dad, who was raised in a close family with 13 brothers and sisters who themselves all had big families of their own. Mom convinced him to visit Holland and look at the difference in life there, compared to their new chosen home here in Canada. He did go back for the visit, but soon sent word that Holland was not what he remembered and would be back to Canada as quick as possible. They realized that Canada was indeed like finding the proverbial, "Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."



*Bill Van Gaal was born in the Netherlands in Feb. 1942 and immigrated to Canada with his family in Feb. 1951, settling first in Quebec. That July they moved to the Barrie Ont. area where he was raised. Bill dropped out of school in grade 8 the day before his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

*After a period of travel and adventure and many jobs he started working at the Ford Motor Co. in Oakville where he was employed for 40 years. For 7 years he worked on the assembly line taking an interest in the workings of the union, Local 707 UAW. He ran for the position of Union Steward and was elected to that position for 12 years. Always looking for new challenges he ran for and was elected Vice President for 6 years and the next 12 as Local Union President*

*Bill has been married to Sandra for 47 years and has 2 children and 5 grandchildren.*



# Tragic Loss

Olive Fowler

**T**he kitchen fire was lit, smouldering warmly but slowly, with the peelings from the supper vegetables wrapped in damp newspaper laid on the top of the coals. This kept the fire burning slower and the aroma from it giving a hint of the meal to come.

The windows blown out by the bombings, recently covered with the temporary composite replacements from the Government, were pushed open to catch the fading golden daylight time, saving money on the bill while conserving in case of electrical shortages.

In 1941, Nanny, my mother's mother, had moved from her Kirkdale home and was now living with us in Bootle. Kirkdale and Bootle are on the outskirts of Liverpool, England. The largest bedroom had been made into a bedsitting room for her. Most of her furniture came with her. There was even a black iron fireplace for the very cold days when she would sit with her skirts pulled up toasting her legs. Her cotton, lisle stockings (panty hose came much later) were rolled just above her knees and there was a penny imprisoned in each of the rolls to keep the stocking tops aloft. She didn't want to have elastic bands or even a suspender belt holding them up. Sometimes they rolled down a bit but only showed when she warmed herself in front of the fire.

After school, I would run up the three flights of stairs (we lived over a Bank (Martins), all our bedrooms were up on this floor) and talk with her. Or she would tell me about the books she was reading or even read to me from Charles Dickens or Hall Cain, these were her prize possessions. She had a pink bobbed-glass lamp, which she had to fill with paraffin oil, and it turned that room into the warmest, cosiest cocoon. The lamp is my prize possession and my number 3 granddaughter also loves it and would often ask me to tell her about Nanny and the old days. Tammy knows that this lamp is to go to her when I am no longer here. She will treasure it as I have done but without knowing the gentle personality that used to own it.

Nanny's other prize possession was her radio which ran on acid batteries. When they had

run long enough and the acid had been used up, I would take the 9" oblong, glass battery to the hardware shop and exchange it for another one. I was always admonished to keep the bottle away from my legs or should the acid leak it would eat into them!

23rd November 1941, the doorbell rang. Too late for the postman? Besides, 'Ted' the postman had his own knock especially if there was a letter from my sister, Eileen, who was now living in the United States. I ran down. There was the yellow-garbed man on a bicycle. He handed me a telegram. I can't remember if I had to sign for it. I ran back to the kitchen and handed it to Mother. The way she thumped down so quickly onto her chair and looked at Nanny, I felt that something huge had happened—something drastic but I had no idea what. She slit open the official looking envelope, read the contents, shuffled over to Nanny and put her arms around her.

"No, no," Nanny cried. She had already lost her husband in 1920. He was a sapper (a soldier who performs a variety of combat engineering duties such as bridge building and laying or clearing minefields) and according to his photo now hanging in my home, a very dapper one.



Uncle Eddy

We all loved Uncle Eddy. The room came alive when he entered. He could play the mandolin, the piano and the mouth organ. He looked like the Marx brother that wore the hat, had the curls and the lovely grin ... Mother and Nanny clung to each other sobbing but not saying a word. What had happened?

All too soon they told us that Uncle Eddy's ship had been torpedoed off the coast of Ireland, returning from a trip to South America; Uncle Eddy's first voyage. All 45 hands had gone down with the ship. I remember sitting with my book on my lap not saying a word, nor really seeing the story. Marjorie, being only eight years old, didn't realize what had happened but realized that it was something of significance and so she was quiet too.

I guess we all ate supper, Mother always thought that a meal helped everything. Eventually it was time for bed. My method of dealing with unpleasantness was and still is to sleep. I fell asleep and despite the terrible news slept and had to be awakened for school the next morning.

There was an unnatural quietness about the house the following day as we got ready for school. For once we left early, and therefore didn't have to stand outside the headmistress's room and give excuses for being late or be handed a detention at the end of the day. We were very grateful.

I am not sure how long we went around the house so quietly. The elders kept as normal as possible, but I'm sure that bedtime was kept as their grieving time. We also had our own worrying times, as the German bombers arrived most nights. It was dark; blackout curtains of heavy black material were made. All street lights were turned down low.

Air raid shelters were provided to each home that had a garden. These were made of ridged metal, rounded with an opening at the front and were supposed to provide a safe haven from the bombs being dropped. We used to have one in Knotty Ash, but it was found to be built over a natural spring & we quite often jumped in, in the middle of the night, "OOPS" only to find the floor about a foot under water. Pop devised a sitting platform right around the inside of



the shelter. First in sat on the platform and then shuffle-bummed around the inside making room for us all to get in.

Mother also had a brilliant idea to fool the German bombers. She covered the rounded shelter with soil and then planted marigold seeds on top. It worked; the German bombers were obviously confused as they never hit our shelter. A young driver's mate of my father was not so lucky, though, his air raid shelter got a direct hit. He, his wife and three small children were all killed by a direct bomb hit.

In Bootle we didn't have a garden but we were allowed to take shelter in the Bank vaults. We had camp cots down there. Tins of homemade biscuits, a camp stove for making tea and rubber rings to bite on if the bombs dropped too close. Of course, our gasmasks were always close.

The docklands were about 2 miles west of us. We had many nights in the vaults.

Father had an exempt job which meant that he didn't have to join the army. His job was counted as essential war work. He delivered Whitbread Beer to the army posts and the ships. He had to take his turn being a fire watcher, which meant he had to sign on at his air raid warden post and then go on the streets and rescue those that needed help, or help put out any fires that had started. The watchers were still expected to attend their places of work the next day. Some of the stories that he told when he came home were really gruesome. A large Co-operative store which sold everything from groceries, to clothing, and even furniture allowed their cellars to be used for air raid shelters. We were devastated to learn that over 200 people were taking shelter down there when a land mine was dropped and, with a direct hit, killed the majority of the people. The others that were still alive but trapped in the debris and couldn't be reached were exterminated by having quick lime dropped on them. This had the people of the town absolutely devastated and horrified. I don't know that anybody could have done anything better than that for all the poor souls.

The docks were hit in many places. Old row houses close to the dock area were rubble. Many children were evacuated to Southport, a seaside town about 20 miles north of Liverpool and considered a safe place. The boys Grammar school, which was fairly close to the docks, was totally annihilated and the boys had to join the girls' school. Many bitter rivalry or love matches were born.

Many offices and manufacturing factories became ruined brick piles. Some parts of Tate & Lyles sugar factory went up in flames but gave a smell of toffee for several days.

We had bombing drills, and pupils of the high school were paper-labeled with whatever imagined injury they had sustained, taken to different parts of the town and left until the air raid wardens came around to the imaginary dead or wounded. I was labeled "wounded" and placed behind a 2



My Nanny, Annie Doyle (Eddie's mother) with my sister, Marjorie (1 ½ years) and me, Olive (almost 5 years)



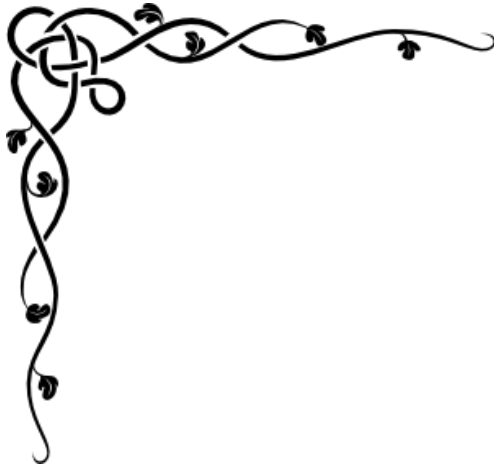
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1/2 feet brick wall on the edge of the park right opposite my own home. I lay there “forever.” “Don’t move until released,” we were admonished. I could hear my friends playing over the other side of the park gardens but I would not move. I was presumed found and given up by the teachers and the kids and they all went back to school. One of the air raid wardens finally found me and had to coax me to go home, as school was over. I didn’t think much of that game at all. What a dumb bunny to lay there!

However, most of us survived Hitler’s war. Our own personal war and loosing Uncle Eddy will always stay with us but is not uppermost in our daily thoughts anymore. We can still look at his photo and remember how he lit up a room when he came in; his music always bright with “Oh Sole Mio” in the middle of the repertoire somewhere.



*Olive is shy but determined in all of her pursuits. She taught school until she married and her life started again in Canada. She milked cows, became a house mother at a school for delinquents and learned to sex chickens so she could join her husband, Chris, in India. She is retired—at last.*



# Mamaita

By Luz Kennedy

**B**reakfast is for some the best meal of the day. It is for me. And as I sit with a cup of coffee looking through the glass door of the balcony on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of my building, I see a glorious blue sky with a brilliant, rising sun bringing with it such an array of colours – blue, bright orange, yellow, red and pink. What a spectacle!

Below the city is starting to wake up. It is the fall season and the trees have lost their leaves; the branches stand up naked and cold and the falling leaves under the trees look like a bright yellow carpet on the floor. And I think of my mother. How she would have liked to see this panorama. Thoughts about her life start coming vividly in my mind as she had recounted them to us.

The year was 1890; the small town was called Salamina in Colombia, South America. On October 21st of that year, the home of my grandparents Isaias Ramirez and Maria Jesus Gaviria, was full of happiness, tenderness and love. Efigenia, my mother, had arrived to this world and was the first one of what would become a family of 17 heirs.

From then on, the family was permanently united and sustained by a great spiritual force. This love between husband and wife would flow copiously to their heirs, who reciprocated in the same way. Any problems that arose at different times were not the cause or motive for doubt or confusion to interfere among them. On the contrary, the ability to face adversity was what united them closely and for life.

Mamaita remembers her childhood games fondly: to separate grains of corn, beans, buttons, etc. that Papa Isaias deliberately mixed up, with the purpose of keeping occupied the inquisitive minds of all his children. And while Efigenia was growing up in grace and beauty, the Ramirez family was enlarging. And so, after Efigenia the following children arrived: Maruja, Blanca, Aura, Augusto, Berenice, Roberto, another Berenice (the first one died at birth), Esther, Elisa, Enrique, Emilia, Gabriela, Lilly, Emma, Arturo and Ligia.

One day, my grandfather, Papa Isaias, said to the two older daughters: "Come on, girls, I am going to take you to Manizales to see an invention that is going to turn the world around." Manizales is a bigger city not too far from Salamina. The girls were so excited that they took off just as they were dressed. When they arrived to the place, the room was in total darkness; they were a bit nervous, but in a few minutes the electric lights went on and oh surprise! There was light! No kerosene lamps. The office now was quite bright and the girls were very excited, but ashamed as they realized they were barefoot and had dirty faces.

On another occasion Papa Isaias again took them to see the newest invention: the telephone, the first one that was installed in town. They never forgot that experience either. And what did they talk about? Probably the same as we usually do today... nothing of interest, just silly talk.

In the plaza of Salamina, there was a fountain where everybody would go and get the water for the day in their plastic pails. One day grandfather Atenogenes, (Mamaita's grandfather) was by the fountain when a woman came to get some water. As she strained herself with the heavy bucket, her skirt burst open and fell to the ground leaving her exposed from the waist down. Needless to say she was totally embarrassed while everybody around was laughing.

Most people dressed very poorly. The daily attire of Mamayita, our grandmother, was a long, black skirt and a white percale blouse; to go out visiting she would wear a black silk shawl over her head. At church the girls wore a "rebozo" or mantilla and white canvas or corduroy shoes. The rest of the time they were barefoot.

The town of Salamina was not offering the opportunities that a big family needed; it was time to move, so the growing city of Manizales was selected for the permanent establishment of the Ramirez family. Manizales is located on top of a mountain, so most of the streets go up and down like a roller-coaster, some quite steep. On bright days you can see, not too far off, the snow mountain called El Paramo del Ruiz, which is a volcano that had been dormant for many years, until Nov. 13, 1985 when this harmless volcano decided to erupt mud in such a way that it killed 25,000 people who lived in the town below. It also injured more than 200,000.

Efigenia was about 18 years old when the first cars arrived in Manizales. Roberto, one of her brothers was very enthusiastic about cars. He and his brother, Enrique, had been in the US working for the Ford Company and were very enthusiastic about taking the girls on a car ride for the first time. The streets of Manizales were not paved yet, but covered with stones, so the car was jumping up and down all along and they were wondering if they would get back safely. Fortunately they did.

To dress and educate a big family was not easy. Grandmother had to use her brains to satisfy all the needs of the daily living. And the family needed shoes. The mere thought of having to buy 17 pairs of shoes was something to think about. But, oh, what luck! One of the stores was having a sale of shoes, at the price of 5 cents a pair! How could she let this opportunity pass by? So Grandmother arrived home one day with a big parcel and the distribution of this exciting moment started, as each of them was trying the shoes according to their sizes. However, in a few minutes everything was confusion – something was wrong. What was going on? Not much – just that all the shoes were for the same foot! And how to solve the problem? Well, they had to wear the shoes just as they were.

The years passed by and tragedy struck: Aura and Blanca, 22 and 24 years old, were infected with tuberculosis. It was then that the calibre of their spirits was tested. Grandmother, making a big sacrifice so as not to have the whole family contaminated, decided to move out to a nearby town called Villa Maria with the two sick daughters, leaving the rest behind in order to

try and restore their health. Mamaita and Maruja would be in charge of the home and the rest of the children. Unfortunately, science was not too advanced in those days and the doctors could not save those lives that were starting to wake up to the doors of love. One of the girls was engaged to Roberto, my father's brother.

Mamaita remembers very sadly how she and the rest of the family had to leave the house where they grew up, and leave all furniture, clothes, memories, absolutely everything ... even the shoes they were wearing had to be left at the door so as not to take the infection to the next home with them

Mamaita told us that even though they were very sad about the sisters, they were never depressed or complaining of their misfortune; on the contrary, some of the girls, in time, formed a string band, others took to playing tennis and the elders, like my mother, dedicated their time to making dresses for their friends, until little by little, the "Senoritas Ramirez" were well know and famous as the town seamstresses. The younger ones worked at offices and some of the older ones got married.

### **The Posada Family**

Not too far away from the Ramirez's home, there was another large family, equally respectable, equally united and with more masculine elements than the Ramirez family. This home, formed by Manuel Antonio Posada and Maria Jesus Franco, was filled also with the noise of 13 male children and only four females. Their names: Ernesto, Abigail, Gilberto, Roberto, Jose Manuel, Alberto, Arturo, Enrique, Gonzalo, Raul, Rosa Maria, Graciela, Cecilia, Emilio, Fanny y Jaime. (Jaime had 10 children, and that's another interesting story).

Abigail was a very responsible young man. At the age of 18, out of his first salary, he bought his mother a machine to grind corn. They were the first ones to arrive in Colombia. His always generous spirit was constantly being demonstrated by giving presents for his family. Mamaita remembers when, years later, he bought a dozen electric coffee makers as a present for his brothers and sisters. This generosity, that was his characteristic, was recompensed as the Lord blessed him with a good career and lucrative businesses. Abigail started as an accountant working in the cacao business.

Destiny had put two people in contact: Abigail and Efigenia, and so it was that, on June 2, 1921, the bells of the church were happily ringing, announcing what was to be a rather modest wedding between Efigenia, a beautiful 26 years young lady, daughter of the president of the Municipal Council, and the young man, Abigail, that even though he had to help his home financially, had accomplished to economize enough to give his bride a home like she had never, ever dreamed of.

That morning the bride was wearing a lovely wedding dress that the groom had ordered from an importing store in Bogota. The simple style that always characterized Efigenia was demonstrated the day of the wedding. She offered a frugal breakfast for the two families which consisted of almost thirty members. One of the interesting characters attending the wedding was the youngest brother of the groom who was only 2 years old and, as an important member of the family, was also "elegantly" dressed up.

The honeymoon had been planned to be at a friend's farm, located not too far from town. A taxi was hired to take the bride and groom to a determined place, where Jose, a young helper boy, was waiting with the horses to take them to the farmhouse as there was no road for cars to the farm. The bride was wearing a navy blue skirt down to the ankles, called fundon, a

champagne coloured jacket, silk blouse, a scarf, a felt hat, and riding boots. The groom was wearing tails.

During the honeymoon the newly wed couple received some visitors, Don Manuel and Maria Jesus (parents of the groom) who arrived a week later. As it was customary, the couple offered them hot chocolate, cheese and hot bunuelos (a kind of doughnuts). There were also other visitors.

## The House

Upon returning from the honeymoon, Mamaita had a surprise. The home that Abigail had prepared for his wife was like a dream to her: the living room had beautiful furniture, two large mirrors imported from Venice (still in existence,) curtains of "macramé," and pale blue porcelain lamps. The bedroom and dining room furniture were made of carved wood, by Tulio Vallejo, a brother of Abigail's business partner. The sheets and towels were hand embroidered with their initials by Maria Jesus and Isabel Angel, aunts of Jose Angel, best friends of the bride. The bedspread was made of satin and lace. The dinnerware was white porcelain with pink little flowers. Glassware and the cookware were bought in a famous store of imported merchandise. The pots and pans were imported from Sweden. He had also several beautiful plants on porcelain containers on top of stands around the house.



My mother, age 28, newly wed

Not one detail was missing to this dream come true. This was the Lord's reward for all Mamaita had done for her family. And I can quote here a phrase she used to say at meal times: "Thank you Lord, for giving us daily food and drink even if we don't deserve it."

One year later, July 20, 1922, their first son, Hernan, was born. Unfortunately, he only lived for one week. That week, the whole town of Manizales was in flames; it was the first big fire that destroyed a great part of the city and the fire came very close to where my parents lived and Mamaita was delivering her first baby, Hernan who did not survive. He was followed by six other children, the third one being me.

By the year 1930 or '31 my father was suffering from a stomach ulcer and my uncle Enrique convinced him to get an operation at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. My parents decided to make the trip and leave us children (4 at that time) with my Grandma and the rest of the aunts. My brother Mario was about 8 months old.

Abigail and Efigenia travelled on the St. Lucia Grace Line ship. Their travel companions were Don Adolfo Aristizabal and his wife Carolina, old friends of my parents. Don Adolfo was a prosperous man who, in time, built a hotel in the city of Cali, which is still in business today. The ship sailed from the port of Buenaventura, Colombia passing through the Panama Canal where

they spent only one day and got to see the interesting cathedral with marble floors and the Capitol that had a golden dome. From Panama the ship went to New York, where Don Adolfo had a car with chauffeur at their disposal. That was very convenient, so they were able to see several places together like the Statue of Liberty, Coney Island and Niagara Falls.

Another novelty for them was the five floor stores. In one of the stores they bought three doll carriages for us girls, together with the dolls and a set of clothes for them. For my brother Mario they bought a big airplane and other unusual toys. In the store they were told that everything was going to be very well packaged and that they would send the merchandise directly to the ship, so that my parents did not have to carry all the big boxes with them. They paid for everything, but ... the toys never arrived to their destination. What a disappointment they had! They came to the conclusion that maybe, due to their lack of the English language they misunderstood the instructions on the papers they signed and therefore did not follow the right instructions to claim the package. Nevertheless, they brought us girls some other novelties in clothes. Manizales has a cold climate so they brought me a gorgeous pink coat with a matching muff for the hands, and pink leggings. Those things were never seen before in town and I felt like a queen in that outfit. I'll never forget that



Always happy!

They travelled by train to Rochester. The Mayo Clinic was gigantic and very well and efficiently attended. My mother was not planning on having an operation, but since they were at the Mayo Clinic both my parents decided to have a general check up. The doctor determined that my mother had "Elephantiasis" but only one leg could be operated first. She had to come back at a later time to have the other leg done. She stayed 20 days in the hospital and, since she did not speak English, they provided her with a nurse who spoke Spanish

One day there was a very heavy snow fall and my mother mentioned that she had never seen snow. The news went all over the floor of the hospital that there was a lady who had never seen snow! The next day the doctor ordered the staff to bring to her bed a big bowl with snow so that she could touch it and play with it. Needless to say she enjoyed that immensely. My father was operated on for a peptic ulcer and recovered very soon

While Mamaita was in the clinic, my father went to Chicago and visited a sausage factory called Packaging House. He thought it was quite interesting to see the way sausages were made. Years later he had a factory of children's clothes in which many members of the family were part of the staff.

Their stay in the hospital lasted about 3 weeks and they were very pleased with the results. Many years later, the doctor who did the operation was so interested in my mother's sickness that he wrote her a letter asking how she was doing. Unfortunately, she never answered him. Around the year 2000, her grandson, Mario Alberto, went to Rochester for medical

reasons, and just out of curiosity, he asked if Efigenia's records were available. My mother was operated on in 1930. To his surprise, they still had her records after 70 years! In less than an hour, he had received her records from the hospital.

After a fabulous two month trip, they returned again by ship to Buenaventura, the Colombian port, then by train to Chinchina, a small town where my aunts took us children to meet them.

There are many more stories about Mamaita but I am skipping ahead to the time I was living in Canada. When Mamaita was about 85 years old, she came with my sister Emma to visit us in Canada, where I had gone to live with my children after their father's death. My mother loved Toronto, especially the colourful boulevards planted with flowers in many parts of the city

As the years passed, Mamaita needed extra help, so a nice young girl (she preferred them young) was hired to go every day and help her with her lunch, read the newspaper, the Bible and any other book that she would be interested in. As mother had lost sight out of one eye she wanted to keep up to date with what was happening in the world. My sister Emma would give her a shower and groom her for the day before the caregiver came. Mamaita had many friends that came to visit her. Every Sunday she and Emma would go for lunch at Beatriz's, our youngest sister.

For her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, my sisters organized a big beautiful party with many relatives from various cities. Leticia, our eldest sister, came from Oklahoma and I went from Canada for the



My mother at age 90 delivering blankets at a seniors' hospital

occasion, as well as my brother Mario from Bogota, plus many other relatives from other cities in Colombia. It was a lovely party and she was very emphatic about asking everyone not to bring presents for her, but instead she would like to take some things to the hospital for poor people. She got pillows, blankets, sheets, etc and she personally went with us to deliver them. She got a lot of satisfaction out of that.

The 100 birthday was also celebrated in big style, although it was a smaller party. Mamaita had

lost the sight out of one eye and was more fragile and not as energetic as ten years before, however, still with her mind in complete control. Again I went from Canada for the occasion and that was the last time I saw her.

One month later she was sitting at her usual chair talking to my sister, and perhaps not feeling too good. She decided to get up at the same time, saying her last words, "Till when, Lord, till when?"... Then she collapsed and died instantly. No pain, no doctor, no struggle, very peacefully! We know she is with the Lord. May she rest in peace.

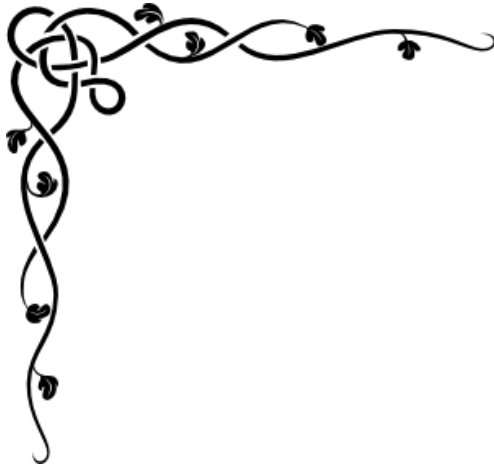


Celebrating her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday with her daughter, Beatriz.



*I was born in Colombia, South America on July 7, 1927. My childhood and teen years were very happy. When I met my Canadian husband, Denis, it was love at first sight. We married two years later and had three children: Patty, Sandra and Michael. During the early years of our marriage, we owned and ran a banana plantation which was literally in the middle of the jungle. When the children were very young, Denis fell sick with a liver disease and died within a year. As devastating as that was, I picked up the pieces and made the best out of life as a single mother. In June of 1977, Denis' sister sponsored us to come to Canada. It was an enormous transition for all of us, coming to a brand new world, yet we all adjusted to our new life and new experiences. I am now a grandmother of 5 wonderful young adults. At the age of 84, I am still very involved in many activities. Of all the trials and tribulations God has handed me throughout my life, I would not trade any of those experiences for the world. I thank Him for bringing us to the best country in the world.*





# My Father, Stewart George

Christopher J. S. Fowler

I could juggle eggs all day long and not drop one. I can sow seeds as fine as dust in skinny lines on dirt pots and generate neat rows of happy petunias. I can diddle with flimsy, minute and ancient postage stamps into the small hours and lose hardly any among the linoleum tiles beneath my desk, but in spite of nearly eighty years of trying, I cannot fold the Daily Paper.

Stewart George could. He may have been practicing twenty years before I met him, but there were no loose sheets sliding to the floor, no creased or bent-wrong-way pages for the next reader to struggle with, and not even a few muttered curses. Throughout his 'read' the Daily Telegraph remained pristine. It looked so easy. I grew up with this image of perfection, something I hoped I could some day emulate. I'm glad he's not here to witness my failure. To my shame I don't even try any more, nor care when the crumpled, tatty sheets of newspaper flutter around my after-supper armchair. I suppose I never felt the pressure: "Get it right or be shamed!"

At 6 feet 3 inches he stood tall and straight. He never walked but marched. As a bank manager and amateur gardener he still looked more like a soldier than most generals ever could. As a father he seemed aloof but somehow that distance shrank as I myself grew up. He was patient and meticulous in all the things he did, and he was, above all, smart.

Considering so much DNA shared, I wonder why I'm so unlike him.

Father laughed when he watched me struggling with the newspaper. "Don't worry. Be patient. You'll learn the trick soon enough." At eight years old I thought that meant 'never'. I was right.

He was born 27 November 1890 in Stratford, Essex, not the pretty village where William Shakespeare had lived, but the smoky, often foggy, always crowded and noisy slum suburbs, the "East End" of London. His Dad, George Thomas, a clerk, was married to Mary. Stewart was their oldest child. By fifteen he had two younger brothers, Sydney 13 and Reginald 11, plus a

five year old sister, Hilda. About then George Thomas walked out, never to be seen again. The family had to manage as best they could. Stewart was suddenly head of the household, in those days thought to be a key position, rarely held by a wife or mother.

“Reg., pick up those dirty boots ...you too Syd,” Stewart would rave.

“Why should we? We’re not your slaves. Who do you think you are?”

“Sydney, you’ll damn well do as you’re told!” Such statements must have rankled with the two younger brothers. Even thirty years later they were still not on speaking terms, but little sister Hilda saw him in a quite different way. He was the one she looked up to, and so it remained throughout their lifetimes.

By 1913 the threat of war was beginning to shadow their lives in the East End. “I’m joining the ‘Terriers,’” Stewart told his mother. “Don’t worry; it’s only a part-time job. We are weekend soldiers. They tell me that we go to camp only in summer-holiday time.”

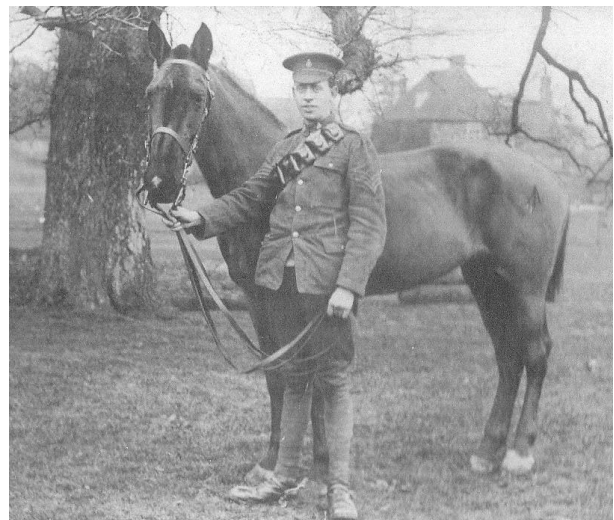
“And how am I supposed to manage, you running off out like that? You’re no better than your useless father!” Mary complained, impatient at his lack of consideration, but she had to recognize her eldest son’s maturing sense of responsibility. Nevertheless Stewart surely relished the thought of escaping from his disobedient brothers.

He must have learned something from his ‘Territorial’ training. When the War started he quickly made it to NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer.) It must have pleased Mary a lot to find her eldest posted to a regiment close to home. The ‘Essex Yeomanry’ was based in the county of Essex, not among the crowded houses of the “East End” but further north, toward Braintree, deep in the farming country.

He soon became a ‘Training Sergeant’, teaching recruits how to shoot (or dig) before sending them off to fight. In those days the Yeomanry rode horses. For a city boy, that must have taken some getting used to but, judging by the stories he told my sisters and me, he loved working with horses. His favourite mount was named “Spanker”. In its wisdom, the Army soon decided to mechanize the Yeomanry. Even many years later, as he told the tale to us kids, there was a tear in his eye. “They gave us bikes,” he said. “The silly buggers thought bikes would go better through mud than horses. They’re damned lucky they didn’t lose the War!” He loved old “Spanker”.



Sydney, 5; Stewart, 8; Reginald, 7



Sergeant Stewart George Fowler and “Spanker”,  
1918

Stewart served at the Regiment's basic training centre till War's end. He and his Sergeant-Major had the job of marching each batch of freshly trained recruits to the docks at Yarmouth, seeing them onto the boats, then "Goodbye and Good luck," and back to the barracks for the next intake. "Yes," he told us, "There was one occasion we actually stayed on the boat and sailed to France, but the officers made us sail right back again."

Sydney and Reginald, conscripted, must have complained, long and loud. "Trust that so-and-so to find himself a soft job while we get all the mud and hard work, not to mention being shot at!"

In 1917, Stewart married Ada Saker, a pretty girl with black curly hair. She was petite but strong-minded, a qualified seamstress working in Greenwich, south of the Thames. The war ended the next year. Stewart, demobbed and jobless, moved in with Ada in her parents' home. These were hard times, many ex-soldiers looking for work and finding none. Ada's sewing brought in enough to keep them. "Don't worry, we'll manage." She smiled. "Father and Mother have already said we can live here as long as we need to."

"No!" replied Stewart angrily, "I must get a job and we need a place of our own." Ada's sisters Victoria and Ethel and their brother Alf all quietly murmured, "Amen to that." Their youngest brother, Jack, with some 'support' from their parents, had sailed to Canada recently. Stewart was in a huff over that.



Ada and Stewart's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, 1967.

Ada's sisters: Victoria (left) and Ethel (right).

possible employer." Stewart quickly abandoned his trays of tin soldiers and caught the next train.

The interview went well. He found himself hired as "clerk" at one of the old-established business houses in the city, Hambro's. He was already "good with numbers." Faced with having to make a living when George Thomas left her, Mary had started a small business, recruiting Stewart as her book-keeper. In his late teens he found himself in the same trade as his absent father. Now, despite the war's interruption, he slipped comfortably back into the routine. He liked the work. It seems the work liked him too. Hambro's was (is) a trading bank, not the sort

"That's begging," he'd fumed. "No way for a son to behave." Ada quietened him but realized they'd better make plans to move out before her vocal husband offended everyone. In spite of searching everywhere in Greenwich as well as north of the Thames in the "East End", (George Thomas had worked there and he hoped there'd be someone left who'd remember him) Stewart had to accept the only offer: selling toy tin soldiers door-to-door, on commission only!

He had been a good soldier, good enough for his old C.O. to remember him when talking to a business friend in the City of London. In those days the Army tried to keep tabs on its ex-soldiers, even if it didn't pay them much (or anything). The C.O. wrote to his ex-sergeant: "Come up to the City. I want to introduce you to a

where one deposits or withdraws one's humble savings, but a place where big business, royalty and other superstars of society organize the payment or receipt of money.

Within a few years he rose to a senior post, manager of the "Foreign Bills" department. I asked him one Sunday morning, "What is a foreign Bill?" I'd heard him grumbling about Bills from the man who repaired the fence. "Was that man a foreigner?"

"Well, no, not those kind of bills," he tried to explain. "What we do is arrange for companies or people to pay for goods they import from foreign countries. We also help our clients get paid for the goods they export." It was a kindly and patient answer to my question. At nine years old I thought it totally "grown-up."

I said "Oh," and left Father to his hoeing. My thoughts: "Too complicated for me." I probably didn't show it at the time, but my respect for his intellect had risen a notch.

"Hambro's Bank," an elegant building, handsome though soot-smearred like its neighbours, lurked in comfortable respectability in the heart of the ancient city of London, at 41 Bishop's Gate. Founded in 1839 by Carl Joachim Hambro, Danish financier, the bank was, still is, one of the great financial houses of Europe, doing business worldwide. Its staff, like the thousands who worked in other dignified

establishments in the City, nearly all lived in the suburbs to the south and every day rode the trains to London Bridge or Cannon Street station. They all wore respectable bowler hats, black suits and neat spats covering the tops of their gleaming black shoes. They each carried umbrellas, neatly rolled (on dry days), and a newspaper, meticulously folded. On the many rainy days, seen from the windows above, the open umbrellas from the railway stations to the offices, became endless black columns, winding and wobbling along the narrow side-walks. For six days a week this was Stewart's life, one of the black ants serving the queens (and kings) of finance.

By the time I came along to join the family, (sisters Glenna and Denise beat me by nine and six years respectively), home and Stewart's daily starting point, was at Beckenham in the County of Kent, forty minutes train ride from London and, to all intents and purposes, right inside the metropolis of Greater London. He'd stride from the house, 15 Shrewsbury Road, like he was still marching with his regiment, buy his "Daily Telegraph" from the vendor outside Clock House station and leap onto the 7.30a.m. for Canon Street. The trains, all electric by this time, had no corridors. Each compartment had its own door to the platform and seated 10 to 12 people, 5 or 6 to each side with but



In the garden, 1967



With his sister, Hilda, and daughter, Glenna (right), 1938

inches of space, knee to knee. Most compartments were labeled "Smoking" and just a few "Non-Smoking". Thousands commuted this way. The porters and railway guards shouted: "Mind the doors!" But, except for a murmured "Excuse me" or an embarrassed "Sorry", few passengers spoke. A chatter-box would be frowned on, eye contact avoided at any cost. This was being "British".

Perhaps now, eighty years later, immigration has changed all that, but to Stewart and his fellow travellers it was the proper way to behave. He puffed on his pipe, carefully unfolded his newspaper and without any effort, read it from first page to last, never stretching beyond the cramped confines of his seat nor trespassing across the few inches that separated him from his opposite neighbour's paper.

On rare occasions I had the privilege of travelling with him and could witness the astounding dexterity, the flimsy paper held between himself and the world, reading all, page by page without seeming to bend or even turn it. At destination it would vanish like the conjuror's rabbit and reappear as he strode down the platform, a neatly folded, fresh-as-a-daisy "Daily Telegraph" under his left arm.

The Bank, like the rest of the City of London, was targeted by enemy bombers during the 1940-1945 air-raids. Nearly all buildings, especially the flat roofed ones, had their nightly crew of "Fire-Watchers", tin-hatted stalwarts taking their turns to stay overnight, armed with buckets of sand, shovels, pails of water and stirrup-pumps, ready whenever the incendiary bombs began to rain down, to climb to the roofs and douse or smother the fires. I think Stewart George got a real kick out of those jaunts. He volunteered two or three nights each week. Perhaps, after his relatively peaceful, "arms-length" First World War, he relished thwarting the enemy himself in the Second. No, they did not hold beer parties on the roof of the bank. None of them would ever show such lack of respect, but I know Father had a taste for good quality Scotch and the Hambro family and directors greatly appreciated the sterling work and the courage of Stewart George and the other fire-watchers.

My father lived till he was 94. Unlike me, he never gave up smoking. We had to scrub the walls and ceiling near his favourite chair and found them pure white, not nicotine brown as we'd thought. He loved his Scotch. Even in his last weeks he kept a bottle of Bell's down the side of his chair but never once did any of us see him even a tiny bit tipsy. I can only conclude that not only did he have loyalty and the patience of Job, but also the courage of a lion and the constitution of an ox. Quite a man.



*Born in England 1928, I married Olive in 1953, still in England. Finally we came to Canada in 1957 and I found a good job at last, practicing my chosen trade of Chicken Breeding. Though that job took us and our children to several corners of the Earth, we have lived "Happily Ever After". Now, hoping to keep that status for many more years, we are thoroughly retired in Brantford.*



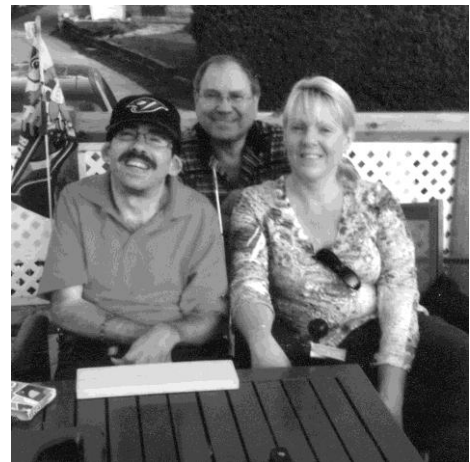
# Adventure at Turkey Point

Paul Benoit and Vickie Iorio

The date was September 21, 2010. The sun was shining brightly on the scenic area. The few people on the beach were enjoying themselves, the wind was calm and there was peace. We were finally getting away from daily routine. Thankfully the unpacking was quick, for we were excited to explore Turkey Point. Turkey Point is a quiet and beautiful spot about twenty minutes away from Simcoe, Ontario. The plan was to stay the night and enjoy our stay. We did. After unpacking, we ventured out of the cottage where we were staying to go to the beach and sit and enjoy the water. We were so anxious that we were finally there after all the planning we had done.

When we got to the beach we started playing a game. In the game you have to bring something to the party that started with the first letter of your name. Nobody got it at first. Everyone was confused about why they couldn't come to the party. Eventually we caught on; Paul brought a pillow, Vickie brought vitamins, some were confused why they couldn't bring a blanket. After that we went back to the cottage where we sat on the deck and played Uno. During the Uno game, Paul's Sister Katherine came for a visit with her friend, David. Paul introduced them to the group and Katherine took some pictures of us. Then they had to leave.

After that, we had supper which we barbequed; we had chicken and hamburgers. It was a delicious meal. After dinner we talked a bit until eight o'clock. At that



Paul (left), his sister Katherine and her friend, Dave

time Doreen (our recreational person) and some volunteers built a camp fire. We sang songs and made S'mores (S'mores are chocolate and marshmallows and graham crackers.) The neighbour from the cottage beside us came over for a friendly visit. After the small party, Vickie and Paul asked Doreen to fix them a drink of Pepsi and Cherry Brandy which tasted something like



Vickie and Paul seated on the right

Cherry Pepsi, only a little sweeter. We relaxed a bit around the campfire until around 2 o'clock (quite late for us) when we went to sleep. A storm rolled in, however, which made it difficult for some of us to sleep.

The next morning we had a breakfast of bacon, eggs and pancakes and various drinks. Paul had a coffee. The food was plentiful. Our activity for the morning was to make tie-dye t-shirts. We tied the shirts with elastic bands and dipped the shirts into whichever color we

wanted. We rinsed them in cold water and hung them to dry. Everyone had a chance to do one. Paul's was red and yellow and turned out a little pink. Vickie's was red, blue and a little bit of yellow, it came out a little purple. It started to rain so we headed inside, and sat around and talked until lunch. For lunch we had sandwiches and pickles. Paul brought some pickles home; he also brought home the rest of the Cherry Brandy.

The only thing about the trip that wasn't enjoyable was the flies buzzing all over, but we had a volunteer to go after them. Then it was time to pack up and come home. We enjoyed our time so much that we want to go back again sometime.



*My name is Vickie Iorio. I have lived in Brantford, Ontario since I was little. I am physically challenged and live in an independent living environment. I enjoy watercolour painting and going for walks. My favourite thing is spending time with my cat Sunny.*



*My name is Paul Benoit and I have lived in Brantford, Ontario for about five years now. I enjoy living on my own. I was born and raised in Granby, Quebec.*



# Confessions of an Underage Drinker

Wayne King

## Sixties Beer Parlour Customs, Regulations, and Observations

In 1966 the Western Hotel was situated in St. Thomas, Ontario where St. Catharine's Street came to an abrupt end at the, formerly extensive, Wabash railroad yards. Why it was called the Western, I do not know. It was not located at the west end of St. Thomas, but rather the centre north. Neither did the Western have a cowboy theme. On the outside the Western was a substantial looking two storey hotel, built of local red brick. The Western serviced the surrounding residential area and what remained of the railroad workers with beer, fast food and rooms to rent.

The legal drinking age in 1966 was twenty-one. I was nineteen and lived with my parents on the other side of the tracks. It wasn't until a number of years later that the drinking age was lowered to eighteen and then, subsequently, raised to nineteen. As an underage drinker the main floor men's beverage room, or beer parlour, was the chief object of my interest.

The Western represented a type of drinking venue that has been obsolete for many years because, although it is sometimes hard to believe, there has been some liberalization of Ontario drinking laws since the sixties. At the time the Western was one of ten hotels strategically located along Talbot Street and near railroad stations which featured beer parlours,

Hotel beverage rooms were where a lot of public drinking occurred – mainly because there were few alternatives. St. Thomas, a small city of twenty thousand souls, boasted a couple of taverns, which were really licensed restaurants, and some private clubs, such as the Legion, the Shriners etc. The strictly enforced law at taverns was that you had to order, oftentimes overpriced, food with your beverage. The minimum food order was plastic wrapped cheese and



## Roads We've Travelled

crackers that could cost up to fifty cents. However, the tavern's advantage was that, unlike beer parlours, they were open Sundays and did offer liquor and wine. The clubs required you to be a member which was impossible for a teenager.

Like most hotel beer parlours, the Western's main floor consisted of two beverage rooms – Men's and Ladies and Escorts. For some obscure reason the Ladies and Escorts was popularly known as the fur room. As usual for those days, the beverage room windows were frosted or otherwise covered so that no one could look in and watch the patrons drink their draught or bottled beer. Neither could you see out. Outdoor patios did not exist. Only beer was sold. Liquor and wine were not available.



The Western Hotel in 2011. It is now an apartment building. The door in the centre of the right side, formerly the main entrance, is now filled in. It faces St. Catharine's street.

Entering through the front door and looking down the length of the men's room you immediately noticed a gloomy room bathed in perpetual twilight. Tables, of uniform appearance, were scattered around the perimeter and in front of the bar. They were small, sturdy and round featuring easily cleaned grey Arborite tops with sometimes matching chairs. A heavy steel pedestal base ensured that each table was difficult to unintentionally tip over or to intentionally lift and throw. Placed in the centre of each table were the accessories required in this era, namely an ashtray and a salt shaker. Every once in a while the waiter would appear with an empty tomato juice can and dump the debris from the ever full ashtray. Both the ashtray and salt shaker were necessities because everyone smoked and many customers used salt extensively. In the sixties few were aware of the implications for your health of smoking and using salt. Many people automatically added salt to their food without even tasting it first. Some old timers added

salt to their draught beer because they believed it enhanced the foam head. Others added salt to their beer because they believed it reduced the foam.

Frank was our favourite waiter. He appeared to be in his fifties because he sported white hair. Frank was short in height, broad in girth and didn't say anything more than he had to. He wore the waiter's uniform of black dress shoes, black dress pants with black belt and open necked, white dress shirt, oftentimes with the outline of a white undershirt showing up beneath the shirt. Around his waist was tied an emerald green apron with built in pockets in which Frank could secret cash. Draped over one arm was a small, white towel that was used to wipe the inevitable wet beer rings from the table. Completing Frank's ensemble was a metal change machine, attached to his belt with sections dedicated to nickels, dimes and quarters. Frank expertly balanced a metal tray with a cork bottom filled with draught beer, bottled beer and empty glasses in only one hand. The cork absorbed the condensation from the beer plus provided a non sliding surface. Drinking beer at the beer parlour was strictly a cash business involving coins and small denomination bills. Cheques were not accepted. Debit or credit cards were unheard of. Frank seemed to be on the premises most of the time we were in the Western in those early days. We developed a mutual familiarity, important to underage drinkers whose presence in the bar was knowingly tolerated.

The bartender dressed the same as Frank except he wore a black bow tie, which perhaps illustrated his superior status in the great scheme of things. We never learned the bartender's name because our dealings with him were indirect. The bartender's job was to draw the draught beer from the keg and pull bottle beer from the large, solid door fridge at the back of the bar. The bartender placed the still foaming beer onto a stainless steel counter with holes bored into it to drain excess beer. The waiter would then load his tray up and deliver to the thirsty customers. When empty glasses were returned, the bartender placed the glasses upside down on a bar top conveyor which transported them through an automatic dish washer and dryer.

I found that most beer parlour patrons, while not particularly friendly, were ready to have a good time within the limitations imposed by good taste and the law. Those limitations could be suspended by imbibing too much. My good friend, Tom, kindly expressed excessive drinking as being full. As in "Wayne is staggering. He must be full". Being much more mature than us underage guys I don't know how the older fellows felt about us, but it didn't really matter because I never experienced any problems with anyone. Yes, I have seen patrons exhibit obvious signs of drunkenness. The symptoms included, but were not confined to staggering, raving incoherently either to themselves or to persons unknown, using off colour language and falling asleep at table while it was loaded up with beer. The waiter could cut off people that were a pain to be around, but he had to be careful. Being a waiter was not for the faint hearted. The only acts of violence I ever witnessed in the Western were perpetrated against waiters. In those two instances intoxicated patrons assaulted waiters who refused them service. Both incidents occurred in the middle of the afternoon.

Two metal signs individually hooked onto a frame advertised that there were two beers on tap, but in some hotels it could be three or even four types of draught. This style of sign was a standard fixture utilized in every beverage room I visited. Only the beer brands differed. The Western's offering was Labatt's Fifty and Labatt's Blue (they were not yet using the singular name Labatt). We quickly learned the two basic rules of ordering beer. First, take your seat, catch Frank's eye and raise your right hand with two fingers pointing down. This series of actions communicated to Frank that you wanted two draught of Labatt's fifty. Frank did not have to physically approach you and verbally take your order making his job as easy as possible.

Pointing your fingers up meant that your beverage of choice was Labatt's Blue. Secondly you ordered two draught – never one – per person. Mastering these basic rules helped us feel like old pros and as if we truly belonged here even though we were grossly under age.



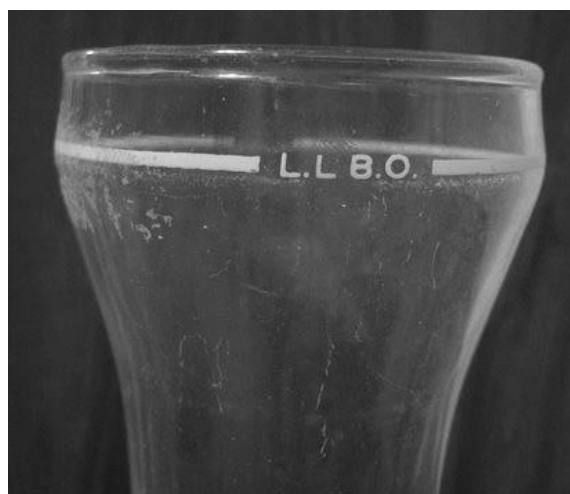
An original 7.6 ounce beer glass with an original long neck from the 1960s

Because beer was relatively inexpensive by today's standards and to help out the waiter you could actually order a tray of beer for around two dollars when a number of people were partying. Government regulations only legally allowed one type of drinking vessel, the seven point six ounce draught glass. It was actually eight ounces to the rim, but with a white line with LLBO emblazoned, at the seven point six ounce mark. The beer had to be on that line – no more, no less. Any foam was strictly on top of the line. Pitchers were not allowed because in those days of overregulation the Liquor Licensing Board probably felt that a sixty ounce pitcher might tempt some drinkers to over drink. However, when the waiter brought a tray it sometimes became a contest to see who could drain the most glasses, in the least time.

Bottled beer was rarely ordered. In fact, I don't know if there was a signal for that. Sometimes a patron battling a savage hangover would order a red eye which was half and half draught beer and tomato juice. This interesting combination supposedly settled the stomach

down and relieved head cramps to allow for the consumption of more beer.

Lunch, prepared in the Western's own kitchen, was thirty-five cents for a hamburger and fries. Draught beer was fifteen cents so even the poorest of the poor could have a beer in those



Close-up of an original 1960s 7.6 ounce draught beer glass

days. For as little as two dollars you could spend the afternoon or evening quaffing a number of beers, enjoying an almost like home made lunch, leaving a bit of a tip and perhaps playing a couple of games of shuffleboard.

Of course there were snacks available at the bar as well. There were the big ten cent bags of potato chips and sometimes the orange powdery Jacks clipped onto vertical racks. The racks took up little space and the clips made it easy for the bar tender to remove. Pickled eggs were displayed on the counter in a clear glass gallon jar. The bartender merely thrust in a pair of tongs and nestled the egg in a paper cupcake wrapper. In the name of good taste, I will not repeat, in this article, our nickname for the

pickled sausages that were oftentimes on offer as well. Both treats were a dime. Stationed in front of the bar was a salt peanut dispenser. The name and symbol for the nuts was Beaver. The nuts were held in a circular, glass globe with a metal floor stand weighted just right to keep the

machine upright. The business end had a slot to place your nickel and a small handle that was noisily cranked that dispensed the nuts via gravity. At the bottom of the globe was a small door that covered the dispensing hole. Lifting the door you would receive a small handful of the delicious nuts that you could immediately thrust into your mouth for instant gratification. A sen sen machine, similar in concept to the peanut vending machine, was lagged into a pillar. For a dime you got a number of pieces of the pencil lead like sen sen that was reputed to be so strong with its pungent licorice taste that it could conceal the smell of alcohol.

Cigarettes were dispensed from a free standing box like, machine. At that time cigarettes cost fifty cents for twenty from a machine, which was more expensive than buying at a store. Everyone smoked, including the staff, so that the interior was perpetually wreathed in smoke. We did not know about the dangers of second hand smoke, but it likely resulted in a more intense hangover. Usually the older guys favoured plain end cigarettes such as Export or Player's. I didn't like non filtered cigarettes because you would be constantly spitting out tobacco. Even worse, while in the act of removing the cigarette from your lips it just might stick to your lips, forcing your fingers to slide down the shaft, and burning them when they came into contact with the lit end. For reasons of convenience I, like most younger guys, preferred filtered cigarettes such as Rothman's, which the old guy's called women's cigarettes.

Television was not then installed in many bars. If it was it was inevitably black and white since most programs were broadcast in black and white. Colour programs were produced, but colour televisions were still crude and expensive. The only consistent source of entertainment was the shuffleboard table. There were two basic styles of shuffle board table. The first had padded banks on the side so that like pool you had a number of angle shots at your disposal. The second type did not have banks so you threw the rocks straight. Either one was challenging, depending on the quality of the opposition or the amount of beer consumed by the various participants. Many pubs had dart boards and juke boxes as well, but unfortunately the Western did not.

The law was that you had to drink, sitting down at your table. It was forbidden to stand at the bar with a drink, consume your beer while standing at the shuffle board table or to get your own drink from the bar. In fact, once it was placed in front of you, always by the waiter, you could not move your own drink, except to lift it to your mouth. If you got up to go to the washroom or to visit at another table you could not carry your beer. Customers were forbidden to return empty glasses to the bar. When people, sitting at two different tables, decided that they wanted to socialize by joining their tables together it was not a problem. The waiter had to be summoned because he was the only one allowed to handle beers. He removed the beers by loading them either onto his tray or on one of the tables. After the tables were pushed together the waiter returned your drinks to the tables. Everyone was happy.

To us young bachelors the Ladies and Escort Room was the centre of fun and largely unfulfilled dreams because the women were there and there was occasional entertainment on a Saturday night. Twangy, Country and Western tunes, rendered by a solo musician wearing the loud, rhinestone studded fringed shirt and white Stetson popular with the country and western crowd in the sixties was the usual fare. He, because it was inevitably a he, sang and accompanied himself on electric guitar. Guys in the Men's Room couldn't help but listen, but it was absolutely forbidden for stray males to wander into the Ladies' Room unless there was a woman with you or waiting for you. Sometimes you would see one woman with four guys sitting with her in the Ladies because it is always desirable to be with the ladies. I oftentimes fantasized that I would meet an unescorted female, although this was rare because most women would not be found in

one of these premises, even with an escort. Besides, the women were all older than us underage drinkers. It was unheard of for a woman to sit in the Men's Room.

Beverage room hours were twelve noon until midnight, but last call was at eleven-thirty. After eleven-thirty you had a half an hour to finish your beer. You might be able to nurse a drink until twelve thirty with the connivance of staff. Absolutely closed on Sunday. Even if New Year's Eve was a Sunday the beverage rooms were closed. It wasn't until the seventies that these regulations were relaxed.

Another curious regulation, applied in nearby Aylmer, but not in St. Thomas, was the supper hour shut down. Beverage rooms closed down at six-thirty and did not reopen until eight. The purpose was so that everyone could go home and spend some time with the family and maybe have something to eat. You had to preplan your drinking earlier in the day if you wanted to continuously drink during the hour and a half shut down. Not only did the hotels close, but the beer store and LCBO also shut down at six o'clock every night, including Saturday and were closed all day Sunday. In small towns they may not even open on Monday. Talk about a long weekend.

Old time beer parlours are long gone from Ontario, never to return. One thing that hasn't changed is that underage drinkers still have their friends and family to purchase beverages for them, just as they always have. However, the law against underage drinking is more rigorously enforced by today's drinking establishments. Proof of age is demanded automatically so that drinking in a public place for the underage is no longer an option.

## **I Drink My First Beer in Public**

Did you ever drink underage in public? I don't mean having a few drinks in the warm bosom of your loving and understanding family. Rather picture yourself and one friend, surrounded by total strangers, imbibing in a nineteen sixties Men's Beverage Room for the first time.

My baptism to public drinking occurred in my home town of St. Thomas in July of 1966. The drinking age was twenty-one. My friend Campbell (always call him Campbell, never Cam) and I had, just days before, celebrated our nineteenth birthdays. Coincidentally, except maybe to astrologers, we were born within two days of each other. Campbell's birthday was the seventh of July, mine the fifth. Aside from being nineteen, and all that implies, major life changes were staring us in the face. Both of us had just graduated from high school. Both of us had found our first jobs. A burning question was should we continue to live at home, or join Pete and John in Toronto, or get our own pad(s)? We had also discovered the joys and pitfalls of alcohol. I was with Campbell and our bosom buddies Pete and John (the latter's birthday July 9 – same as Ringo Starr's), the previous New Year's Eve when we all experienced our first real taste of alcoholic beverages, but as the man said that's another story. Since then all four of us continued to consume alcohol on the occasions when we could get it. We obtained our illicit booze from a selection of bootleggers and friends who were of age. We consumed it, wherever it was safe, usually moving cars, but certainly not in public.

Now after six months experience we were looking to expand our drinking horizons. Campbell and I both came to the same conclusion, at the same time. The time had come to go public. Yes, we were ready to drink in a hotel beverage room, popularly known as a beer parlour.

We were confident that we had the mature look of experienced drinkers and the smarts to pull it off

The first question was where to drink? After much debate we decided on the Western Hotel. Why the Western? The Western was quiet and off the beaten path. Therefore, it was less likely that we would be spotted by adults who knew us. We didn't want to bump into anyone who might frown on underage drinking to the point of sharing their concern with our parents. Campbell and I also believed, through street rumours that the Western was ready, indeed eager, to serve minors. The where, who and why being settled, we now had to decide when and how.

The when was easy. It had to be a Saturday. Campbell and I agreed that the best time was a Saturday afternoon when everyone was relaxed after a hard week's work. We also figured that more people patronized beer parlours on Saturday than at any other time allowing us to remain anonymous – just more faces in the crowd. With our minds made up we selected the upcoming Saturday afternoon as D-Day.

The how was more difficult, but we formulated a simple plan. Walk in, sit down, maintain a discrete silence and get our beer. The latter was the biggest stumbling block. How do we actually get the beer? We didn't know the mechanics, but surely it couldn't be too complicated. Could it? Probably like ordering a coke in a restaurant. We decided that we could brazen our way through that part of the exchange. Both of us agreed, as we repeated out loud, "Everything will be ok if we just walk purposefully through that door, take our seats and wait to see what happens next."

On that memorable Saturday Campbell drove us to the Western in his nineteen-sixty pea green Plymouth Fury sporting huge, vertical tail fins and reflecting blinding sunrays from the massive amounts of stylish, polished chrome.

As an aside, it should be noted that we dressed as we had in high school. All weather Clark Dessert Boots, continental style wool dress pants and Christopher Oxford dress shirts with button down collar. The latter article must be full sleeved, but with the sleeves rolled up as an acknowledgement that it was a Canadian summer. The sixties dress code was much more formal than today's. We did not wear jeans and t-shirts on important social occasions or even at school or church. Ball caps were not an option, unless you were a ball player. Our hair was shorn short, but not too short, in a style we called the Princeton. Long hair had just started to become a factor but had not yet caught on in St. Thomas. A pompadour was for the country and western crowd. I have to admit my hair was boring and lifeless because it was so thin, in stark contrast to Campbell's hair which was a thick and massive mane, unruly and wind defying. But I digress; let's go back to the story.

Pulling up to the north side of the Western, Campbell found a parking spot strategically located just around the corner and just out of sight from the front door, which was located on the west side of the Western facing St. Catharine's Street. Parking there was ideal if we had to beat a rapid retreat from the beer parlour. We were getting more excited, more into the mood as we exited the Plymouth. Like Odysseus tortured by the sirens' song we plunged headlong into our fantasy. Only our sirens' song was the stimulating aroma of fresh, draught beer and deep fried foods, blended and blown freely in our direction, by a very loud and powerful fan mounted above the hotel's side door. The close, muggy, summer air only increased our sensitivity. Motivated? Yes. Any fears that we might have entertained, momentarily at least, disappeared. Knowing that we had made the right decision we pressed purposely on. Anticipation built as we drew near the massive, front door.

Neither, Campbell or I were familiar with the inside of beverage rooms and did not know what to expect behind that door. But, armed with my new found courage I looked at Campbell and repeated our mantra to assure him "The best plan is to just walk in, sit down and see what happens." With the promise of a just reward for our boldness we fearlessly opened the Men's Beverage Room door. Stepping inside, we noticed that we were at the back end, of a long and narrow room. Although it was a bright summer day the beverage room windows were covered so that the effect was that of twilight. In this cave like atmosphere, patrons filled the tables throughout the premises enjoying their draught beer. Not a word passed between Campbell and I as we hurriedly chose the first available table in sight, which was located right next to the door. Sitting close to the door assured us that we could maintain our dignity even if we were forced to exit rapidly due to refused service or if a police foot patrol passed through.

Determined to accept our fate we sat down to await events. Time passed slowly as the adrenalin pumped through my brain. I fought back the fear and trepidation that flowed over me in waves. I kept reminding myself, "We've walked in and sat down. Now we must wait."

Surveying the premises we noticed that up front was a very closed-in bar servicing both men's and ladies' rooms. Screwed into a wooden bar pillar were two horizontal plain white metal signs emblazoned with bold black letters stating that Labatt's Blue and Labatt's Fifty were on tap. Gathering drinks on a tray in front of the bar was a waiter. Would he notice us? It appeared he did not as he efficiently went about his business. We quickly learned that the waiter's name was Frank as customers vied for his attention. It did not take us long to deduce that Frank's job was to deal exclusively with customers. There was also a gentleman behind the bar. He was the bartender. As the name implies his job was to tend to the bar, where he could fulfill the beverage orders given to him by Frank. The bar was so positioned that the bartender could keep an eye on both the Men's and Ladies' rooms.

Meanwhile, anxiety continued, forcing my brain to work overtime. Over and over the same conflicting thoughts kept pounding in my brain. "Stay positive." "We are grossly under age." "How do we order?" "All we have to do is sit and wait."

His tray filled with beers, Frank walked slowly through the room dropping off each table's order, while taking new orders, wiping off tables, emptying ashtrays and dealing with payments. At least it seemed slow to us as we anxiously awaited his arrival. Then we noticed. There was no doubt. Frank was approaching us. The moment of truth had arrived. Would he take our order, coldly refuse us or ask for proof? Campbell and I noticed that everyone drinking draught had been served two beers. As Frank reached the table he asked us what we wanted. I sat stunned, but Campbell exhibited the most courage by blurting out, "We'll have four draughts of "Fifty" please." Frank simply grunted, "OK," left us and returned to the bar where the bartender drew off Frank's next order which we assumed was ours.

We waited anxiously for Frank's return. Then, here he was, working his way through the room towards us, with our beer. Our beer. I hurriedly placed a dollar on the table because we didn't know how much beer cost and a dollar could buy a lot in those days. Frank nonchalantly reached the table and placed our beer, one at a time, on it. Frank stuffed my dollar bill into his apron pockets, saying "That'll be sixty cents". My wits having returned and, remembering what I had observed at a nearby table, I generously said "Have one for yourself." Frank returned a quarter. Success was achieved. We had beer, without overt suspicion or hassle. The afternoon became quite joyous as Campbell and I relaxed and celebrated our coup.

The pressure that had built up was finally released. Campbell and I had achieved another success on our road to maturity. I felt like Bogey at the end of Casablanca, when he shoots

Conrad Veidt and Claude Rains does not arrest him. Walking arm in arm into the mist on their way to join the Free French in Brazzaville, Bogey states "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship" And so it was for me, Campbell and beer parlours.



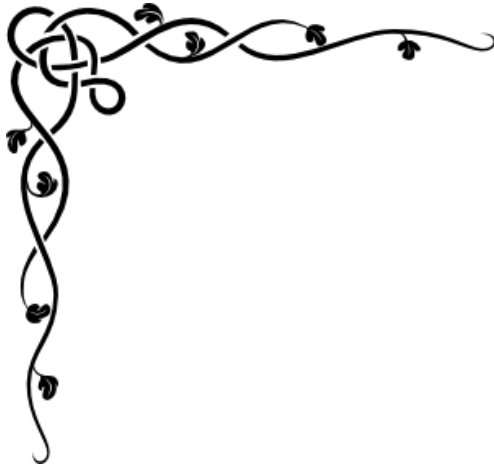
Wayne, age 18,  
1965



Wayne, age 63, 2010

*Wayne was born and raised in St. Thomas, but has lived in Brantford for thirty years. He is partner to Sharon and father to Amy, Aaron and Ian. His work career was in sales/marketing for a variety of businesses, both local and international. Interests include gardening, history, photography, brewing, cycling and hiking. Now that he is retired he is able to devote time to creative writing and reading.*





## Building a Cottage on a Lake

Orval Parsons

**A**s a young married man I had two aims, other than to earn a decent living: one was to own a farm and the other was to acquire a cottage by a lake.

We had an opportunity to buy a farm which was owned by a curling buddy of mine. Orville had two farms and wanted to sell one – a 100 acre property with an old house and a barn. So one day we drove out to see the property; it was east of Brantford. To get to the house there was a very long lane on the edge of a swampy area. We all discussed the possible purchase of the farm and Muriel said: “Honey, we have only one car; how can I get out if I need to?”

Our teenaged children then said: “We don’t want to live here. We’re too far from our friends and the church.”

I could see the difficulties of owning a farm that was 10 kilometres from the city, with only one car; and clearing the lane in the winter so I could get out to work and the children out to school would be a problem.

With some regret we did not pursue this venture.

The other aim, owning a piece of lakeshore property, did materialize. In the fall of 1969 we (Muriel and the two children and I) looked at a map of Ontario and considered which area would be best for us to commute from Brantford – the Kawarthas, the lake area north of Toronto, or Lake Huron. We chose the Lake Huron shore because this area was more accessible. Then we planned a series of week-end trips from Grand Bend in the south, to Stokes Bay in the north. Those trips were so interesting, seeing the towns along the Lake Huron shore. We contacted real estate agents in each place of interest, and we saw several properties for sale. One of these properties was at Pike Bay, just north of Red Bay.

The following spring we returned to Pike Bay to see again the property that we liked and could afford. It consisted of two shoreline lots with a cabin of 800 square feet on one lot. The vendor was anxious to sell; he and his wife were being divorced and they wanted to settle the

estate. So, the sale went through quickly and we took possession of the two lots. We hired a lawyer to handle the legal business, and Sam said to us, "Orval and Muriel, I really don't want to go to Walkerton, the county seat, to check on the deed; so why don't you two go up and do it." Sam told us what to look for, we did the search and we learned much about the history of our own property, as well as saving some money.

The property had 200 feet of shoreline, and the water in Lake Huron was crystal clear, ideal for swimming. One of the lots had a cabin that was furnished. It was 800 square feet in size and contained a loft. Our son chose the loft for his bedroom.

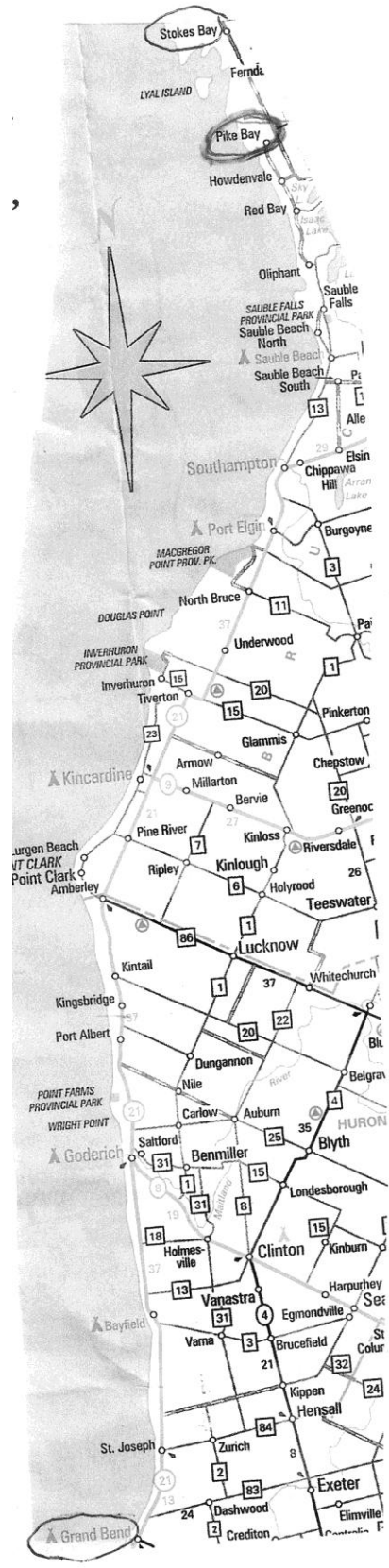
I shall always remember the thrill of our first weekend at the cottage, where we felt a sort of pioneering instinct; it was completely different from city life with all its services, and we reveled in the feeling of relying on our own resources. Water and electricity were essential. There was hydro for our stove and lighting; for water we had a hand pump that brought water from the bay for washing. For drinking water we took large bottles across the bay and filled them from a good spring there. It was a good beginning.

We had outside plumbing, an outhouse, and it was quite adequate. People had warned us that there were rattlesnakes in this area of the Bruce peninsula, and they are poisonous. One day I heard a voice call out: "Orv, there's a snake outside the door and I can't leave. Can you do something?" I answered, "Hold on, I'll find someone who can help us."

I walked over to my neighbor, Bob, a year-round resident, who said: "Orv, I'll see what I can do." We looked at the situation and we tried to make the snake go away. It didn't move and Bob said: "I'll go and get my rifle." Bob returned with his rifle and fired three shots at the snake; it was amazing to see that with each shot the serpent moved its head to attack the bullet. Finally it was safe for Muriel to leave the outhouse.

For two years we enjoyed living in the cabin, going for walks in the evening along the road and meeting neighbours. Life was good, the swimming was excellent and we sometimes went in our small boat across the bay to buy something in the store. One day we looked at the empty lot and Muriel said: "This lot is a better one than the one where the cabin sits, so let's consider building a cottage better suited to us." That started the ball rolling.

How would we build the cottage? Would we hire a



contractor or was there another possibility? By chance we learned that the carpentry teacher at the school where I taught was looking for a project for his senior class, making a pre-fabricated building. I spoke to the teacher and said: "Would you consider making a pre-fabricated cottage for us; I would pay for all the costs." Grant said, "This would be ideal. The boys need a building project like this; and I have plans for a one-floor cottage of 1280 square feet." We agreed to have this cottage built; and the project was to start as soon as classes began in the fall.



A beginning

flooring, I had a feeling that something was not right. This feeling persisted; two of the boards were not resting properly on the joists. That bothered me so I returned to Pike Bay as soon as I could and laid them properly.



"A1" great shingler!

not understand this inactivity, but then I looked round and saw the reason. In our neighbour's yard an attractive 15-year old girl had just appeared in a bathing suit. Work took second place when a beauty like that one appeared.

The next step was to have a foundation for the cottage. I went looking around and I found a contractor in the Pike Bay area who would build it from our specifications, and who would also install a septic tank. All of this work was done in September.

During the winter of 1971 and 1972 I kept a manual of building a cottage by my bedside, and referred to it frequently. I was determined to prove that a teacher of Modern Languages could also do practical things like building a cottage. We could hardly wait for spring to arrive when we would start this venture.

Easter came along, when we would have one week to work. I had arranged to have 2 by 8 inch boards delivered for the joists and also 4 by 8 feet boards for the flooring. When laying the

The summer of 1972 was a very busy time; first of all, putting up the framework. Five friends and relatives were with me, and an amusing incident occurred one day. Two of us were putting up a 6-foot section of wall; then each of us left the wall, thinking that the other man was still holding it. Of course, the wall collapsed and had to be reset and fastened in place. No harm done.

That summer was especially warm and dry; we were fortunate. Our son Glenn had studied electricity and we put him in charge of the wiring. We installed the siding, doors, windows and the roof. One warm day, when our son, his cousin and I were putting on the shingles, I noticed a sudden lack of work on the side of the roof where the boys were. I could

One thing was lacking, as far as I was concerned, and that was a sailboat. I learned that a ship-builder in Owen Sound, Vanderstadt & McGruer, built sailboats of various sizes. One boat, a 14-foot one called a "Sprite", with a mainsail and a jib, attracted me. The price was within our budget, so I bought the boat and named it "Free Spirit". On one side of the boat, to show my interest in Modern Languages, I printed "L'Esprit Libre" and on the other side "Der Freie Geist".

That boat was a continual source of pleasure for us. I wanted to learn to bring it up nicely to a dock and, after many trial runs, I was able to bring it alongside the dock, using only the wind as power. The trick was to lower the jib and let the mainsail go free.

Just when I thought that I knew everything about handling "Free Spirit", I started out on a warm day to go from the bay into Lake Huron. All went well until I decided to turn around and sail back. I turned the rudder but the boat would not respond; the boat and I kept drifting further into the big lake. What to do? All of a sudden I realized that the centre-board was not down in the water. The centre-board is like a keel; it stabilizes the boat and is necessary when a change of direction is to be made. Once I lowered it the boat responded and I was able to go back into Pike Bay.

For several years we spent the summer, and occasionally the spring "break" and the Christmas holiday at the cottage. Our children and grandchildren came to visit.

For many years the other members of our bridge club would join us for three or four days and those days were always filled with great fun and interest.



"Free Spirit" at the dock



Muriel with two of our grandchildren, Lisa and Carl Brook enjoying the sun at the cottage

## Roads We've Travelled

On one occasion we hosted a family reunion when fifteen people connected to the Parsons family were with us.

In 1991, for several reasons, we decided to sell the property. It was put up for sale and sold within one month. And so, one phase of our family life came to an end and another phase was about to begin.



Our cottage is the building on the left



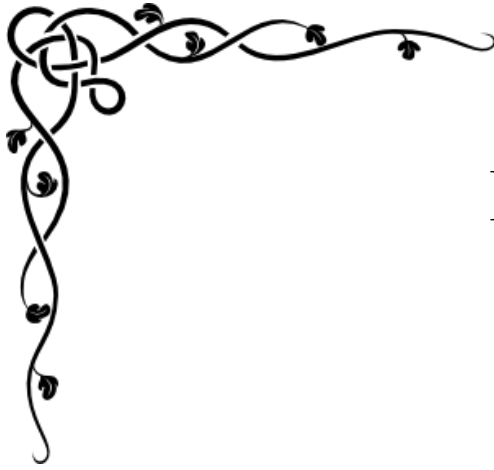
*I was born in St. Marys, Ontario and I grew up in a family of five: my father, mother and two brothers.*

*At high school I was interested in foreign languages, especially French and German and I continued this interest at the University of Western Ontario.*

*After graduating from Western I went to work for a company in Toronto where I met Muriel Semple, a kindergarten teacher. We were married in 1950 and our two children, Kathryn and Glenn, were born there.*

*I eventually left my position in the company and enrolled in the College of Education in Toronto to obtain my certification as a teacher. Over the next thirty years I taught in four secondary schools: three in Ontario and one in Europe.*

*In 1987 I retired from the Brant County Board of Education. My main interests now are my loving wife, our two children and nine grandchildren. I also have a great interest in investing and in belonging to the Kiwanis Club of Grand River.*



# Help Me, I'm Falling!

Sharon Bolger

**P**lease someone, anyone, help me! I have fallen into a dark hole. I don't know what is down here and I don't know if I will ever make it out alive. The descent began gradually, then, suddenly I was falling faster and faster. It felt like falling in a nightmarish dream. I look up and people are peering down at me. Some are yelling at me, telling me to get over it and get out of the hole. They think I haven't already tried to wish myself out.) Others are staring indifferently. Some are laughing; they believe I threw myself down on purpose. They are certain they would never find themselves in such a horrible place. A few are kicking dirt into the hole on top of me believing that I am not worth rescuing.

After a short while I can tell that most people are walking away from the edge of my hole. They are going about their lives wanting to forget that I ever existed. Incredibly though, there are one or two who are reaching their hands into my hole telling me to grab hold and try with all my might to climb out. These are the people who matter and who are my saviours. They are quiet heroes who help me out of my dark place. Their names will never get in the newspaper, nor will they ever be offered a medal, but they are heroes nonetheless. And, although no one will recognize it, I am also a hero in my own right.

That is my analogy of how I felt, and what it was like, during the most difficult months of my battle with bipolar disorder. I gained a lifetime of knowledge during those terrible times. But, unfortunately, some of what I learned might need a warning posted on it:

"The content of this material may be disturbing, viewer discretion is advised!"

I learned how thin and easily torn our veil of compassion can be. It was never more apparent to me how betrayal, abuse, and judgment are as much a part of our nature as acts of heroism, kindness and saintliness. I became aware that we believe in healing of the body, but not of the mind. Once a person is labeled mentally ill, they will always be considered mentally ill, regardless of whether they recover. I learned that it comes naturally for us to feel empathy for a person suffering with cancer or arthritis. But when an individual becomes depressed, anxious or

paranoid we entertain the belief that they need to pull up their socks, or just snap out of it. Worse than that, we might resort to laughing at their symptoms and call them names behind their back.

I found out that the approach and attitude toward physical and mental illness within the medical community lacks equality. During my nursing training I took care of a patient with Raynaud's disease. It is irrefutably caused by smoking. But we gave that patient the same respect and excellence of care as everyone else, even though he continued to smoke as more and more of his leg was amputated. In fact we were silently forbidden to cast blame or to consider that he should be accountable for his health, and the cost of his health care. It is a very different experience when one becomes emotionally ill. Blame is the name of the game. I felt blamed for my actions, blamed for not thinking reasonably and not behaving logically. But when the very organ that we need to be all those things is not working, how is it possible to be accountable? Our culture and the many systems that are part of it will make us accountable regardless.

I experienced blame and impatience from surprising and unexpected sources. While I was in hospital, my brother called and resorted to yelling at me. He told me I would never change, nor would I ever get better, and how dare I worry the family. Years later, when he was diagnosed with colon cancer and concurrently suffered a heart attack, I suppose I should have called him up to tell him that his health was the direct cause of his indulgent life, and he deserved his pain. That would have been true. But instead I prayed for him and felt the utmost compassion, as though he was an innocent victim of his diseases. When, in fact, he was far more responsible for the state he found himself in than I was! I don't know how to prevent bi-polar illness.

I should not be alive. Suicide is the main cause of death for bipolar people, and suicide is very misunderstood. People with extreme physical diseases sometimes ask for a mercy death to escape a life that is a living hell. And in our hearts we can imagine their pain and their wish to die. But, I will state with experience that emotional pain is mental torment. Many people believe suicide is a coward's way out. In fact it is the crisis symptom of a disease that has progressed to a critical state, the same way as a cardiac arrest is the crisis symptom of prolonged heart disease.

I discovered something else through a traumatic awakening that will stay with me forever: police are not trained to cope with mental illness. Many of them hate the burden of it and often respond in anger believing that it takes them away from their real duties. Unfortunately, they are trained to use whatever weapon is available to them and they do it without reservation, because they can. I have felt the end of a steel-toe boot again and again after being pulled from my vehicle. My nose was broken after they slammed my face down on the hood of my car. It is unconscionable that I received that treatment because I made a 911 call from my cell phone. Forgiving them their actions has been an ongoing struggle. The court system is less aggressive but it is a one size fits all. Imagine going to Sears or Wal-Mart to buy your favorite pair of jeans or a special dress only to discover they now sell everything in just one size.

I have become acutely aware of how we use the English language to belittle the mentally ill. It happens in everyday conversations, in comic acts, on television shows and in movies. And, although, in today's politically correct climate we would not call a black person a negro, nevertheless we freely spill out vulgar words like crazy, nuts, weird, loony or ding-bat.

In retrospect, the illness itself was the least of my concerns. Coping with family and friends who had little education and many misconceptions of mental illness, predators who took

advantage of my vulnerability, church members who thought I was just being selfish, a medical community who had a limited budget to spend on my recovery, diminished finances, near homelessness, isolation, and government systems decidedly inconvenienced by my short comings, all combined to become my real devastation.

In my persistence to earn back my nursing license, I was required to be assessed by a prominent well-seasoned psychiatrist, with an emeritus status attached to his credentials. I paused in bewilderment when he asked me, what I thought to be a rather odd question for someone of his wise years. He asked me why it took me so long to recover. I realized then how far removed doctors can be from their patient's real life experience, living in a world of denial, fear and disdain for mental illness, and how that interferes with a speedy recovery. But, despite the unanimous decision of the team of doctors and nurses who diagnosed me as having no chance of recovery, here I am, in sound mind and, for what it's worth a damn lot smarter about the world and human nature.

With all I have experienced and what I have survived I should have some enlightening words of wisdom to share. But, I don't! I can only hope tomorrow is better. I hope our attitude toward mental illness will change dramatically in the near future. I envision a health care system that invests as much research into the mind as the body. I pray for a world without mental illness. And, if my hopes of a better world come true, no one will ever again write a memoir like this one.



*Sharon Ann Jenifer Barnes/Bolger was born in a small northern Ontario community in the early fifties. In her memoir Sharon talks about a personal mental illness crisis and how it has impacted her life. It was written out of the hope that sharing her experience will increase the awareness of Bi Polar disorder and bring attention to the some of the shocking responses from families, society, the legal, medical, and social systems toward the mentally ill. She understands if readers are doubtful to believe her account of how she was treated, because sometimes she has a difficult time believing it herself. That said, she promises that she has written her story honestly and without embellishment. She hopes it will bring enlightenment to anyone who reads it.*





# Starting Over

Sylvia Woodford

**W**e're going to Australia," my husband announced one evening when he came home from work  
"Oh really," I said. "And when did you decide this?"  
"My mates and I were talking it over and we all decided it would be a good thing," he said.

"Are all the wives in agreement with this?"

"Well, the guys are going to tell them tonight," he said.

I was wondering what caused the guys to come to this decision. This was in 1956 and although we had just bought our first TV I didn't watch it much, only on the odd occasion. However, I was watching the news one night and suddenly became aware of the Suez Canal Crisis. I didn't really understand the consequences it might have at the time. Of course, I know more about it now. I did know though, that anyone who had served in the services, i.e., R.A.F., Navy, or Army would be among the first to be 'called up.' So I suspected that this sudden decision to move to Australia had something to do with that situation, although that was strongly denied.

I was quite upset about this move as we had not long ago moved into a brand new house in a new subdivision of Waltham Abbey, Essex, England and had just bought lovely new furniture. I didn't want to go across to the other side of the world at all, but the guys had made up their collective minds and I had no recourse but to go along with the decision.

Pretty soon I came around to the guys' way of thinking and started to look forward to it. I had two children at the time, David and Josephine, and although they were too young to understand most of what I was telling them, I would ramble on extolling Australia's virtues, probably mostly to convince myself. And so we waited to hear from Australia house about our immigration papers, and we waited, and we waited. Nothing was getting done and I felt in limbo all the time.

Months passed and still we didn't hear anything. Christmas came and went and sometime in January, 1957 my husband made another announcement! "The guys and I have decided to go to Canada," he said.

"What has made you change your mind?" I asked.

"We are having to wait too long for our clearance to Australia, so we applied to the Canadian Embassy to see if our necessary papers would be processed more quickly."

And they were. Within a couple of months, we had received our documents and were to set sail in May, 1957. Canada? What did I know about Canada other than what I learned in geography class, which wasn't much, because I wasn't too interested in geography? All I remembered was that it was a vast country of wheat fields, very cold in winter and very hot in summer. What do I tell the children this time when it doesn't sound all that enticing to me?

In due course, we gave up the house and sold most of our belongings. This was a very sad and emotional time for me but my husband took it all in stride. We stayed for a couple of weeks with my in-laws in Dagenham, Essex. My husband worked in the experimental department of Ford Motor Company in Dagenham, and so was conveniently close to his job. The kids and I were not happy campers with the in-laws, I must say, but we endured it.

One of our friends was being married prior to our leaving and so we had a wedding to attend, which brightened things up considerably for a while. The couple was also traveling to Canada with us, which was nice. Finally, it was the day before we set sail. My husband took the children and me to say goodbye to my parents. Little did I know that I would never get to see my dad any more. I sat in the back of the car crying, with my husband yelling at me to "Stop that silly noise and grow up." My friend was waiting at her gate to say goodbye but he wouldn't stop again.

We were up early the next day, which was May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1957. After a long train ride we finally reached Southampton. My mood mirrored the grey of the day, and I felt very miserable. After what seemed like an eternity we were finally able to embark. We were to travel on the Italian ship, the Homeric. Once the preliminaries were taken care of, the children and I went to our stateroom for a nap.

The stateroom was quite impressive and nicely appointed. After we'd settled in, my husband went to explore the ship and probably have a drink with his buddy.

After a couple of hours, my husband stopped by to say that the ship was leaving port, so we scrambled up on deck to watch. There were lots of people waving goodbye but there was no-one there to wave for us. It was, as far as I was concerned, a very sad moment.

Soon it was 'tea-time' as we say in England, so that cheered me up a little because it was so bright and cheerful where they were serving it up. I can't remember what we had but there was a lot to eat. After tea, and when the children were asleep, we went down to the ballroom where they were holding a dance. I really enjoyed myself that evening. I was asked several times by different young men to dance, which I did. It was kind of strange though, dancing on board a ship, because the ship would be listing from side to side which meant that we would first be



On the deck of the Homeric, David, Joey and me

running one way, then it would straighten up till we tilted the other way. Anyway, I had a ball that night.

The next day was a different story. I lost my sea-legs and became terribly ill with sea-sickness. Anyone who has suffered from that will know how terrible it feels. The ailment lasted for about three days and we were only traveling for six days so I lost a lot of sighting-seeing time. Since it was early May the weather was still quite cold and not suitable to using the deck chairs but my husband and the children found things to do. After the sea-sickness bout wore off, I was able to join everyone in the dining room again. I must say the ship's catering was excellent and the waiters, being Italian, were very attentive—at least they were to me. I was suddenly really enjoying myself.

Early on Saturday morning we awoke to the sight of Canada in the distance, although we were some way away from port yet. It felt very strange and I was emotional and wasn't really sure how I felt about it all. This was a brand new life we were starting in a strange land that I knew absolutely nothing about.

After sailing up the St. Lawrence River, we arrived in Montreal. I don't remember too much about that because I was feeling confused and there was an awful cold wind blowing, and on top of that I couldn't understand a word that people were saying. I know my husband felt the same way, but there must have been some English-speaking people or we might still be there. Soon we had gathered together what little belongings we had with us. The rest of our belongings were being shipped at a later date. We went to hail a taxi. What a scary ride. Here we were, driving on the wrong side of the road and it seemed that we were about to have a head-on collision. Lesson number one! Canadians drive on the opposite side of the road from British drivers. Whew! That was hair-raising.

We were to travel on the train from Montreal to Toronto and we would have quite a long wait for the train, so we took a walk around. It was so cold and windy that I didn't take too kindly to the city at that time. I have been there several times since and I love it now! We at last ventured into a coffee shop. Here we go again, French! I managed to come up with "lait" for the children, "café au lit" for me and "café noir" for my husband. That seemed to do the trick. We didn't eat though. I couldn't come up with any more words. I had learned the other French words when I worked in a grocery store, from the tins of biscuits that had those words printed on them, otherwise I would never have been able to order coffee and milk.

The train ride was quite pleasant, although it was a very dull day, but it gave us an idea about how the people lived. There were large farms and small shacks dotted along the countryside. Some properties had enormous lines of washing flapping in the wind and there were cattle and horses grazing in the fields, but that wasn't an unusual sight for us. After what seemed an interminable time we finally arrived in Toronto. We were to stay with a friend of my husband's and I must say that his wife made us feel less than welcome, but I won't go into that area. After a couple of days of looking for work, and the children and I having to stay with a miserable woman, my husband moved us to what used to be The King Edward Hotel. It was much more pleasant there but we only stayed for a couple of days before catching a bus for Windsor.

The guys were thinking of applying to the Ford Motor Company but when we arrived we found that the company had moved to Oakville and had their new factory there. So we went there instead. The kids by this time were really getting cranky. "Why can't we just stay in one place for a while," David said. And Josephine had started to cry a lot, poor child. We were feeling very unsettled. Eventually, the guys managed to procure jobs with Ford and we were able to get an

apartment in an old farmhouse in a little hamlet called Hornby. It was on what is now Trafalgar Road. We had the upstairs and our friends had the lower apartment.

"How do you like this?" I asked the children.

"Oh it's just great," David said and Joey agreed with him. "We've found bundles of straw in the barn and a swing. Come and see them." So I went to the barn with them and soon we were all swinging and jumping on the straw bales. We were having fun at last. Once we had informed our families of our whereabouts, we looked forward to letters from home finally.

By now it was June and the weather had warmed up beautifully. One day when I was sitting on the front porch soaking up the sun, a Volkswagen beetle came charging down the driveway. A young woman was at the wheel and the car was full of little kids. "Hello," she called as she got out of the car. "My name is Sybil and I live just down the road by the school."

"Hello," I returned.

She said, "I would just like to welcome you to the neighbourhood and would like you to come for coffee on Tuesday if you would like."

"I'd like that very much," I answered. We shook hands and she went tearing off. I never dreamed what an experience it would turn out to be. Every Tuesday we would meet at a different house. I met Sandra Post, the lady golfer, Madeleine and Norman de Poe, (Norman at that time was an Ottawa Correspondent), and there were several other quite well known people but I can't remember all of their names now. When it came time for me to do the honours, I was at a loss. I had no fine china, least of all a beautiful home like the others. But Sybil came to the rescue with some bone china cups and saucers that she had no need for. I had the apartment looking spick and span and everyone made themselves at home and were very gracious. They were a great bunch of women and I feel very grateful to them for making me feel so welcome. Sybil was also an art teacher and sometimes we would gather at her Aunt's old home on the lakeshore in Oakville, where she would give painting lessons. I still paint to this day.

But all good things must come to an end, and eventually we made a move to Oakville, where I went on to have three more children. I just have a little anecdote to include in this story. Soon after we arrived in Oakville, it was the town's centennial. After the parade through town, everyone gathered in the park on the lakefront. A big ceremony was going on and at the



David and Joey's first winter in Canada



Family and friend on the porch of the farmhouse

conclusion the mayor planted three oak trees. (I think it was three). When everyone had finally left, we were enjoying a few moments by the lake and David and Joey were playing under the trees, when Joey ran up with what looked like a good sized twig. Not. It was one of the oak saplings that had been recently planted. Oh, my goodness! What to do now? Since no one was looking, I found the hole and replanted the sapling. It was still there and growing beautifully when I went back a couple of years ago.

We all settled down in Canada and three of us (my husband not included), became Canadian citizens. The other three children are natural born Canadians, although one lives in California and that gives me a good excuse to go visiting once in a while.



*I was born in England on January 19, 1931. I spent a good deal of my childhood being evacuated to several places during World War II. I met my husband-to-be in 1948 and we were married in December, 1950. We then went to live in Cornwall where my husband was serving in the R.A.F. Our first son was born in Redruth, Cornwall on December 31, 1951. After my husband left the R.A.F. we returned to my home town of Waltham Abbey where our first daughter was born in May, 1952. In 1957 we immigrated to Canada. Here we lived in Oakville for several years where we had three more children, two boys and a girl. We moved around a lot at the whim of my husband to Burlington, Hamilton and finally Brantford. My husband and I separated in 1976 and divorced in 1984. In 1996, shortly after I retired, I lost a son to suicide. One other son lives in California with his wife and three children. Another son lives in Hamilton. My two daughters live in Brantford. They each have two children. I also have two great-grandchildren.*



# The Drifting Years

By Alan McClelland

I had managed to get through public school doing as little work as possible and therefore hadn't developed any study habits. When I passed into high school I was totally unprepared for it; each subject had a different teacher who I saw for less than an hour a day. Whereas before I had one teacher who kept track of my progress, I now had to work using my own initiative which was completely lacking. It was the beginning of my drifting years.

My first year in grade nine was a disaster; I was a lost soul. When the science teacher asked for our lesson notes to be handed in for marking, I could only give him the brief jottings I had made in class. English class was similar and since I had no interest in geography or French, I simply ignored them. Algebra was the only one I really liked and might have been the only one I passed that year.

My second year in nine went much better; I was familiar enough with the system and the courses that I was able to pass into grade ten. These two years had been spent at Brantford Collegiate Institute but in the meantime Pauline Johnson Collegiate had opened, which was much closer to where I lived, so I was transferred there. It was not a happy move on my part; BCI had the comfort of an old boarding house where everybody knew one another. For instance, a lot of the teachers had nicknames, such as Ma Laidman and Pop McFadden who were nearing or past retirement age; Beaky Lewis because he was tall, thin as a broom and had a large beak shaped nose. The principle was called Big Bill as he was well over six feet tall and the vice-principle was known as Greasy Scott because he was always slipping around the halls giving out late slips.

Other incidents come to mind such as the science teacher telling us about the time he put the following question on the exam: Why is the block of ice put in the top of an ice box? The correct answer of course was because cold air flows downward. One student answered that it was because there was a motor in the bottom. The teacher never did tell us the mark he gave to it.

In my second year in grade nine there was a fellow in my class who made red ink. When our home room teacher, Miss Laidman, heard about it she asked him to make some for her. He came in one morning with the ink in a wine bottle and plunked it on her desk; this was before classes had started so there were other students wandering in with homework assignments. One of them picked up the bottle and while reading the label he asked, "How much for a shot?" It quickly disappeared into her cupboard.

At home we would often refer to our teachers by their nicknames so you can understand the confusion of one mother, who on parent's night for meeting the teachers, approached Mr. Lewis and said, "Are you Mr. Beaky?"

"Yes," he replied, "I'm Mr. Beaky."

Although I was not happy about moving to Pauline Johnson, I did manage to pass grade ten on my first try. This could have been due to my home room teacher, Mr. Williams, who had a cynical but funny sense of humour. I remember one student in our class, Tom Jones, had an innate talent for languages; his marks in French were always in the eighties and nineties but the rest of the subjects he failed or barely passed. One day, when Mr. Williams was going over our exam results, the class broke out in laughter when he commented, "The idea, Jones, is to spread the marks around." He was young but in some ways formally old fashioned, for instance, male students were addressed by their last names only but female students were always preceded by a Miss.

When I passed into grade eleven my old attitude returned. I was enrolled in an academic course but shops were offered as an option. Even though I had absolutely no aptitude for anything mechanical, this sounded like a good idea, so I signed up for four: electrical, machine shop, drafting, and woodworking. To describe my efforts in these areas as mediocre would have been a compliment. The assignment in the machine shop was to make a small metal hammer using the lathes. At the end I had only finished the handle which received a failing mark. In the woodshop we were to make a bed table with fold down legs. Again I got as far as completing the legs which also received a failing mark. In drafting I might have made it to the mediocre level but in electrical it's possible that I passed. The reason being that teacher didn't have us doing any wiring only designing circuits on paper which I enjoyed. I think he had concluded our class was hopeless when he sent two students from it to change a light switch in the hall. When they returned, the screw driver he had given them to use now had a blackened tip because they had laid it across two bare wires to see if they were live. It was only a small class of about ten students but I remember him repeating, "Just keep it down to a dull roar."

My second year in grade eleven I stuck to academic subjects and managed to drift into grade twelve.

At the beginning of the summer holidays, I landed a job as a pot washer in the kitchen at the Brantford General Hospital. Any cooking utensils that were too large for the automatic dishwashers were passed to me to wash by hand. It wasn't 'til I started that I discovered that it had a hidden benefit; any food that wasn't sent to the wards was given to me to dispose of. A good portion of those roasted chicken legs, bacon and tomato sandwiches, and butterscotch puddings, to name only a few, somehow missed the garbage can.

When I returned to school in September, the hospital offered me a part time job delivering the food carts to the floors at supper time. I would leave school at 4.00 pm, catch the bus to the hospital, get home around 9.00 pm (too late to do any homework of course) and work the weekends as well. It wasn't long before work hours were exceeding the school hours. There

was no way I was going to pass, so at the end of the Easter holidays, I decided to give up on school and drift into the working world.

I went downtown and registered as a full time job seeker at the unemployment office (Canada Manpower now) with no idea of what kind of work I was suited for. The interviewer suggested that I apply for an office position and on the third attempt I was hired by Cockshutt Farm Equipment to work in the accounts payable department. There were four of us, a male supervisor, two female clerks and myself. My job mainly involved helping whoever was the busiest, although it was routine, it contained enough variety to keep me interested.

The office building was probably built in the early 1900's which meant that if a fire started, it could spread rather quickly. It was therefore decided that one person on each of the two floors should be designated a fire warden for that area. I was delegated this duty because I was the lowest person on the totem pole. The fire department was asked to come and give us a demonstration on how to use a fire extinguisher. On the appointed day, we were joined by three people from a branch office and all of us gathered behind the office building, where the firemen had a blaze going in a 45 gallon drum. The fire extinguisher used a powder to smother the fire which meant you used only short bursts aimed at the base of the fire to put it out. After the demonstration, the fire was restarted and a volunteer was called for. Since none of us even made eye contact, a victim was chosen, handed the canister, and told to give it a try. He stepped up to the drum and, instead of applying short bursts, he held the trigger firmly back. The huge cloud of powder emitted by the extinguisher was blown back toward him by a strong wind and he completely disappeared. It was the end of the demonstration. If anyone asked what my duties were as a fire warden, I told them that I was to run down stairs, out the front door, stand on the sidewalk and yell, "Fire!"

There was one executive who made a big show of carrying his brief case home with him every night. As a joke, one of his colleagues put the executive's phone book in the brief case. About two weeks later he was heard complaining that someone had stolen his phone book.

I was transferred to the cost department and then to the general accounting department but due to my lackluster performance in these areas, I ended up in the computer department. In 1962 this was a highly mechanized operation that relied on punch cards for data input, which at that time, was the forefront of computer technology. The information was transferred to the cards from the paperwork by six typists on machines that punched holes into the cards. Then someone had to run them through one of the three sorters that arranged them in a proper sequence. The Univac was an IBM computer, the size of a van and extremely complicated to program. The cards were then fed into printers that transferred the data to printouts for use by the different departments. Due to my lack of mechanical capability I was now completely out of my element. The sorters simply refused to process the cards in the right order and the printers either jammed or would not even start. I was never allowed near the computer. I was eventually transferred to the factory payroll on the night shift which I hated with a passion.

When I wasn't working, I was usually in the company of two other single males, Terry Clark and Winston P. Jones. Terry worked in the mail room at Cockshutt's; he had blond hair and blue eyes and a new girl friend every month; Winston worked in the office at the Scarfe Paint Company. He had curvature of the spine which meant from the waist up his spine arced to the left but this in no way affected his lifestyle. He was a Queen Scout and I remember seeing him paddling around in a canoe without a life jacket even though he couldn't swim a stroke. Wince said the middle P in his name stood for Perseverance.



One night in January the three of us were out aimlessly cruising around in a snow storm, complaining about our Canadian winters when someone said, "Why don't we just move to a country with a warm climate?" After that night it seemed to be our sole topic of conversation; we had even agreed that Australia would be the country we would emigrate to. I really bought into the idea and was looking forward to going; it wasn't until I asked, "Just when are we going to see the travel agent?" that I found out I was the only who had taken it seriously. So in February of 1963, I reserved a state room on the ocean liner Oceana, leaving Vancouver on October 4 for a three week cruise to Australia, with stops at Hawaii and Fiji on the way.

All three of us bowled on the Scarfe Company bowling league and in April we were looking forward to the bowling banquet. Terry had a date of course but Wince and I were on our own, that is until a couple of days before the dinner when Wince asked me, "Do you want to take my sister?" I agreed, thinking that she only wanted to enjoy the party and would leave Wince and I to our own devices once we got there. With this in mind I arrived early to pick them up so that Wince and I could enjoy a few beers before supper was served. He answered the door and introduced me to his father and mother and his younger brother Bob but his sister, Pat, was nowhere in sight. She told me later that she hadn't expected me to show up so soon and was only wearing a slip when I knocked on the door.

On meeting Pat I was pleasantly surprised to find that she was an attractive, slim brunette, about my height. When we got to the Hungarian Hall, she didn't wander off like I expected but stayed with me the whole evening. I really enjoyed her company so on the following Tuesday I was waiting outside the church where I thought she had said she was a cub leader. After a half an hour and no one came out I drove to her house and knocked on the door. As soon as her mother saw me she said, "Pat's at the Salvation Army Citadel," then after a slight pause, "Or did you want to see Wince?" I assured her she was right the first time and headed for the Citadel. By July I was engaged and had cancelled the trip.

At the end of August I was once again adrift as Cockshutt's had given me my notice to look for work elsewhere. This would have been an ideal situation if my travel plans were still in place but now I was committed to getting married in September the following year. I saw an ad for a job with a finance company so I applied for it and got an interview. The reason they gave for not hiring me was that I didn't have grade 12. A friend of mine suggested that I try other finance companies as they all wouldn't require a diploma. Unfortunately he was right and I got hired by the Pacific Finance Company. My job consisted of dunning the slow or no payers and in order for me not to have to demand payment from people I knew I was transferred to their office in St. Catharines, about sixty miles east of Brantford.

Once again I was completely out of my element; I had trouble asking people who owed me money to pay it back. In many of the cases I found I was sympathizing with the debtors who really looked down and out. I can remember thinking, "How can you get blood out of a stone?" I was also naïve enough to believe them when they told me the payment was in the mail. This meant, of course, that I was getting a lot of false promises with the late payers no longer even paying. After two months the company and I mutually agreed that it was time for us to separate. It took me four months to find another job, which again was completely unsuitable but I didn't stay long enough for them to determine that and breezed through two more before settling into another mistake. I was a married man now and Pat was getting a little bit concerned about my stability.

I can remember reading that when applying for a job if the interviewer does more talking than you do you will probably be offered the position. I'm sure this was the reason that I was

able to drift into the cost department at Harding Carpets. The main function of this job was to maintain inventory records of the raw materials used in making the carpets. I found it to be quite boring but the boredom was sometimes relieved by incidents in the office. For example, one of my co-workers had a strong aversion to receiving a static electric shock and since the whole office was covered in carpet, you received one every time you opened a door. In order to avoid it, he would wait for someone to go through ahead of him and try to squeeze by before the automatic closure shut the door. It was an open concept style office and one afternoon we were all surprised by a loud crash and a thump; when we looked up he was lying on the floor with his foot caught in the door. We all had a good laugh, especially when he got up and went back to retrieve his shoe which had come off on the other side.

I had been there for about three years when I noticed the ad in the paper for a job in the cost department with Hussmann Store Equipment Ltd. and since it paid more money, I applied. I got an interview and was offered the position; once again I drifted into another mistake. My duties were primarily updating product costs to reflect any engineering changes and inventory control. In order to do this I had to learn the basics of blueprint reading which was definitely not one of my aptitudes. Something else I hadn't taken into account was that the company had no computer. At the end of the month all the new product costs had to be recorded, extended and balanced on spread sheets using a mechanical calculator. To say the work was tedious would be an understatement.

To get a break from this humdrum routine, Gerry, a coworker of mine and I began spending our Friday lunch hours at the Graham Bell Hotel; it wasn't long before the word got out and there were five or six of us running for the parking lot at the stroke of noon. Someone said that you don't buy beer you only rent it and as a consequence, I spent most of the afternoon in the washroom getting rid of all that beer I had rented during my lunch hour.

The one thing that I looked forward to all year was the company Christmas party. Hussmann's would rent a hall with a catered dinner and a dance band. A group of employees would spend months writing skits and rehearsing them and after dinner they would act them out. The skits always contained situations from the office which everyone could identify with and this put us all in an upbeat mood for the rest of the evening. One skit still stands out in my mind; it was our company many years into the future with the scene taking place in the president's office. The president, who is now a female, is sitting behind her desk speaking to an employee. The conversation was really humorous but it was the last line that brought down the house. The president handed the worker some pages and said, "Would you take these to the mail room and ask Harold to run three copies?" Harold was the real president.

About three years after I started, the company hired a new controller and one of his first requirements was for the cost department to enroll in the five year RIA course (Registered Industrial Accountant.) I saw this as my escape as it would provide me with something worthwhile to offer a new employer. Once I had passed my third year, I began my search for a new job in earnest. I registered with a job placement agency in Hamilton with the stipulation that they find me a position outside of Brantford. At this point, not only was the job monotonous but I was frustrated with the dull routine of our social life as well. I was certain the only solution for it was for me to get a job in another city where Pat and I would get involved in more interesting activities (whatever they might have been.)

In June of 1973 I was hired by Riverside Yarns in Cambridge to be their accounting supervisor and in October we moved there to a semi-detached house in a new survey. With the new job I was responsible for compiling the monthly financial statements and supervising three

## Roads We've Travelled

departments, accounts payable, payroll and reception. This was going to be a real challenge for me as I had no experience with financial statements outside what I studied in the accounting course and no supervisory experience whatsoever. The day I started, the woman who did the payroll handed in her notice. The controller offered the job to a friend of his and while he was on holidays, she quit and so did the receptionist. I had not only to hire two new people but I had to train them as well on jobs that I was still learning myself. I found I really enjoyed the challenge and for the first time I had a job that I actually enjoyed. Unfortunately it was to be a short lived experience; two years after I started the company announced it was moving to Cornwall.

Once again I was adrift. I got an interview through a local personnel recruiter with Mitten Industries Ltd. for someone to set up a cost system for them. I accepted the position even though I didn't have a clue how to go about it. I stayed for thirteen years and left for what was to be a five year world tour starting in Buenos Aires; it lasted one month and I was back in Canada.

This ended my drifting years; from then on, I set my own agenda and only did the things that I thought I would find fun and interesting to do. It has been a fun journey ever since, filled with many events and learning experiences that I wouldn't have missed for the world.



*Alan McClelland was born and raised in Brantford where he attended both Brantford Collegiate Institute and Pauline Johnson High Schools. He worked in the accounting field for various companies then moved to Cambridge in 1974, returning to Brantford in May of 2000. He has two children and two grand children.*



# One Person Can Make a Difference

Kay Boyd

I created a quilted wall hanging a few years ago, “Circles of Life”, which celebrates an anniversary that changed my life and that of hundreds and thousands of people in Canada on May 14, 1969.

Divorce laws had not been changed since Confederation in 1867 and, for the next 100 years in Canada, obtaining a divorce was next to impossible, leaving many people in unbearable situations and placing many families in sad and lamentable difficulties.

You may remember that Pierre Trudeau made the statement, “The government has no business in the bedrooms of the nation.” It was Mr. Trudeau who introduced a bill which came to be known as Bill C-150 in December of 1967 when he was the Attorney General. The bill died on the Order Paper when an election was called.

Following Trudeau’s election as Prime Minister, he reintroduced the bill. From the time the bill was re-introduced, it took 18 months to move through the parliamentary process during which time it was hotly debated. Several commissions were appointed to gather information and have hearings across the country. It was part of what is known as an omnibus bill where there are several pieces of legislation included as one bill – which is another whole story.

Having been abandoned and a single mother with four very small children, I wanted to get on with my life but was unable to apply for divorce under the old laws and so I decided that I would do everything I could to make sure that Bill C-150 was passed. During the lead up to the final vote on the bill, I was involved in working with all my will to do everything I could to get our legislators to vote yes to Bill C-150. Mr. Trudeau had allowed the vote on this bill to be a free vote. In other words, our members of parliament could vote as individuals rather than as a party. To that extent, it was imperative that absolutely everyone was aware of the plight of single parents across the entire country. I appeared on several national television shows, *Take*

*Thirty, This Hour has Seven Days* and finally on a CBC special nation-wide program airing a few days before the crucial vote.

The set for the special program was a courtroom setting with a judge at the bench, and a jury made up of 12 persons, including me and 11 of my friends who were single parents. The twist was that each of the jurors was also a witness, and as each witness was called to testify, we left our seat in the jury box and took the stand. Each witness was sworn in, questioned about their situation, and testified. When each witness was excused, we took out seats back in the jury box.

During the summation, the lawyer looked at the judge and made his final closing remark, "What do we tell these people?" I shall always remember the judge saying, "I guess all we can tell them is to just go home." That was the final scene, fade out, and over.

The producer of that program told me that in his entire career, no program had elicited so much response. He told me that, immediately following the program, the phone lines were absolutely jammed all across the country. As a young single mother of four, I was unable to be divorced under the 100 year old laws as they existed in 1969. My only chance for divorce from a terrible person was a change in the laws.

The house voted on Bill C-150 on May 14, after 8:00 pm when the division bells rang, calling for the vote. It carried 149 to 55 and the outcome was reported on CBC radio almost immediately. I cried. It passed the senate in August, 1969 and, subsequently, I was able to obtain a divorce shortly thereafter. The law has been revised several times since 1969.

There are five crystals on my wall hanging to represent the tears that were shed by women, men and children all across the country and whose "Circles of Life" would change for the better and whose lives would improve dramatically.

May 14, 1969 is an anniversary I celebrate each year. That anniversary changed my life and that of my children. I shall be ever eternally grateful for Mr. Trudeau's tenacity and to John Turner who shepherded the legislation through parliament when he was Attorney General under Mr. Trudeau, and especially to the CBC producers who worked diligently to bring the message to the nation.

My father always told me that one person **can** make a difference and I believed him, and I believe that to this day.

## **Barbara Walters and the NBC *Today Show***

Shortly after getting my little ones off to school, the phone rang. I answered, "Hello."

"This is the NBC *Today Show* calling from New York. Could we speak to Kathleen, please?"

"This is Kathleen."

"We are calling to enquire whether you would be able to get to New York by tomorrow morning. Barbara Walters would like to do an interview with you on tomorrow morning's *Today Show*."

Requests for radio, newspaper and television interviews were part of my responsibilities as president of a world wide organization of single parents and especially so since I was also the first president ever elected from outside the U.S., and the youngest and the first female.

While talking to the caller, I glanced at the clock. I knew there was a late flight to New York and so I said yes, on the promise that they would make a hotel reservation for me and that I could get a seat on the flight and make arrangements for a sitter on such short notice. It isn't every day that one gets an opportunity to appear with Barbara Walters!

I called my parents first to make sure that they could look after the kids, and having arranged that, called the travel agent and booked my flight. I had to hustle downtown and pick up my ticket inasmuch as there were no computers in the late sixties. I threw some things into a travel case, called the New York office of the organization to tell the office manager that I would be in New York the next day and after the broadcast would be coming into the office on Fifth Avenue. I asked her to inform as many of the board members as she could contact to let them know that I was scheduled to do *The Today Show* the following morning.

Back in those days, I travelled so frequently that they knew me well at the Park 'n Fly near the airport and I made a quick call to let them know that I was catching a late New York flight and would be in a great hurry. Having made all the necessary arrangements, I jumped in my car and headed for the Airport. Park 'n Fly were waiting and whisked me off to the terminal.

I arrived quite late, checked into the hotel and it was only then that I actually stopped long enough to collect my thoughts and review the instructions I'd been given about the NBC studios, and when I was supposed to be there. Needless to say, I was so nervous that I didn't sleep much and was awake before my wakeup call. The hotel was quite near the studios and so I was able to walk to my destination.

Upon arrival, I was ushered into the makeup room. As a flaming redhead, I have very pale skin and cameras weren't what they are today. For television, you had to have lots and lots of makeup so that you didn't appear too 'white' on screen. While sitting in the makeup chair, Ms. Walters came in and sat in the seat beside me. I was struck by how tiny she was. She didn't say much while we were being 'made up'.

Television sets are usually in huge arena like spaces and the set is quite small in comparison to the total room. And there are lights – lots and lots of hot lights. There were two seats on set. I was given instructions, seated and then Barbara took her place beside me. Hugh Downs was the announcer and he was also in the room. *The Today Show* was in syndication at that time and although it was 1½ hours long, not all stations carried the entire show. Some stations carried only parts of the total show. As such, at each break there was an announcement to be made and commercials, of course. After the first segment, Hugh Downs approached me on set and said, "You are really good." I wasn't sure what he meant but he was smiling and so I guessed that meant it was going well.

Barbara's questions about single parents were well thought out and probing. Her staff had done their research homework well. Much of her interest revolved around the recent Canadian change in the divorce laws. I was on two segments of the show and during the final segment she was talking with another person. We were broadcasting live and there was no such thing as 'tape' in those days. A friend of mine in Omaha, Nebraska was able to make an audio tape off air and I still have that tape. I sound as if I'm about 15 years old.

When it was over, I left the studio deciding to walk to the office and, as I was leaving, a handsome gentleman (the one who had been on the show after me) came out of the building with me and asked me in which direction I was going. I told him I was headed down Fifth Avenue and he said, "I'm going in that direction too." We walked along chatting animatedly until we reached an intersection and he said, "This is where I turn. It's been so nice to meet you," and I continued along. It wasn't until I walked the next block that I stopped walking when I realized,

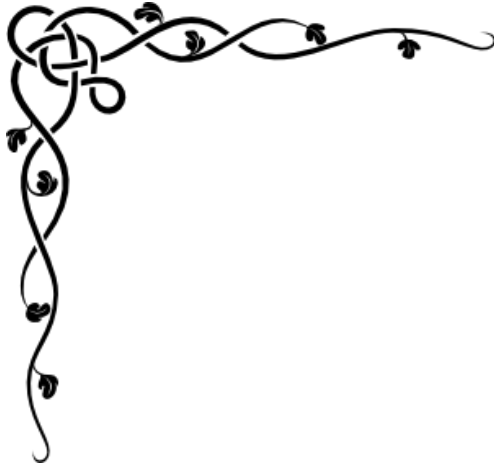
## Roads We've Travelled

oh my goodness, that gentleman was Pierre Salinger, who was at that time a correspondent in Paris, having moved there after his stint as Press Secretary to Kennedy and then Lyndon Johnson!

Overall, it was an incredible life experience and to this day, each time I see the very famous Barbara Walters, I realize that I was actually interviewed by her – on national television! Sometimes it seems like a long ago dream, but I still have that audio tape and I do listen to it from time to time. It will no doubt figure into my memoirs.



*My name is Kay Ridout Boyd and I am the Mother of four successful and wonderful children, one daughter and three sons. I am retired from being an Academic Chair for many years at Mohawk College in the Adult Continuing Education Faculty. I studied Chemistry at Ryerson and worked for several years for Fisher Scientific Company in Toronto. I have been very active in the Brantford community having served on many boards and committees over the years including The Chamber of Commerce, St. Joseph's Hospital and Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant and so many more that I can hardly remember them all. I enjoy doing needlework, quilting, reading, writing and traveling....and lots of other neat stuff.*



## The Suffolk Child's Journey Continues

By Audrey Mary Boggis Cichacky

**W**ith the love of the country forever embracing my heart and soul, the time had come for my family and me to leave our beautiful beginnings, this paradise of Great Bealings, Suffolk, England where I had spent my formative years. These surroundings had established my character and to a great degree, my thought pattern. These surroundings had kept me grounded and secure in the decisions I would make in the future.

Our journey down life's highway took us through many changes of locations until finally, in 1935, we settled happily in our own home called "Trafford House." Our new home, just outside the town of Ipswich, was along a highway that led to the town of Woodbridge, a small picturesque town. Ipswich was a larger industrial town with factories producing agricultural implements.

Once again, we found ourselves in surroundings not too unlike what we had known before in our previous homes. Happily we all set about making it our place.

Our place was on a large, long lot stretching from the main highway in the front to open fields at the back. The back garden became our playground. During that summer of 1935, our friends would come over to our home. This summer was the first of many more to follow in the playful childhood pastimes of that playground.

Soon we developed quite a menagerie of animals that included pet rabbits, chickens, a billy and a nanny goat, a dog named Lassie and a cat named Tibbles. In addition to this menagerie, a most generous neighbour, presented us with a family of pet mice!!



Charlie and friend in the backyard



“Oh, no! This just can't happen.” My mother was in complete shock, accepting our neighbour's gift only because the previous owner would be leaving for New Zealand in a few days. “And where would the poor little things go?” My mother said thinking out loud. She looked at our faces and what else could she do? Our pets were completely housed in a ranch like house that had stairs and a four-poster bed freshly laden with straw. The mice quickly joined our menagerie. Very soon, a big problem began. When we first checked the mice, there were just two. By morning, they had increased to ten and so on and so on and so on. How do you teach mice planned parenthood? A few days later, all the mice had escaped through a hole at the back of their fancy dwelling never to be seen again until air raid shelters were being prepared for the coming of war.



Let the show begin!

lettuce leaves freshly plucked from my sister, Brenda's, garden much to her dismay and disapproval.

“Time for the show,” one of my sisters would shout. Then, with my favourite record playing “Red Sails in the Sunset,” all the girls would get theatrical and loosely drape some well used lacy curtains around themselves and gently waft along to the sound of the music and blow kisses to the audience when the words to the song became romantic.

“Red sails in the sunset please bring my loved one safe home to me.” Now, the boys thought this was all rather “daft” but we didn't care. We dreamt about being on a real stage some day.

Once the show was over for the day, if we were lucky, we might be invited by my brother, Michael, to have a special treat from his masterpiece, the world's first barbecue.

He had rigged the stove in such a way as to make the grate a cooking surface. Michael had retrieved this remarkable cast iron plate which was beautifully ornate. He had found it amongst the rubble of an ancient town and it was part of the “Tollgate,” circa 1800. It had been

As the summer progressed, so did the play area. My brother, sisters and I enjoyed setting up special shows for our friends complete with an old gramophone emblazoned with “His Master's Voice” and three records titled, “Red sails In the Sunset,” “Where the Bee Sucks There Suck I,” and “Maggie, Yes Ma.” As the music played, we would act out the songs.

We enjoyed our summer days spent with friends in our own garden. My brother placed himself in charge of the “Billy Goat Butts” game. My brother invented this game. Anyone who was interested had to pay my brother to get the billy goats to butt their behinds and to see if billy goats really did eat tin cans.

“Wow he really got me that time,” squealed Brian Marks as he slid face down in the dust.

“Coo, blimey that really hurt.”

“Ha, ha,” my brother would say. “That's nothing. Watch me.” He would set himself up for a “double butt.”

The kids then would get to pet the rabbits and get them to race. They coached them with carrots and

torn down to make way for a new pub. He elegantly shone up the grate and gathered together some cooking tools and old army billy cans. It was a sight to behold.

While at this "world's first barbecue," he would rule the roost. He was strictly in charge. In order to buy meat to roast on his invention, he did a daily paper route where he earned one shilling and sixpence. Once he had finished his paper route he would go to the local butcher, Mr. Ransom, and spend it on sausages.

The wonderful cooking smells of those sausages wafted in the air and straight to our nostrils. Now the bartering would begin.

"Mike, Mike, Mike can I have a piece of sausage?" I begged.

Mike would answer, "No. I have to share them with three people: me, myself and I."

"I'm hungry."

"Me, too." And so the chorus would continue.

Next, he would say, "If you do my paper route next week, I'll give you some."

"No," I retorted.

"Too bad. No paper route. No sausages."

In frustration, I gave a quick swift kick to the barbecue's supporting sticks and to my horror everything fell over and a fire started in the dry grass. I was so scared. I thought the whole neighbourhood would disappear in smoke.

I took to my heels and ran, fearing the worst. I hid in a large barn and was determined I would never come out again. I stayed there silently until after dark, not answering any one. The darkness scared me even more.

My family called for me urging gently, "Don't be scared. The village is still standing and so is our house."

When I finally came out of hiding, guess what my brother had saved for me? Half of a slightly dusty sausage. Such brotherly love endures forever. It took a lot of effort for me to take that tiny piece of meat from him but I did. It was so delicious.

Later, with great relief, I was happy for a bath and to climb into bed to sleep, to sleep, perchance to dream!



Valerie with prize rabbit



Charlie with pet rabbit

*Baby Seed Song*

Little brown brother, oh little brown brother.  
Are you awake in the dark?  
Here we lie cozily, close to each other.  
Hark to the sound of the lark.  
Waken!" the lark says, waken and dress you:  
Put on your green coats and gay,  
Blue sky will shine on you, sunshine caress you  
Awake ! 'Tis morning. 'Tis May!

( By Edith Nesbit, 1858-1924 )

Oh, how I loved this poem. It is a poem I learned to recite when I was in grade two for the school play for parents' night. I have remembered those first few lines from childhood and quoted them many times to my own children when I settled them into bed.

When I was little and cuddled into bed with at least three of my sisters, I would imagine we were all little brown seeds. When we, little sisters, lying closely together, would awaken to the sound of the lark we would become the beautiful flowers. This thought would amaze me even if the sun was not shining in the morning. It was very comforting to me to know we were all so close, especially after the war began in 1939.

The walk to school from Trafford House was approximately three miles down the Main Road across the heath and onto the moderately built-up "Humberdoucy Lane."

This lane was a long, winding road which took us to our school called, "Rushmere School." The school housed grades from one to six with two grades in each classroom. All the classrooms were very cosy and were heated by large, open fireplaces fuelled by wood and coal. Around the fireplace was an ample sized fire screen of black mesh with a lot of brass trimmings. The teacher stoked the fire and the classroom would be nice and warm when we arrived.

It wasn't very long after classes began that our grade one teacher, who seemed quite old to us, would gravitate towards the fireplace. She appeared to sit on the fire screen and would then gradually raise her skirt at the back showing her bloomers while she warmed her bum. She was quite unaware that we were watching her very closely.

One by one, the children began to giggle, and only then, did she drop her skirt and tell us all to behave or we would be sent outside. The one that laughed the loudest and longest was the first to be sent outside.

We had a thorough education at Rushmere School. Though much of our world and the world beyond was changing at an alarming rate, we were somehow protected while we were in this school. The talk of apparent war became louder. Decisions were made to switch us all to another school which was located on the main Ipswich to Woodbridge Road. We then could take a bus to school in bad weather and this would be safer for us than walking along the road.

Paranoia and fear that came with the threat of war had mothers worried about the safety of their children. Many homeless men tramped along the main road, out of work, down on their luck, shabbily dressed, carrying all their belongings in a sack thrown over their shoulders. With their worn out shoes, they tramped, mile after mile, hoping to find work wherever they could. When they needed to take a rest, they would lean on an old branch of a tree, and whittle away on

a small stick turning it into some toy or decoration they might be able to sell in the future. It was a sad sight to see. By the time war started in 1939, most of the homeless had joined the army and were immediately sent to the front line in France.

A year before the war, in November 1938, my sister Valerie was born. She brought such joy to all of us but especially during the time we saw our father prepare to leave us and go to war. The first winter our father was away was the most difficult for us but Valerie distracted us from the sadness of our father leaving with her antics, her giggles, and her cute ways. She especially loved the little bunnies and would squeal with delight when their fur tickled her nose. I took the role of her big sister to heart and wherever I went I would take her with me if I could. We were rarely separated from each other from that point on.

"Our place" at the end of the garden began to change. Though it remained our favourite spot, we began to be pulled away from it by having to take on more adult responsibilities even though we were still children who were ten, eleven and twelve years old. The animals were always there and we continued to love them and care for them as our pets but the war would soon change this as well.

Our pets took on a different meaning and purpose after the war began. My father who had left for the army as soon as the war began saw our little menagerie differently. Those cute little bunnies could well be needed to be our dinner some day. When food rationing started, my mother made a deal with the butcher. She asked him, if it became necessary for our family, would he take one of our bunnies or chickens and exchange it with one from his shop?

"Yes, ma'am, I certainly could do that."

As far as we knew, he kept his promise and we were able to enjoy chicken or rabbit dinner that came from the butcher and not from one of our own pets.

The war put many restraints on our mobility and activities. "Our place" became the ideal location for an air raid shelter that my father had built during one of his leaves from the war. He worked very hard to excavate a hole large enough to accommodate one of his many sheds. In the shed that was now an air raid shelter, he equipped it with bunk beds, mattresses, pillows and blankets and oil lamps. We lived in this shelter from dusk until dawn, every night, for many long and often worrisome nights listening for the Nazi bombers, droning over us, heavily loaded with bombs on their way to London.

Two years later, the outside air raid shelters were all replaced by government supplied indoor shelters. They were made of heavy cast iron and were four foot high by five feet square. During mealtimes and homework times, the shelters became dining tables and work tables. At night, the children slept under these cast iron shelters.

In November 1940, we became a family of seven with the birth of my youngest brother, Charles. He, like Valerie, became the centre of our world. Our family continued to live in a very active household where there always was time for lots of creativity and play. My two older sisters, Marjorie and Peggy, now had day jobs as sales clerks. Marjorie worked at Woolworth's and Peggy at a jewellery and gift store in downtown Ipswich.

To this day, my admiration for my mother, Hetty, remains. She had such a strong character who against all odds,



Charlie



My father, Charles, RASC, WW2

and often alone, kept our family stable, safe, well cared for and our minds full of hope and free of hatred.

My father, Charles, discharged from the army for health reasons, returned to his family in 1942.

We had survived. Body and soul intact. A family bonded forever to this day.

### **1945**

#### ***The War Is Over***

The war is over. With much joy and jubilation folks could continue to dream once again and really believe their dreams could come true.

I was almost sixteen years of age by then. I could plan my own future and did so with much enthusiasm.

Since childhood, I knew that I wanted to be a nurse. I had watched with awe the public health nurse visiting our school to check our eyes, teeth, and ears. She combed our hair with a fine-toothed comb looking for unwanted company. Nits, she would call them. She would give some a note to take home if she had found some nits on their heads. This would be most exciting news in the world of six year olds.

Pursuing a career in nursing required much preparation. I was determined to achieve this goal even though there were some who tried to discourage me from doing so.



Repairing windows broken by bomb blasts

My mother told me, "You will never last."

My sister, Peggy, already a nurse, described with gruesome detail stories of patients' conditions such as a patient's toes falling off in his socks.

"People die you know," she said.

"So," I answered back. "I am going to be a nurse."

The day I entered nurses' training was the beginning of a lifelong career that covered two continents and a span of forty years.

It was as a nurse in training at the Burough General Hospital in Ipswich, England that I met my true love. I first caught sight of him as he walked into the hospital dining room for breakfast. He was so handsome. Our eyes locked. I felt as if I had been struck by lightning.

Turning to my friends, I spluttered, "I'm in shock. That's the man for me."

Those early days while I was in training were everything I had ever dreamed them to be. I had such a feeling of satisfaction when I helped others to become well and strong again.

Yes, my sister had been right. There were many scary things that I had to learn to cope with as a nurse.

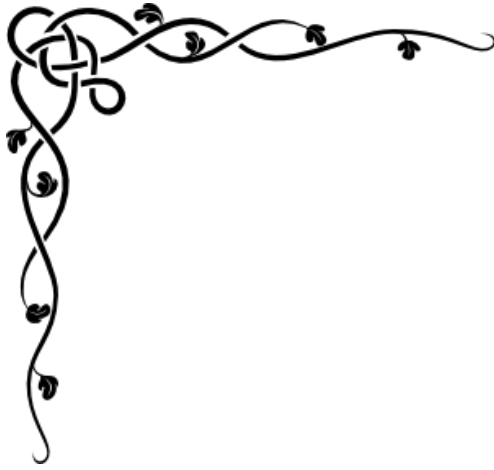
Yes, people did die.

In 1951, I embarked on the most profound decision of my life. I immigrated to Canada together with my new found love, Basil. We took the first steps towards a life together to fulfill our dreams.



*Audrey Cichacky was born at home in Great Bealings, Great Britain on October 23, 1929. She began school in 1932 at the local village school in Great Bealings. The family moved to Ipswich in 1934 and then to Trafford House in Rushmere, Suffolk in 1935. By 1938 the education of preparing and coping with war had begun with nightly air raid shelter drills. Her little sister, Valerie, was born that year. WWII began in 1939 and father left with the military for France. Childhood changed. The war left an imprint on being children with air raids, restricted movement, drills and bombs.*

*At 18 Audrey began nurses training on April 1, 1945. She met Basil Cichacky at the Burrough General Hospital, Ipswich in 1947. They immigrated to Toronto in 1951 where she was employed as a nurse at Toronto Western Hospital for 6 weeks and then at Sick Children's Hospital from 1951 to 1953. She continued nursing until retirement at age 55. She was married to Basil Cichacky and they had three children—Julie, Katrina and Danny*



## Life in the Hub

Mary Hurman

**W**e were at a crossroads as a young couple in late 1967. Our little rented one-bedroom stucco house, built by a bachelor in the 1930's in a quiet country setting just outside Dundas, Ontario had been put up for sale. A draughty add-on wooden porch served as our children's bedroom. For me, moving was not optional. Although we were given first chance to buy it and loved the location, because of its haphazard layout and design, it was not a house I wanted to own.

"Why don't you go to work for a couple of years, and I'll babysit the kids. That way you can get a house you like." With those words, my mother persuaded me to accept a job offer and compromise my noble intention of being a stay-at-home mom. In a decade when working mothers were frowned upon in Christian circles, the advent of "the pill," was enabling young moms to emerge from their home-sweet-home and enter the work-a-day world to achieve a higher standard of living. My struggle was whether I could be both a good mother and a working woman.

Earlier that year, I received a job offer for a position as secretary of a new school under construction. In June, 1967, I was pregnant with our second child when a friend referred the local school principal to me to fill in for the secretary for a few weeks. At the end of September, she would return.

On my last day of work, the principal asked, "Will you apply for the position at the new school that's opening next year? The job is yours if you're interested."

I was flattered but said, "Thank you, but I don't think I will be."

He said, "We'll call you next spring." He did.

Our son was born that December. Not long after, the landlady put our rented house on the market, placing us squarely at the crossroads: do we rent again or buy a home of our own? In 1967, even a modest house cost \$13,000. On a single income of less than \$5,000 and with two

little children under five, the mortgage payments of \$125 would not be affordable. House prices were climbing; interest rates hovered around 8.5%.

We decided to buy, agreeing that, when the school official called, I would accept his and my mother's offers. If I needed to work, working in a school would enable me to spend the summer months and Christmas holidays with my children, which would be ideal. Our children would never become latch-key kids, because they would leave and return home with me. I had always wanted to teach but, for various reasons, after high school in 1960, I took a secretarial job at Stelco in Hamilton. The chance to work in a school and set up an office from scratch appealed to me. And so, in August, 1968, I began my lengthy career in the world of education. As they used to say about the Armed Forces, "There is no life like it!"

The non-negotiable salary was set at \$55 a week (30% less than I was earning when I left Stelco in 1964) and no pay for school vacation periods. My mother charged \$15 a week for being the best caregiver a mom could want for her two kiddies. The remainder of my earnings paid the mortgage.

The new "senior" school that would accommodate four hundred Grade 7 and 8 students would not be ready until January. During the fall term, the office remained at the village school and students attended in two shifts, based on rural and suburban addresses.

A new trend away from the many small Grade 1 to 8 community schools was spreading across Ontario as a result of the Hall-Dennis Report. Our new large centralized senior school would include open-concept classrooms, a library and gym; home economics and industrial arts rooms; a music room complete with instruments; a science lab, and, for the first time, French language instruction! Bussing these older students from near and far to senior schools became the norm.

In the classroom, education was to be less regimented, more child-centered, focusing on individual achievement rather than comparison with others. Rote learning was to become discovery learning, at a child's own speed; failure was a thing of the past. Percentage marks were abolished. Learning would no longer happen at individual desks in rows but at tables, in groups, even in math. The old-fashioned phonics and mental math was being moth-balled, but corporal punishment with a leather strap, writing lines, and standing in the hall survived.

Most of the staff members at the new school were young people fresh out of teachers' college (without university degrees) who would fit nicely into the new ideas about how school should be done. It was clear that the confident young grads had their own theories about how children should be raised. When they became parents themselves, their ideas for raising good kids, predictably, were sorely tested, some even shattered.

The school setting affords a unique perspective, not only on the education system and its workers, but also on society, on families, and parenting styles. From 1960 to the mid-80s, the opening of school included the Lord's prayer and a Bible reading prior to morning announcements. The dress code for male teachers in 1968 was a jacket and tie; sweaters were



Huurman family in 1969



accepted about a decade later. Slacks for women were frowned upon until the advent of the polyester “pant suit.” No teacher was allowed to bring food or drink into the classroom. No staff member called another adult by their first name in front of students. Teachers who became pregnant were expected to quit their teaching jobs when they “showed.” There was no pregnancy leave. A woman suffering morning sickness had better not let it be known because absence from work for pregnancy-related illness was not chargeable to sick leave! The women’s liberation movement led to legislation that changed such outrageous rules.

During the first few years at the “new” school, the Grade 8 population included boys who had repeated one or more grades. At age fifteen, they were not about to subject themselves to learning the “frog language” (French) or playing a musical instrument. Their fathers usually were not the least bit supportive of the French or music teachers’ efforts either. Such disrespect by students is defined as persistent opposition to authority under the Education Act, and their defiance would lead to detentions, strapping, and suspensions—all to no avail. These big boys seemed incorrigible. My job included, among other things, typing the suspension letters, babysitting the boys who were kicked out of class, and taking the phone calls from their unhappy parents. In the outer office, I would flinch at the sound of each whack of the strap being administered behind closed doors in the principal’s office.

I spent more than thirty years in various Wentworth schools as the frontline person in “The Office,” or “The Hub,” as some teachers called it. It is called “The Hub” because the office and the secretary are central to a school operation. Some teachers go so far as to say that the secretary herself is the hub or heart of the school, and many feel that, with a good secretary and a good caretaker, a school has it made! On a bus trip through Europe in 1986, we travelled with several American teachers. When they discovered what I did for a living, they were quick to explain to fellow travellers how important it is for a teacher to be on the right side of “The Secretary.” They claimed, “It’s the only way to get things done!”

Particularly in the late 1960’s when daily school office coverage became the norm, public perception of a school secretary, was—in some places still is—that she answers phones, calls parents as needed, hands out band-aids and late slips, and spends the rest of her time filing her nails. Very few people know what she actually does. Because her job is not understood, she usually ranks lowest among school staff, below the caretaker. That attitude was reflected even in the school board’s policies. I recall during salary negotiations in the 1970’s, when the hourly rate was \$3.57, having to explain why a secretary should be allowed overtime pay when she *worked* after hours. Our argument was that caretakers who supervised evening gym rentals could *sit and read* to earn several hours’ overtime pay while we stayed past closing hours to actually work. We won our case.

Why do schools need a secretary anyway? Generally speaking, the school secretary provides secretarial and clerical support for the principal and teachers, and it is her responsibility to ensure smooth day-to-day operation of the office. She handles confidential reports, cash, and purchasing; keeps financial records and does the banking; she maintains and updates school and student records; completes reports for Board and Ministry purposes; handles reception, telephone, mail and correspondence; assists students and teachers, etc. She is familiar with Education Act regulations governing attendance and records. Today, she must work with more than a half-dozen computer programs. At the office, preparations are made for school trips, special assemblies, graduation, and orientation.

I learned quickly about approved texts, teacher evaluation and manually completing and balancing long, complicated statistical reports for the Ministry of Education. I also learned a new language: educational jargon such as OSR and OSOR (Ontario school records); aims and objectives, opening exercises, IPRC, ESL, suspension and expulsion; internal transfer, external admission; Ministry guidelines and Board policies. There was a public address system to master, as well as protocols for dealing with parents and students and first aid. I became acquainted with teacher federations, qualifications, negotiations, etc. etc. Until computers arrived, letters were typed with carbon paper and tissue for copies, manila paper for the file copy. Memos, newsletters, and lessons requiring many copies were done on dittos or stencils. Mimeograph and ink duplicators and “dry copiers” were standard, messy office equipment until photocopiers became affordable. Before computers, there were standard and then electric typewriters. I used my shorthand skills extensively for letters and reports and even for dictated university essays. When computers were installed, most secretaries didn't know how to even turn them on. Training in groups of thirty followed later by a sarcastic abrasive techie.

As a young woman, I enjoyed the new learning as well as reminders of my own schooling in the lessons and materials I typed. I was enriched by witnessing and hearing about the teachers' dealings with students and their parents. Typing university essays after hours for teachers who were upgrading their qualifications (and salary) by pursuing a B.A. degree inspired me to take some university courses myself. For my efforts in editing, correcting the spelling, grammar and sentence structure in their essays, the principal awarded me an “honorary” B.A.!

My husband, Harry, says that the stories about my school career could fill a book. Yes, over the years, I encountered some interesting folks, as well as unexpected challenges: bomb threats, false fire alarms, threats of physical violence against staff, and accidents and injuries ranging from cut fingers to broken limbs to soiled underwear! One broken arm belonged to my own son.

During my first few years in The Hub, phoned and written threats of physical violence against teachers came regularly from a concentration camp survivor. One day, this mom announced she was coming to wash out a teacher's mouth with soap. Another day she warned that the principal had better be wearing a bulletproof vest because she was coming for him. Fortunately, the principal had a way of diplomatically calming her down by listening to her with patience and empathy.

Usually interactions in The Hub were polite and cordial. Caring professional staff and community members are the norm. Yet, as in all walks of life, it is impossible for a school secretary to stay on the right side of all parents, all teachers and students. Some youths and better-than-thou parents try to ignore you because you are “just the secretary.”



1978: Mary at work, stylus in hand, preparing a stencil for a Home Ec. Sewing lesson. Note the electric typewriter and telephone set, and the dry thermal copier on the counter in the background.

When I overheard a bully who was sent to the office ordering his victim to agree with his version of the incident, I put a stop to the conversation. He told me, “Just mind your own business! Who do you think you are anyway, grandma?” The principal justly rewarded his rudeness.

And then there was the teenaged African adoptee whose birth date no one knew for sure. He had witnessed horrible atrocities as a child and seemed to have no feeling or empathy for others. He laughed in the face of authority. His malevolent smile made me and others shudder, imagining an O.J. Simpson in the making.

In dealing with cry babies, experience as a mother is invaluable, but it was hard to sort those who cry wolf from those who are genuinely sick. That can get you into trouble with parents, whatever way you call it. One Grade 4 student who showed no sign of sunburn came to the office claiming the sunshine of the previous day was making him sick.

A kindergartener complaining of a sore tummy told me his stomach had been moving in and out about five inches. I said, “That’s because you’re breathing!”

He argued vehemently, “No, I’m not!”

To quote Art Linkletter, “Kids say the darndest things!”

Conversely, it was touching to read in the very last hand-made card I received from a pupil, the message that little Emily printed, “I will miss you because you *always* make me happy when I’m not *feeling* very well. I hope you will *all ways* remember me and keep this card.”



Flowers for Secretary’s Day, 1987

As in other spheres of life, the people you meet in a school range from friendly and pleasant, to rude and demanding, to cold and superior, from cooperative and caring to intimidating or criminal. In the early years the secretary was frequently left out of special lunches and social gatherings, because, after all, she’s “just the secretary!” At an evening Christmas party, one haughty teacher spurned an office colleague with the question, “What are *you* doing here?” My friend was able to shrug it off and enjoy the evening with kinder colleagues. Happily, there were many lighter moments with teachers and principals, and notes and gifts of appreciation at Christmas, on Secretary’s Day, and at year-end.

Dealing with parental intimidation and verbal abuse proved to be a delicate balance of self-preservation and diplomacy. Their usual weapon was a threat to report me to the highest

authorities for a perceived offence. One parent, who allegedly damaged her psyche with drugs, stands out.

“I’ll call the f... Board if you f... hang up on me again!” The first hang-up occurred because she continued to swear at me after I asked her to stop. She dumped her vitriol on me because I refused to call a teacher to the phone during class-time—a no-no except in an emergency. A second hang-up followed. Some years later, when she got herself together, this woman was cordial and friendly whenever we met.

A similar threat was delivered face to face at the end of a school year because I had called a mother to ask if she would like her teenager to cycle a kilometre to school to pick up his June report card or if I should mail it. Most parents are anxious to see their child's final results. Father arrived ten minutes later, enraged, demanding to know why I had upset his wife. His reasoning defied logic.

"You should not have to ask! It is your job to mail it!! Where is the principal?" he demanded.

I explained the principal was at home and offered to have him call. The man stormed out, proclaiming his intention to contact all my superiors. Reason must have prevailed once the steam evaporated because I heard nothing further.

On another occasion, school staff members were threatened with a lawsuit because of a boy's fall on the playground that resulted in a broken leg. Staff with first-aid training did not suspect a break and so we kept him as comfortable as possible, in bed with ice, checking on him frequently until his parent could be reached, which took two hours in the days before cell phones. Emergency doctors failed to diagnose a break until X-ray proved it. Again, reason prevailed eventually. As they say, when you are on the frontline, you can expect to get shot at.

One hockey mom phoned repeatedly from work at the end of a school day with a last-minute message for her child who attended another local school. She would call me because calling that school involved long- distance charges. She expected me to relay her message. After several such calls, I asked her to telephone the other school directly, which she angrily reported to my principal. The direction I received from him was to comply with her demand, because I was, after all, a "public servant." Great support! Does public service make you a private servant too? Months later, on the way to school, I found her teenage daughter wandering the country road in a daze after blowing a tire on her car on the way to school. I drove her home. A subtle defrosting of the mother's icy attitude was my reward.

Challenges came from other directions. A tough, loud-mouthed bus driver sought refuge in the inner sanctum one day, literally crying on my shoulder about her passengers. Her brawn was ineffective in curbing their disrespectful behaviour. She was at her wit's end. At that moment, a place to calm down and a listening ear was needed.

How do you keep from laughing out loud when a greasy-haired, smelly, unkempt, 350-pound supply teacher checks in at the office and, as he walks away, you see that he has torn the seam of his pants from belt to crotch. His going home to change leaves a class without a teacher. Resisting your mischievous streak, you call him back to save him from becoming the laughing stock of four hundred students for the rest of the day.

In The Hub, poignant moments arose as well. What to say to a petite, pretty tweener who can't stop crying because she thinks she's fat and is closed to contrary opinions. How can you help an oriental boy who finds out too late that he is allergic to frost? Could you keep your composure when you are alone with a little boy who innocently articulates his recently recovered memory of an accident with the words: "My mom and my sister died. Only me and Dad lived."

And wouldn't you too want to shelter a nine-year-old with many younger siblings whose mommy - my personal acquaintance - is dying, yet he expresses hope that her cancer won't spread to her eyes. Situations like these can and do arise on an average day in the hub of a school.

"As a kind, firm, judicious parent" is a phrase in the Education Act describing how teachers must act toward students in their charge. Some parents are far from kind, firm or judicious. Still, many children achieve in spite of their home life, just as kids learn in spite of a

bad teacher. I saw students who were behaviour problems in elementary school evolve into eye surgeons, engineers, mechanics, teachers, or business owners.

One older mother whom I knew through church called me one morning. "Mary, can you make my three sons go to school? They're sitting on the front step and they won't go!"

When a father reports his seven-year-old is missing school because the child, who is manipulative and controlling at school, needs a mental health day, is he being judicious?

One of the most pathetic parenting stories I ever heard was about a mother who delivered a resume for her six-year-old daughter to neighbouring homes in an attempt to attract some friends.

And there were unwise parents who were "too kind," allowing kids to stay home day after day until there was no hope of keeping up with their classmates. Attendance counsellors and social workers were unable to effect changes. One girl spent her time eating and watching TV with Mom. She was allowed to drop out of school for "home study." Net result: as an adult she was charged with keeping an animal house filled with neglected dogs. The house had to be destroyed. She went to jail.

Unkind parents were shown up through the behaviour of their children at school. One child cried all the time; another had welts on her legs inflicted by an incestuous father; others manifested inner conflict at school by withdrawing, or bullying, by rude or cruel behaviour.

I recall boys, some from privileged homes, who did well at school, yet a few years later committed suicide. Another died of alcohol poisoning. My heart still aches for a boy, picked on by others because of his diminutive stature, who was mean to other children. This little guy had witnessed a knife attack on his mother and became hardened when she deserted him at age three, never sending him a gift or even a card. At home he received little care or nurturing. I once invited him to go to a fall fair with us and then to my home. It was evident at dinner that he had never sat at a table with others for a meal and was very uncomfortable in our structured family situation. We arranged for him to attend Circle Square summer camp, an experience he said he really enjoyed. A few years later, I heard he had landed in jail for robbery long before his teen years ended. I still pray for him sometimes.

A lasting sadness for me was seeing a twenty-something former student I knew well succumb to AIDS. And when I see the great life of my granddaughters, I think at times about two very young foster kids, offspring of motorcycle gang members, who had never had a birthday party or outing, and who knew more about sex than their teacher did at age twenty. And I remember another foster girl, a victim of sexual abuse, who lashed out at other students by destroying their art work. One day, she kicked and fought the principal as he escorted her to the office. Told to sit quietly in a chair facing him, she removed a shoe, intending to throw it at him. He looked up just in time.

It seems to me some kids are handicapped by their parents until they learn to make good choices for themselves. God bless the many teachers who go beyond their teaching duties and sincerely try to make a difference for less fortunate children!

Some of the notes from parents and students were memorable – the latter because it was amusing to see children attempt to forge their parent's signature, the former for their content. Here are a few that stick in my memory.

"John stayed home to help Charlie pitch sh..t" and another, "He was sick with the flue."

And can you believe this: "Jeannie will not be at school tomorrow as she is going to McMaster to watch her father's new wife give birth."

A rather unusual explanation of a boy's absence was that he "Stayed home to watch an elephant give birth." Little imagination is needed to figure out where he grew up!

When my husband refused to wear a polyester light grey suit of vest and flared-leg pants that I sewed for him in the 1970's, my consolation came from seeing a rather plump country boy who helped his father pitch manure proudly wear it to his Grade 8 graduation!

Professional "misconduct" was in view in The Hub. It was well known that witness protection was defined as a transfer for the witness. The first case of managerial misbehaviour that I encountered involved an extramarital affair with a teacher, leading to his dismissal. Another manager helped himself to library magazine subscriptions, padded his expense account, reversed charges for personal telephone calls to the school, and "borrowed" school equipment at will for years.

I cannot omit the handsome, repulsively sweet professional who wore make-up and expensive suits. He introduced himself to me as "the beloved apostle Paul," then leaned over my typewriter, reached for my hand and kissed it. Weeks later, this highly paid expert was arrested for shoplifting a \$20-item, ending his career, locally at least.

A memorable character in a position of authority was from a racial minority. He proved to be a gambler and chronic liar. Though he never admitted his addiction, there was plenty of evidence that this slick operator was in debt over his head with creditors, businesses, colleagues and equipment repairmen, perhaps even The Mob.

It was awkward as his secretary to tell him, "The children's store downtown called and said they don't want any more excuses. They want \$225 by Friday." Another day, the message was, "You no longer have car insurance." His typical reaction was a broad toothy smile and a pleasant but dismissive, "Thank you."

In the short time I worked with him, his car windows were smashed and creditors came out of the woodwork to the school to discreetly collect on loans. One day a man in a trench coat appeared in the office, asking for him. The visitor refused to identify himself. I was instructed to invite him in. Quickly the door was closed to the private office. Minutes later, the principal briskly followed the trench coat outside, and was not seen for several hours. What is most interesting is that, when pressure from staff complaints became too much, management reassigned this individual to a different job: teaching financial management to adult students!

Looking back over my thirty plus years in The Hub, no two days were ever the same. Mornings were always hectic with ringing phones, complaining bus drivers, visitors arriving at inopportune times, teachers asking for assistance with jammed copiers; parents bringing forgotten lunches; principals wanting answers; supply teachers needing direction; sales-persons vending fundraisers; community inquiries about something; disgruntled parents; visiting academic personnel, social workers, or consultants; safety officers or school nurses; students wanting permission to call their parents or to submit an announcement, or looking for a teacher or a lost item or just a band-aid. It was hectic, sometimes dizzying, to contend throughout the day with constant interruptions of telephones, children, visitors, deliveries, service personnel, teachers and caretakers. And, as is the case in assembly line environments, at the end of a day, in a busy school office the work is never finished. There really is no job like it!

During noon hour one day, a male colleague said, "I was reminded of you on Sunday morning. Our minister spoke on peace amid chaos. He used an example of a little bird nested in a bush beside a rushing waterfall, chirping away, undisturbed by the noisy tumult. That description fits you. You always stay calm in spite of all that goes on around you." I took that

as a compliment, one that was expressed in different words by others in various schools. Hopefully, I was a calming influence.

I enjoyed many heart-to-heart chats in the staff room with stressed-out colleagues dealing with difficult students, parents or other life “stuff.” We held thoughtful, stimulating debates about our individual beliefs and life philosophies. An older colleague, commenting on the one-on-one personal chats, said she thought I must have a “mother confessor” attraction for others.

One thirty-something teacher confided in me that she felt she had no reason to live; she loved her students but was struggling in other areas of her life. Not long after that conversation, she did not go home. They found her a day later in a secluded spot in the countryside, in her car, dead of carbon monoxide. On another occasion, by underscoring the emotional investment parents make in their children, I talked a male teacher, an only child, out of eloping. Happily for all concerned, he and his bride included their parents in the wedding.

The two or three years my mother suggested I work turned into more than thirty. Regular employment ended in early retirement in 1995 but I took on supply work. In 2009, I was invited to fill a job-share vacancy. I always found the world of education interesting, enjoyable, and challenging. Besides, who would give up a job with summers off?

Since 1968, manual typewriters evolved into electric typewriters and they into computers. The strap is long gone. After forty years of Hall-Dennis thinking, testing and marks are back in vogue, as are individual desks. Discovery learning did not prove to be the way most children learn most things. Today's opening exercises may not include the Lord's Prayer or a Bible reading. Religious instruction and children's Bible clubs are outlawed. Sadly, even the Christmas story, traditional carols and Christmas concerts with a Christian theme are taboo. I feel it is to our detriment that Ontario's public education system disowns its Christian roots, but it does reflect the secularization of our multi-cultural society and changed values.

As a child I had wanted to become a teacher. Education was not valued in our home; hard work and helping our immigrant parents get ahead was a greater priority. During adult conversations with friends, I overheard my father opine that education is wasted on girls “because they only get married anyway!” – a common belief in the 1950's in blue collar circles. My Grade 8 teacher had to persuade my parents to allow me to attend high school, which led to a “good job” at Stelco's head office, or I would undoubtedly have been channelled into domestic or retail employment.

Clearly, God isn't limited by what we or our parents have in mind. Though my childhood dream of teaching school did not materialize, my career in educational administration has been more than fulfilling. With regard to career satisfaction, I have loved working in school offices among educated people. I learned to teach from typing teacher evaluation reports which addressed teaching methods and techniques, long and short-term planning, meeting teaching objectives, organizing lessons, etc. In my job, I also learned a lot about parenting, discipline, and communicating with youth. I was a better Sunday School, Bible study teacher and youth leader because of my school experience. And I even got to teach a children's Heritage Language class for two winters—with pay! For the course, I was required to write my own curriculum. I think Henry Ford was right when he said, “Learning keeps you young!”

I confess that my greatest fear as a young mother, amidst the revolution of counter-culture, free love, drugs, and hippie flower power, was that my own children would become alienated from their parents when they hit their teen years. With God's help and the lessons learned from years in The Hub, my approach to child-rearing was refined. I am blessed to be able to say that the feared alienation never happened and that we and our offspring remain close.

Our two dear children, Elaine and Alan, each have two children of their own now. I am proud to say that they are loving, caring parents and spouses and productive members of society.

One of the fringe benefits of working in a school is the annual free photographs that the school photographer gives to staff. My aging process is well documented, as you can imagine.



1970



1989



1993



2006



2010

Some years, the package included a staff picture. Early in the 90's, a beautiful young lady in my staff picture caught the eye of our bachelor son. To make a long story short, an unexpected but huge blessing from my years in The Hub is a much-loved teacher who became our much-loved daughter-in-law and the mother of two of our beloved granddaughters. To quote Forrest Gump, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get."

I have many cherished memories and, truthfully, I harbour no rancour toward my dear father for his beliefs about educating girls. I look back with no regrets about my decision in 1968 to take the job in the new school, and I am sure that my son and all the other members of my family would second that!

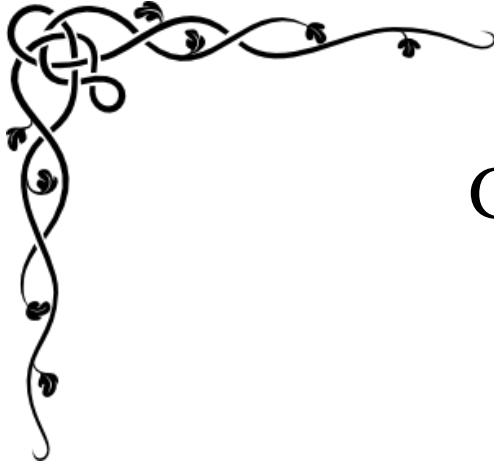


Our son, Alan and his teacher girlfriend, Laurie, 1993



*Mary lives in Brantford with her husband Harry. Her office career started at Stelco's head office in east Hamilton in May, 1960, in the days when employers came to high schools to hire the top Commercial graduates. She spent 1964-68 at home, occasionally filling in for sick Stelco office employees. In 1968 she became "The Secretary" at Spencer Valley School and enjoyed thirty-plus years as secretary to the principal and staff of various schools in Hamilton-Wentworth.*





## Grandparents: The War Years

Mary Huzul

**I**n England during the Second World War, when the men were away fighting for their country, the women took over the jobs in factories and offices and the childcare fell onto the shoulders of the grandparents. I was blessed with very caring grandparents.



Gerardus and Elsie Tromp

On my father's side, my grandfather, Gerardus, had come from the Friesland province of Holland and settled in England where he met and married my grandmother Elsie. She had been raised in an orphanage when her military father died of a brain aneurysm and her mother was unable to raise the family. Gerardus came from a large, religious family—many nuns and priests. We had a steady stream of visitors from Holland bringing cheeses, chocolate and tulip bulbs, to the point where Gerardus was investigated by the police. Although nothing came of it, he had a mistrust of authority after that.

During the war years Grandfather Gerardus tended a small plot of land, allocated by the government that provided us with fresh fruit and vegetables. Grandmother Elsie kept chickens in her back yard and made us decent meals on weekends. We lived on the outskirts of London, in Sudbury. My grandparents, Elsie and Gerardus, lived about five

miles from us in Dollis Hill. It was just a bus ride away. The area where my grandparents lived later became known as “bombing alley.” Ironically, the first bomb landed on Kilburn Street where Gran Elsie would walk to shop. It was a V1 bomb. There were also V2 bombs which had an entirely different sound, so you knew what was coming.

Our main caregiver was my maternal grandmother Nan Climo. Nan lived with her eldest daughter, Aunt Syb, just around the corner from our apartment. Two doors away, one of her sons, Uncle Lou, lived with Aunt May and five children. Nan had had a hard life, raised by a strict aunt and uncle. She was a good looking woman with chestnut hair and blue eyes. I know she was intelligent as she was a student teacher at the village school.

At a young age, Nan met and married a young man from a good family who had high hopes of becoming a lawyer. They moved to London where he became a solicitor's clerk. They had ten children but lost two at age six to infectious disease. Nan always grieved for them. My mother was the youngest and was very frail. She spent time in a tuberculosis sanatorium. She told me it was three to a bed there and she cried a lot, separated from her family. Sadly, my grandfather had a drinking problem and never achieved his goals. He was involved in an accident and spent his remaining years in a psychiatric hospital. Nan was left a young widow with eight children to raise. They all turned out well, having a craft or trade.

When war broke out, Nan moved into our apartment to help with the children. My dad was somewhere in Germany, my mom was working in a factory. Almost every night, the fighter planes bombed London. Even now, when I watch a World War II movie and the air raid siren blares onto the screen, my blood runs cold. We got to know the sounds of the different bombs overhead and ran for the bomb shelter set up in our bedroom under the mistaken belief it would save our lives if a bomb fell on our heads. Poor Nan often got caught short on a visit to the bathroom. We had thick blankets on the windows. Mom said that even a chink of light would let the fighters know they were above a city. One night I woke up to a man carrying me out of the building; it was the air raid warden. We had an unexploded bomb in our back yard. Luckily, my Uncle Lou was an air raid warden too, so I recognized the uniform. I was more frightened by the searchlights, sirens, and fire trucks of the bomb squad.

Shortly after this, we were evacuated to the country. Nan took us on the train to Beck Row, Suffolk where her sister lived. My mother stayed behind to work in the factory. When my grandchildren get out of hand, I think about this lady in her late sixties taking on two high-spirited children. The children from the village school gave us a hard time, as we had come from the city, until another of Nan's sons came to visit. I



Me Marv Tromp



Norice, Mary, Peter and George Tromp

can see him now in his blue R.A.F. uniform sitting on a desk answering the children's questions. We became heroes overnight. Unfortunately, we were very close to the American air base at Mildenhall and the fighters decided to bomb it. I think it was Nan's prayers that got us through.

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945—V.E. Day: there were street parties. Mom's sister, Dorothy, was the Anglican minister's wife. Her husband was away in the R.A.F. I helped her dish out the Lyons ice cream—the best I have ever tasted! The parties went on all night. They built bonfires around the bomb craters on a green area near our house. We waved flags and sang and danced. I was too young to stay but my cousins danced till dawn.

After the war, Nan returned to Aunt Syb's. Aunt Syb had also been a young widow raising two children. Her son, Paul, had been a navigator on a fighter plane at eighteen years of age. He made it safely through the war but, sadly, was murdered in Indonesia where he was an accountant on a rubber plantation. Nan had the large front room at Aunt Syb's with her own furniture and Royal Derby china. The sewing machine was set up in the bay window. My cousin, Olive, and I would vie for Nan's attention. She taught us to sew and she knit Fair Isle gloves at Christmas for us. Later, when I became a nurse and worried about exams, Nan told me how she had helped deliver babies and helped injured and choking children in her old neighbourhood with no training—just life experience.

The rest of Nan's family would come over weekends and we had some great family get-togethers. In 1953, Aunt Syb was the first on her street to get a T.V. It was tiny, about the size of a bread box. We watched the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in black and white. It was stunning and, a wonderful experience I will always remember.

## The Winter Blizzard of 1978

On February 1, 2011, we were warned of a major storm heading our way. We were expecting 30 centimeters of snow the next day. We ran around getting in extra food, water, flashlights and batteries, and arranging child care for the snow day. Well that storm never happened, but I was reminded of a storm in 1978, that was totally unexpected.

I was working at St. Joseph's hospital in Brantford, when it was a real hospital with an emergency department, intensive coronary care unit, and operating and recovery suites. I worked in the emergency room, but we also did some surgical procedures. As I was a trained operating room nurse, I usually worked in this area.

We had nicely started our day when the snow started to fall. The doctors cancelled the rest of the elective surgery schedule and then many went home. By 3 o'clock it became clear that many nurses from the next shift would not be able to get into work and those who were ready to go home would not be able to do so. People with snowmobiles came to take staff home and bring in reinforcements, but it came to a point that even they were unable to get through.

I called home and arranged for the boy from across the road to stay with my kids. His parents would be there in case there was an emergency. His father was a fireman. My husband was stuck at work across town. The first thing this boy did was send my two youngest children to the store for cigarettes, but the store was closed and they got lost in the snow. My husband walked across town through major drifts and the children managed to get home.

I was able to turn my attention to patient care. I was asked to go to the I.C.U. as it was full: many major surgical cases and men who had had heart attacks while shoveling snow against

their wives' appeals. I heard there were two ambulances stranded in the country with car accident victims. The cafeteria had taken on a festive appearance: there were a few doctors, X-ray equipment and cafeteria staff, but they kept us supplied with sandwiches and coffee.

At midnight we were replaced by staff from the cafeteria and sent up to the nuns' residence on the fifth floor to shower and sleep. That was when the ambulances started rolling in. It was a credit to the ambulance personnel that none of the patients was in shock as they didn't have I.V. equipment on board in those days. I spent the next few hours taking the patients back and forth, dressing wounds, and helping put on casts. Suddenly it was morning and the day staff managed to get in. I was exhausted. Somebody drove me home. Snowplows were digging people out of stranded cars. I was amazed at the amount of snow. Everybody at my house was safe but hyper. All of our patients survived but one: an elderly man who had had major surgery. We felt badly about that.



*Mary Elsa Huzul was born in London, England 30 November 1937. She has been married to Al Huzul of Brantford for 47 years. They have four children: David, Alison, Paul and Christine, and five grandchildren: Derek, Daniel, Kristin, John David, and Julianne. Mary is a retired nurse with a social work certificate from Renison College, University of Waterloo. A cancer survivor, Mary is taking creative writing with Lifescapes at the Brantford Public Library.*