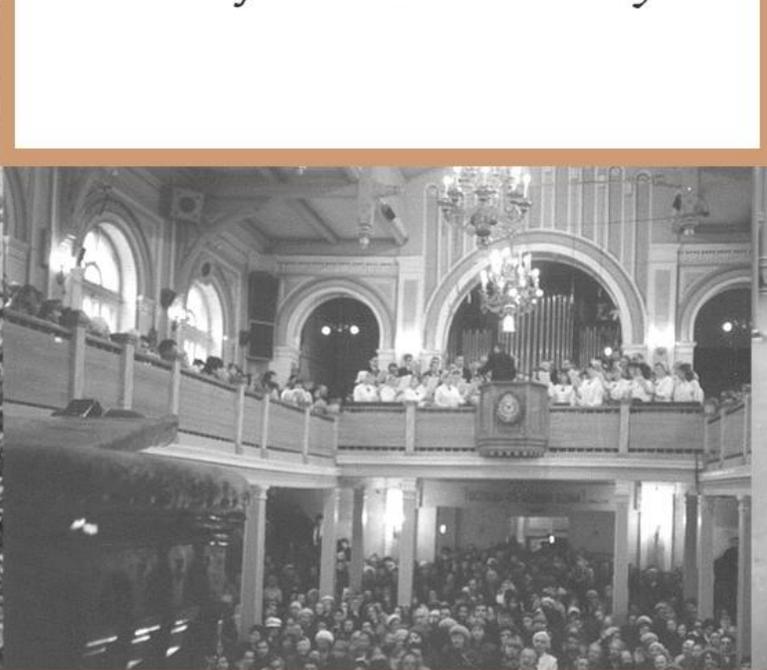


Keepsakes Of Our Past



*Lifescapes Writing Group 2016
Brantford Public Library*





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Of Our Past*



Lifescapes Writing Group 2016
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This book was written by members of the Lifescapes group, a memoir writing program sponsored by the Brantford Public Library.

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Introduction

Lifescapes is a writing program created to help people write their life stories, to provide support and guidance for beginner and experienced writers alike. This is our ninth year running the program at the Brantford Public Library and *Keepsakes of Our Past* is our ninth collection of stories to be published.

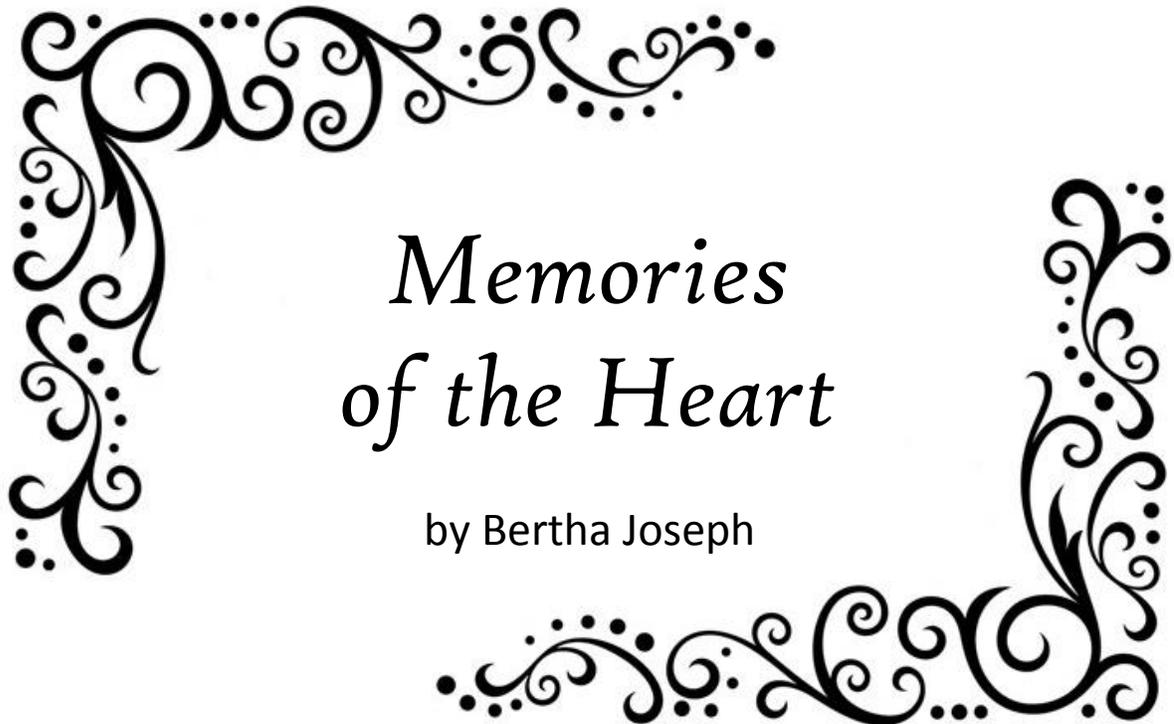
A limited number of print copies of each edition are available for sale. Alternatively, the library archives copies for borrowing and posts PDF versions on our website at <http://brantford.library.on.ca/adults/lifescapes>. This year we are also pleased to present our first large print edition of *Lifescapes*, which has been printed in 14 point Calibri font and framed by wide margins.

On behalf of the library and this year's participants, I would like to thank guest authors Charles Eric Jambor, Larry Brown, and Lorie Lee Steiner for your inspiration and guidance. We appreciate and enjoy the time you have spent with us.

For myself, I always learn something new from working with the *Lifescapes* group. This year our writers faced illness, injury, and changes of life, and some were unable to finish the program. Watching those who persevered really drove home for me that *writing is hard work!* It takes time and determination. Truly it has been a privilege to witness the dedication and fortitude of these writers.

Whether you are here as writer or reader, thank you for being a part of the *Lifescapes* experience. It's a wonderful legacy.

Robin Harding
Coordinator, Adult and Seniors Programming
Brantford Public Library

A decorative border of black scrollwork and dots frames the central text. The scrollwork is intricate, with loops and flourishes that curve around the text.

Memories of the Heart

by Bertha Joseph

It was a hot summer day in the mid 1940's. After a long week working at Robb's Foundry, Father had his weekend ritual of rising early in the morning, eating a hearty breakfast of porridge regardless of the season, and pensively sipping his morning tea from a saucer, an old European custom. Father then took his usual morning walk about the neighbourhood, enjoying the warmth of the rising sun.

Nearing home, the sun was shining brilliantly in a clear blue sky and already the intense heat of the day could be felt. It was one of those days that put a desire in his heart to leave the world of brick and concrete heat. His thoughts wandered to the farm in Oxford. He imagined reclining in the comfort of the fruit trees, in the small orchard at the side of Grandpa's farm house, where gentle breezes were always prevalent.



Father under the fruit trees

Trees were plentiful and rivers and brooks of cold clear water flowed freely through the land. The breezes, picking up the coolness of the waters, refreshed the land and those upon it. One could take a stroll up the old road to the spring of ice cold water that for untold decades gushed its way through the earth. A drink of this water

instantly gave you relief from the heat of the day and, as you drank more, it began to send chills through your body. The very thought of strolling up the old road brought to Father the memory of the overlapping tree branches, forming a canopy of shelter from the sun's burning rays. As his eyes met the blue of the sky, he spoke aloud with no one to hear: "Today, we are off to the Country."

Turning on his heels, he went to pay a visit to a friend.

Malcolm was sitting on his front porch enjoying a cup of tea when he saw Father coming up the pathway. Upon reaching the porch, Father turned down the offer of tea for a substitute proposition, that Malcolm drive him and his family to Oxford to spend the day. In return for the favour Father would repair Malcolm's front porch. Delighted at the proposition, Malcolm would pick them up within the hour.

Malcolm arrived. Mother and five little children were seated into Malcolm's 1941 Ford. Clinging onto the car frame and his head inside the window, Father stood on the running board of the car. This was not so much out of need but for the enjoyment of it. We were on our way, excited to be going to Grandpa's farm and filled with desire to see the animals. Father leaned in front of Mother and, for the entire twenty-five mile trip, conversed with Malcolm, shouting to be heard above the noise of the car and the wind carrying his vocal notes out past his own ears. The highway to Oxford was very narrow and Father kept getting swiped by the overhanging tree branches, another reason for keeping his head inside the car.

I was a small child, possibly around seven to eight years of age. To me, the world seemed like such a massive place. Not accustomed to being in a vehicle, my stomach tossed and turned at every continuous bump on the gravel road. All the while, the horse-hair upholstery caused our flesh to itch causing us much discomfort.

Mother knew we were nearing the farm. The air was filled with the fragrance of the wild pink roses that abundantly grew and blossomed, in the ditches and fields about the farm. This scent once entering her being had stayed a lifetime. Father looked at Mother and lovingly said, "You are home."

Mother's eyes brimmed with tears, tears from the lonely hours dreaming of the country home she left, and now tears of joy that once again she would enter her Mother's kitchen, and feel her loving arms wrapped about her. Finally, our trip ended in the mud driveway at Grandpa's farm.



Mother and Father at Grandpa's

Excitedly, Father shouted, "O.K. children, we are here! Watch your manners, go see the animals, have lots of fun, and don't get in Grandpa's way." Father and Malcolm went off to the barn to visit Grandpa and we were left to explore the farm. Mother with baby in her arms was embraced by Granny, who rushed out of doors to greet her. As Mother opened the screen door, which forever was painted yellow, I longed to go with her not only to visit Granny but once again to enter the memory I had of her home.

The cottage was a welcoming sight, surrounded by wild pink roses, hollyhocks, fields of hay, and wild flowers. The home bore a plain appearance, finished with wooden shingles, painted only by the ever changing seasons. Windows were raised, the curtains were blowing freely in the breeze, and smoke rose busily from the chimney. Granny was busy cooking and baking for the day's meal, which took place every day in this little cottage.

Inside this humble, warm and cozy abode told a story of a plain and simple way of life. The walls were finished lumber with wooden floors, scrubbed



Mother with Granny

white as the driven snow. The kitchen, the largest room in the house, was the gathering place where family and visitors came together. A large table and chairs welcomed you. Always sitting in the center of the table was a butter dish, a sugar bowl, a crock of molasses, and a matching crock filled with teaspoons. A large kitchen wood range with its wood box graced the other end of the kitchen. Although it was a hot summer day, tea biscuits and dessert were cooking in the oven. A pot roast was simmering on the stove. Oil lamps, cleaned and filled for the coming night, sat on a wooden shelf. The luxury of electricity was believed to be unnecessary.

In close proximity of the stove sat a very large rocking chair. This was Grandpa's resting place. It was here he read his Wild West Magazines and told stories to the children of his Wild West days, which (unknown to the children) were all taken from his protected magazines. The rest of the home consisted one bedroom and a loft with a bedroom at each end.

While Granny and Mother were chatting and enjoying each other's company, we were roaming the farmyard. To the left of the driveway we came to a large fenced-in enclosure that housed our Uncle's dogs. There were two black and white spotted dogs, slim, sinuous, and beautiful except for their barking, warning there were unknowns in the yard. A golden Retriever nonchalantly looked us over.

We ventured to the hen house. Hens, chicks and roosters picked their way around their enclosures, caring not at all for the strange little crew that wandered over to have a look at them; and who tried to reach through the link fence to touch their feathery little bodies, to no avail. We became startled at the grunting and squealing of a big fat pink pig that was wallowing in the mud. Suddenly, without a warning, we were being attacked by a flock



Geese in back of the barn

of geese. Grandpa saved our lives that day, we thought, when he came to our rescue and shooed the geese to the back of the barn and closed the gate. Across the pathway from the pig's pen loomed the barn. We entered the huge

door and got a whiff of the cows' and horses' stalls. Grandpa continued on with his chores, shovelling and throwing the manure out the window to the manure pile. This manure pile looked like a mountain to our young eyes. The horses moved restlessly in the heat, heads bowed eating hay that Grandpa lovingly pitch forked and carried to them, and drinking the cold water Grandpa carried from the brook, down the hill from the barn. The cows munched away in their stalls.

Later in the day, we enjoyed seeing Grandpa, sitting on a tiny round wooden milking stool, milk the cows. We stood in fascination and for the first time we realized where milk came from. Then, without any warning, Grandpa gave each of us a squirt from the cow's teats. Some of the children laughed, others cried, while I stood dumb-founded and unsure of the gesture.



Bossy and Molly

We were shown the hay barn and loft.

Along the side of the barn, Grandpa had a large grinding wheel. We watched him as he sharpened knives, scythes and saws. Two goats tied to a post were enjoying a feast of tin cans.

Grandpa took us to the other side of the barn. We were introduced to the special little "outbuilding". In the building was a seat with two holes for us to sit on in case "Nature" called. Wonderful old catalogues adorned the space beside the holes. We had a choice to look at the pictures or use the pages out of necessity.

To the right of the outhouse were mink cages with savage looking little beasts inside, flitting and dashing from one end to the other and probably wishing they could get at us.



Grandpa and his horse

We walked with Grandpa down a path in back of the barn. There a wonderful brook of fresh cold water flowed in through the land to the River Philip.

Even on the hottest of days, the brook water flowed cold, too cold to drink a lot at one time. As we watched the trout swimming aimlessly below the surface of the water, Grandpa filled the two buckets. Happy, tired, and hungry, we were off now to join our Mother and Granny in the house. As we neared the house, we caught sight of Father and Malcolm reclining in the orchard taking a nap. They were tired after their long exhaustive walk in the woods and up the old road.

Granny was at the stove mashing potatoes in a large black cast iron pot. Everyone was called to the table for supper.

Many visits took place over the next few years. I was then allowed to travel by bus to Oxford, to visit Granny and Grandpa. This meant not only staying for a daily visit, but for a weekend and Easter or summer vacations. It was during these times that memories were embedded in my heart.

The Seasons of our lives brought to us many endearing and sorrowful events. Through it all, we braved the storms and found our peace at Grandpa's farm. Decades passed in the realm of my life. Over this span of time, amid all the joy and laughter, tears flowed. Father died suddenly in an industrial accident, Grandpa became ill and left us. The warm, cozy little cottage that warmed my heart and brought comfort and joy to my life was gone.

Over the years that followed, I longed to go once again to Grandpa's farm. My heart longed for the scenes of my life at the farm, which were constantly lingering in my thoughts bringing me great pleasure and a tear.

Reliving Memories

I am returning to Grandpa's farm, but I will not be travelling by bus or old Ford cars. My trip today, accompanied by my heart and memories, will be by way of Down Memory Lane and Along the Country Road.

My heart leaps with joy. I walk barefoot on the gravelled Birch Ridge Road facing the cool breeze blowing across the brook, mingled with the scent of spruce and fir. I hear the sound of laughter and music. I see the old barn in the field. Gypsies are dancing to flute music around an open fire.

Stepping from the road into the swampy garden of ferns, I see her, the lovely Lady Slipper of white to dusty rose. Undisturbed I leave her, and I am drawn to the bountiful sweet smelling and profusion of colour of the wild pink roses. I am nearing the farm.



Grandpa

I see Grandpa in the field pitch forking his cut hay onto the hay wagon. The team of horses munching on the left over hay, move restlessly in the heat, their tails simultaneously swat the irritating flies. The hay wagon is full to overflowing and the boys are leaping to the top for their ride back to the hay barn and loft.

The silence is broken by the songs of the wild canaries, while black crows caw, dip, and fly high. I listen. I hear the old familiar sounds of the farm yard. The aroma of fresh baked bread draws me to Granny's kitchen. My hand rests on the handle of the screen door, forever painted yellow. I feel a thrill as I open it and enter into the loving arms of Granny. I feast on baked bread, molasses and sugar cookies. I am delighted.

It is morning, I hear Grandpa, it's not even 4:30 am, and the sun is still resting in the East. Grandpa has no time to wait, as there is so much to accomplish before sunrise. At 5:30 am Granny stirs and, as if she has wings, is aptly out of

bed, washed and readied for her never-ending day. She moves with energy and purpose. The smell of breakfast wakens me.



Granny carrying milk pails

Another day on the farm comes to a close and Grandpa retires to bed. After the sun sets, the oil lamp is lit, casting shadows on the walls, preparing the setting for an evening of storytelling, ghost stories, jokes, and laughter. We take our evening stroll to Aunt's home. Uncle recites his favourite verse, "The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert Service. He ends our visit by narrating his ghost stories and wild tales. The night is waning. With our hearts in our throats, remembering Uncle's tales, we leave for home. The clouds have covered the light of the moon. Except for the flight of the fire flies, the road is pitch black and the only light, our lantern, runs out of oil.

Reaching home, we silently ascend to the loft. The windows are opened wide, the curtains blow in the cool night breeze, when suddenly a bat is flying around in the loft. Panic, laughter, and stories start all over again. The next morning, Grandpa expresses his displeasure that we disturbed his sleep. We spoke not a word but our thoughts go to last evening and we remember. Laughter starts again and continues until Grandpa, with a gleam in his eye, a smile creasing the corner of his mouth proceeds again to the barn.

The visit to the farm by way of Memory Lane is a very long trip. It spans over many years. So much activity has taken place in and around the little cottage, with so many stories yet to be told. Between sunrise, sunset and the day ending with the moon and stars sailing in and out of the darkened clouds,

*Time flows on,
Things change,
Memories of the heart endure.*

~ Bertha M. Joseph

About the Author

I was born and raised in Nova Scotia and since 1964, Brantford, Ontario has been my home. I am a proud Mother, Nana and Great Nana.

I love to write stories. I am writing Memories. My book is called "Strolling Through the Diamonds." The "diamonds" symbolize the precious years of my life. These are my stories written for my children, their children and all their little children, who one day, like me, will wonder about those who lived before and from whom they descended. In reading my stories, they will come to know me and may grasp a little of what life was like so long ago.



After I retired in 1994, my wife Donna was still working. One evening she said to me, "You need to keep yourself occupied with all the spare time you have now. Here is a story in the Brantford Expositor about the Canadian Executive Service Organization [CESO]. They are providing retired business people like you an opportunity to use their skills and experience helping small and medium size business enterprises [SME] overseas in developing countries, those emerging from communism, as well as aboriginal communities in Canada, to organize and build their own new business models." She suggested, "You now have the time, expertise and skills to do this and should look into joining."

I subsequently submitted my application in February 1994 and was accepted as a Volunteer Advisor in May of that same year.

I received my first overseas assignment in June 1995. It was for 30 days in Izhevsk, Russia, a city approximately 2000 kilometers east of Moscow in the Ural Mountains, just west of the Western Siberia Plains. I was informed that I would be conducting seminars and workshops for business people in the construction and building materials distribution industry. I made contact with all of my former suppliers in the building materials industry to prepare a library of catalogues and brochures to take with me as educational information and exhibits describing the building materials and products that were available in Canada.

While preparing all of my teaching information for presentation to the Russian audience, I proceeded to learn as much as I could about the culture, history and politics of the country by speaking with other CESO-VAs who had completed assignments in Russia. I studied a Russian-English Language dictionary and a phrase book, so I could communicate with the people I would be teaching and dealing with while there.

With the help of my wife, who was teaching student nurses at the Mohawk College/Brantford General Hospital Campus, I assembled the information and teaching materials needed for the workshops and seminars I would be conducting. My first major learning curve was to make it as interesting, educational and enjoyable as possible for those to whom I would be presenting the information.

Culture Shock

On a Wednesday evening in late October, I left Toronto Pearson International Airport for an overnight flight to Frankfurt, Germany via Lufthansa Airways. I then took a Thursday early morning Lufthansa flight, arriving at Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow about mid-morning. After clearing immigration and customs with several heavy bags of luggage, I was met by Alexander Sergeev, the Regional Representative for CESO in Russia. He took me to the Hotel Rossiya, a very large (800 room) hotel in downtown Moscow. I was given a room looking out at the main street and saw the red brick buildings of the Kremlin and Lenin's tomb across the street in Red Square.

I stayed there until late Friday morning, when Alexander took me to the train station for a 2000km, 22-hour overnight train ride east from Moscow to



View from the train.

Izhevsk in the Ural Mountains. Arrival was scheduled for about 9 o'clock on Saturday morning.

Alexander had not advised me that there was no dining car on the train, nor did he provide me with, or suggest that I should obtain, some food to eat during the trip. I

had just settled into the bunk in my compartment and my first surprise came when a luscious blond woman entered and settled into the other bunk. She spoke no English and I spoke no Russian, however during the trip we were able to communicate somewhat, with great difficulty. She had come prepared with sufficient food that she shared with me.

To my great surprise, I was met at the train station by four gentlemen from the Udmurt State University. After introducing themselves, they took me to breakfast at the university dining room. I ordered oatmeal porridge, and seeing a large bowl filled with a white granular material which I thought was sugar, proceeded to spread a very generous amount onto my porridge. When I started to eat I very quickly found that it was salt. Not wanting to let my hosts know my mistake I ate it anyway and declared how delicious it was. I did not make that mistake again.

I was introduced to a young gentleman named Vladimir who had been assigned as my guide, caretaker, translator, almost constant companion and go-to guy for whatever I may need to make my stay comfortable and successful. He had his wife do my laundry.

I was then taken to a hotel (government owned and operated) and was told, "This is where you will stay during your 4-week assignment." The hotel dining

room was not open for dinner that evening so I decided I would go to another hotel a couple of blocks away to dine. There were two women working at the front desk who warned me that it would not be safe to go out of the hotel by myself after dark, and did their very best to block me from doing this. I managed to persuade them that I would be OK and not hold them responsible for whatever may happen to me.

After dinner I walked to a telephone centre, ten blocks away, the only place I could make an international call home to tell Donna that I had arrived safely. Returning to the hotel, I got lost and had to go back to the restaurant to retrace my steps to the hotel, resulting in my returning quite late in



Red Square cathedral and my hotel.

the evening. The women gatekeepers were very concerned and berated me for undertaking such a dangerous mission, saying, “Don’t you know we are responsible for your safety while you are staying here?” to which I responded, “I am very sorry. It will not happen again.”

On Saturday morning, a woman interpreter from the university arrived at the hotel and told me she had been assigned to show me around on Saturday and Sunday and inquired what I would like to do. I informed her that my only request was to attend a Baptist Church on Sunday, other than that plans for the rest of both days would be up to her. On Sunday morning we did attend a Baptist Church – in an unfinished basement of an apartment house.

We had to watch that we did not bump our heads on the heating, water, and sewer pipes that were under the main floor, barely six feet above the sand floor with sheets of plywood supporting the folding chairs that were placed there as pews. The service was interesting and congregation friendly, and open to discussion. The rest of the weekend was spent on a sightseeing tour of various significant historical sites, including a visit to a very large flea

market, which proved to be beneficial in the teaching project I would be undertaking during my time in Izhevsk.



Left: The Central Baptist and Evangelical Church in Moscow. To my knowledge, this was the only Protestant church allowed to stay open during the Communist Bolshevik era. It harboured Baptists, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Anglicans, and Lutherans.

Ready for Work

On Monday morning, Vladimir took me to breakfast at the university dining room before going to the office of the Udmurt University Department of Business, Commerce and Economics. My third surprise came when I was taken into the office of the Dean, where the Dean and about ten professors and staff were present to welcome me with the requisite toast of Vodka or Cognac, as was the customary greeting to a visiting teacher.

My fourth surprise followed when the Dean informed me, “You will be lecturing undergraduate students regarding business principles and practices in North America.”

Not being a product of academia, nor having experience in lecturing at the university level, or at any school level for that matter, I told him, “You must have been misinformed about the purpose of my assignment in Izhevsk, and I must graciously decline this role as I have no experience in lecturing university students.” As I reached into my briefcase for my assignment documents, I added, “My teaching experience and method is to conduct interactive seminars or workshops for business people.”

He was, to say the least, somewhat taken aback and visibly miffed with my response. The assembled professors and staff were terribly shocked (jaws dropping!) that I would have the temerity to advise the Dean that I could not accede to his request. I then informed the Dean, “My understanding from CESO is that my assignment would be to transfer my business experience in the construction and building materials distribution industry to people in similar types of business in Russia, through conducting a series of seminars and workshops.”

He asked “Are you able and will you consent to do this for the undergraduate students at the university?”

I replied, “I will be delighted to try to do so.”

“What help will you need to adapt your teaching materials in order to undertake this task?”

“I would need to have someone translate the handout materials into the Russian language,” I said, “and I would require proficient translators to work with me in the classroom.” Much to the surprise of his colleagues, he agreed with my request. Vladimir was assigned to help me, and we immediately undertook the task.

On the day of presentation to the first class of students, my naivety and inexperience teaching at this level, in this venue, in another culture and language became very apparent. What I did not realize was that the method of teaching at universities in Russia was quite different to that in Canada. For example: The professor would present the lecture, the students were required to take notes, and then go to the library to read and improve their understanding of the lecture materials, as the students had very few textbooks of their own. They were not under any circumstance to enter into any type of discussion or to challenge the professor about his teaching thesis or conclusions nor dare to challenge the professor’s suppositions. Thus, the mindset I had to cope with was that the students would not enter into any discussion nor respond to my questions, therefore, conducting an interactive learning workshop that relied on dialogue and discussion of the material

being presented was totally foreign to them and quite difficult for them comprehend and adapt to my teaching methodology..

Added to this situation, I was working with an 'English to Russian to English' translator who did not know, nor fully understand, the technical terminology of the material I was trying to impart to the students. I therefore had to periodically ask questions of the students to make sure the proper information was being translated in the purest form possible. I was never sure that the students understood what I was telling them. Don't get me wrong, the translators were very competent and good at their tasks, however I was not used to this method of teaching, nor were they.

The Best Laid Plans ...

I had planned a three-day session to present the information to the students. Due to the lack of interactive participation, I finished it in two days, which meant that I had to fill a whole day in some way that would help demonstrate the implementation of the theories I had taught them.

When we started class on the morning of the third day I indicated that we had covered most of the teaching material, and asked, "Would you be interested in doing an exercise in starting a business of your own as entrepreneurs?" All of their hands shot up in agreement.

I then asked, "What type of business do you think we could establish?"

They were slow to respond. Eventually one of them suggested, "Starting a business would not be affordable or appropriate for us considering the amount of capital that would be required, or the lack of a facility." The others agreed.

Then a few students suggested, "We could knit and market sweaters or other apparel." "We could make and sell bread and baked goods." Many more suggestions came forward. Each idea was considered and deemed impractical, either because no one had the expertise to produce these types of products, or it would require a larger size of facility than they could afford.

After a short time encouraging other responses, I pulled my tie out from my sweater and said, "How about making and marketing ties like this one? It will not require a large capital investment and would be easy to manufacture and have a ready market." There was consensus that this may possibly be a good product to start with.

Much discussion ensued as to what would be required in a facility to work from. Some suggested, "We would require a large manufacturing and warehousing facility that would be unaffordable and therefore we would not be able to proceed any further."

I asked, "Do you have any money that you would like to invest into your own business?" Most agreed that they could each possibly come up with some Rubles. We then set to work determining, "How many Rubles can we raise for capital among ourselves from our own resources and how much and where we may be able to acquire more capital?" We arrived at the possibility we could obtain 100,000 Rubles, about \$1,000.00 dollars, from our own resources, family and friends.

I asked, "Do you all have mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts or other family or friends at home or in your community?" They all indicated that they did. "Do they sew clothing for your family and own and use sewing machines?" Again, most agreed they did. I then asked, "If we raise enough capital to purchase the materials and patterns to make ties, do you think they would be willing and able to make the ties in their homes?" When everyone concurred that this could possibly happen, I explained that we had indeed met the criteria for a home-based industry.

"This is known in Canada as a home cottage industry," I explained. "We will consign the materials and patterns to your mothers, grandmothers and their community friends that agree to participate in this business venture. They will cut the material to the patterns we supply and proceed to sew and package the ties, which we will then warehouse, market and deliver to the consumer." We then set about planning where we would operate from and how much space we would require. That settled, we proceeded to develop a business financial and marketing plan that determined pricing for the ties, the method

for marketing, and distribution of our product. They eagerly put forth ideas like: “We can sell them at the flea market every weekend” and “We can contact men’s clothing stores to sell them.” By the end of the class day everyone was participating with great enthusiasm and were asking if they could continue the next day. Unfortunately, that was not an option.

I forgot to mention that the Dean and Professors actually threatened some students with a failing grade for that semester in order to get a sufficient number to participate in this experiment of a new method of class teaching. It turned out that those students who participated became so enthusiastic that the University, the Dean and the staff were very pleased with the outcome. They had little difficulty recruiting students for more seminars and I was subsequently engaged to conduct three more classes over the next three weeks.

Farewell, but not forever

On the completion of my assignment at the university, the dean invited me into his office to tell me how pleased he was with what I had accomplished. He asked, “Do you think everything went well and were you satisfied with the outcome?”

I indicated, “Yes, I was very pleased with the help and cooperation of every one of the staff and the students’ participation, especially with the assistance of the interpreters and Vladimir.” I then had the temerity to suggest: “The washrooms on this floor are not well ventilated, nor are they looked after very well. This was not conducive to the good health of the students and staff.”

To my surprise he agreed with me and said, “I will look into it.” When I returned again a year later they had been totally renovated and were extremely clean and well maintained.

When I was in Moscow, I told Alexander that my wife Donna was a Registered Nurse teaching at the Mohawk College Nursing School at the Brantford General Campus. He was always looking for new CESO assignments that

would mean more financial reward for him, so about two weeks into my assignment he planned a trip to Izhevsk, ostensibly to see how I was making out. He then took me to meet the director of the Izhevsk School of Nursing, and asked me to advise her that my wife, Donna, was a Registered Nurse, who was a nursing teacher in Canada. This ultimately resulted in Donna being offered an assignment teaching Canadian methods of nursing at the nursing school in Izhevsk.



Red Square.

During my free time, I also met with several prominent business people to encourage them to think about inviting other CESO Volunteer Advisors to come to help them in their business, and to possibly do business with Canadian firms.

One of these men invited me and my interpreter to meet with him and his colleagues at his office one evening, to discuss such an undertaking. He sent a car to transport us to his place of business, and when we arrived we had had an in-depth conversation about the pros and cons of how this would benefit his organization, following which he took us into an adjoining room where he had prepared a sumptuous feast in honour of our visit, consisting of many Russian food delicacies, some hot, but mostly traditional cold cuts and salads. Russian hospitality required that each one present propose a toast to the guests with vodka or cognac, and the guest must then respond with an in-kind toast to the host. This kept going for more than an hour as we ate. I tried to match our host drink for drink with a disastrous result.

Just as we were about to say our farewells and leave his office, I felt sick and did not make it to the washroom before I threw up all over the reception room floor. My gracious host came to support me, asked his staff to clean up, and personally took me to my hotel with a whole entourage to make sure I was going to be all right. To demonstrate what a gracious, concerned person

he was, he called the next day to invite me to meet with him once again, without vodka or cognac.

Before I was to leave for my return to Canada, Vladimir invited me to his home to have dinner with his wife and family.

Their home consisted of two rooms in one of the University residences; one large room a bachelor-type suite that was their main living quarters with a kitchenette, dining area and a sitting area with a bed-chesterfield where he and his wife slept. The other room two doors smaller and used as a bedroom and playroom for their two children. The family were most hospitable and generous hosts, and I left with a good feeling about returning soon again.



Vladimir and family.

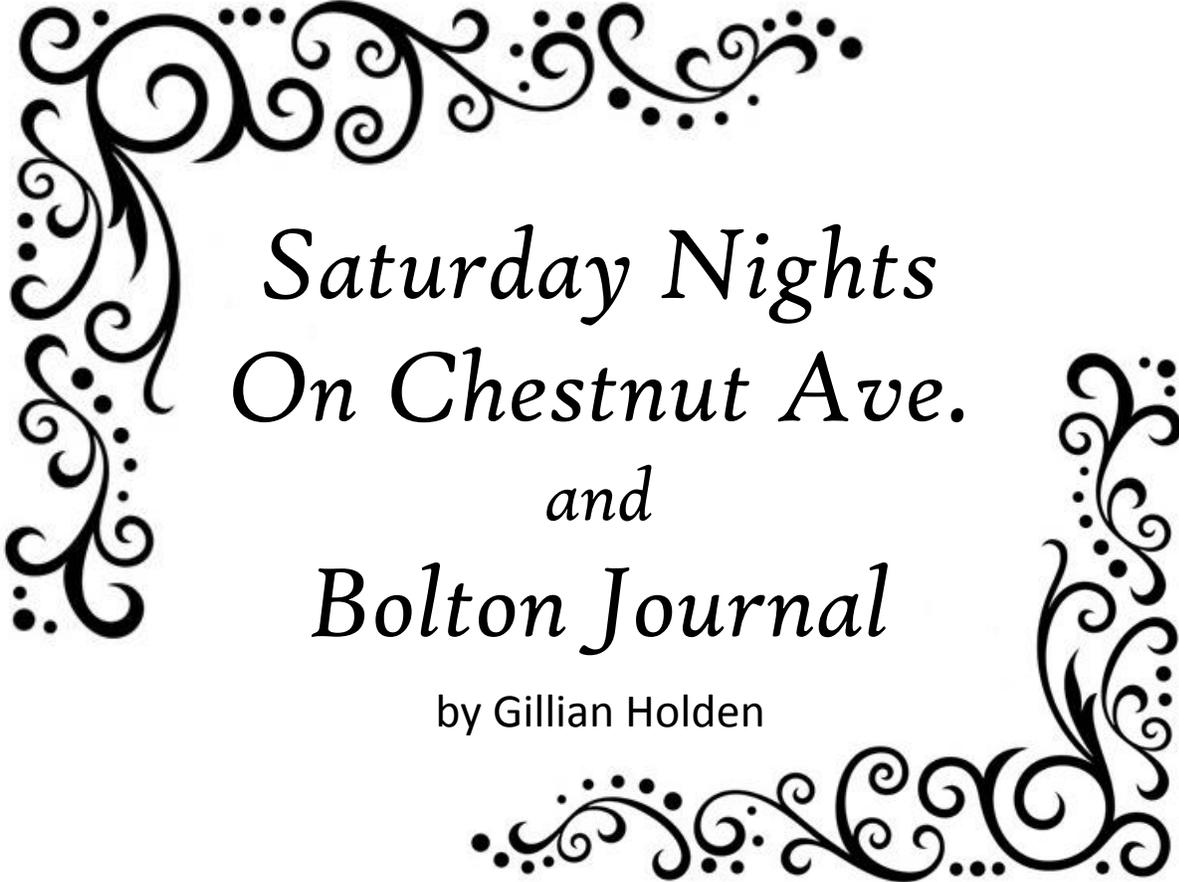
When I arrived home, Donna told me she had decided to retire from work at the hospital and had applied to join CESO as a VA. She was accepted, which meant that we could undertake simultaneous assignments, she teaching nursing and I business planning. This led to many other surprises for both of us on subsequent assignment trips to Russia, Slovakia, Romania and Guyana. But those are stories for another time.

About the Author



Donna and I are very proud of the tremendous progress and accomplishments that Cystic Fibrosis Canada has made, since the momentous occasion when we met with doctors at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children in March 1958. The shocking, life-changing diagnosis we heard that day, led to the formation of what has become a great world renowned children's medical health organization.

We thank God that we have lived long enough to see and participate in this fantastic adventure that has helped so many children in Canada and throughout the world.

A decorative border of black scrollwork and dots surrounds the title text. The scrollwork is intricate, with swirls and small circles, framing the text on the left, right, and bottom sides.

*Saturday Nights
On Chestnut Ave.
and
Bolton Journal*

by Gillian Holden

Saturday Nights on Chestnut Ave.

Minus 30. A usual January night.

Eight o'clock. A usual Saturday night.

The cold and the snow never stopped us. Off we would go to the neighbours to sing, dance, catch up, and eat.

In the winter months our friends and neighbours took turns entertaining in each other's homes for a Saturday night get-together. No one even thought of babysitters back then. All us kids went along, bundled up in our coats and scarves over top of pyjamas, read for bed and the long walk home.

We would set off walking to our neighbours, Hazel and Abe. My dad carried his saw horses so Abe could put an old pine door over them and set up an extra food table. I carried my doll and a game in my bag to share with the other kids, if we weren't whooping it up. My mom carried my dad's beer, his darts, and whatever food she had made for the late supper.

Hazel, Abe, and their four kids lived in a Brantford cottage. When I think back I wonder how it held everyone and took the Saturday night beating it did. The Quebec heater stood solid in the centre of the living room and that produced the heat for the whole house. As everyone arrive all coats, hats, and scarves were piled sky high on Hazel's bed.

The other main feature in the living room was the piano. Abe's piano. Abe could bang out a tune like no one's business. He also played the accordion and the mouth organ. I loved it when he played "I'll be Down to Get You in a Taxi, Honey."

He also played good ole foot-stomping music and he loved to clog. Prior to all of us arriving, Abe would place two sheets of plywood on the floor so we could stomp too. I remember one night we danced so hard, the stovepipe came away from the wall. There was soot everywhere! The men used a coat-hanger and strung it back into place and we kept on dancing.

Abe had a dartboard on the back of the kitchen door which led to the closed-in back porch. My dad, being from England, loved a game of darts. We kids would run by every so often looking for a place to hide (as we were playing hide 'n seek) and someone would bellow, "Damn kids! Don't run in front of the dartboard!" ... with good reason, I might add. Unfortunately one night as Hazel was bringing in the food from the porch, a dart pierced her toe right through her moccasins. My dad soaked, disinfected, and bandaged her foot – and the dart game went on.

Abe was the culprit. No more clogging for Hazel for a while. Beer was flowing. It was kept in snow in galvanized tubs in the yard, just outside the back door. All the food was kept in Hazel's closed-in porch just off the kitchen. It was freezing in there. When it was time to eat, the women

would carry in the food to be heated. Hazel would place a bright gingham cloth over the pine door table and the food would be placed on it alongside the cutlery and plates. There was so much food. We had sandwiches, casseroles, cheese and crackers, pies, and of course my mother's famous sausage rolls.

The party just seemed to go on and on until us kids started to dwindle and someone packed us into the big pile of coats. I don't think I could tell you the time if you asked.

I remember my dad waking me up from my winter coat cocoon, so snug and warm. Oh, just the thought of going out into the cold air and walking home.

My own bed wouldn't be nearly as warm.

Saturday nights were very social.

Good friends. Good food. Good times.

Author's Note: The following story is a work based on and in memory of true events. After looking through many photos, listening to stories from parents and their friends, I wanted to try and imagine just what VE Day would have been like in Bolton, Lancashire. I hope you enjoy it.

Bolton Journal

May 9th 1945

VE Day

TEARS ... LAUGHTER ... RELIEF ... FREEDOM

The people of Bolton, Lancashire rejoiced yesterday. Here is how broadcaster Jack Burnley reported it live, from his perch at the top of the Bolton Town Hall.

It is May 8th, 1945. I am standing on scaffolding on the rooftop of the Bolton Town Hall in Victoria Square today. VE Day. Tears, laughter, relief, freedom. If ever there was a time for the saying "Action speaks louder than words", this is the day. There is not an inch of pavement showing due to the vast crowds. It is difficult to hear over all the cheering.

What a beautiful sight, though. Over to my right I can see the word VICTORY in bold, white letters painted along Deansgate Road. Marvelous! A jeep is just coasting by me overloaded with soldiers and ATS girls, waving their Union Jacks and singing at the top of their lungs. Right behind them are six RAMC servicemen marching along in perfect step.

Minnie Duckworth has set up a small booth on the steps below me. I can only see the top of her head as she is totally surrounded with Union Jacks. As everyone passes she hands them a flag. Old Jack

Higgingbottom is beside her sobbing with happiness and relief, shaking hands with everyone he can. It is a sea of red, white, and blue.

Two conga lines, looking like a kaleidoscope, made up of townsfolk and soldiers surround the town hall. One circle dances clockwise, the other counter clockwise.

If I look forward and slightly to my left, I can see hundreds, maybe thousands of servicemen, Navy, Army, RAF, marching down Bridge Street in perfect formation, towards the Palais. Crowds of cheering people are lined down either side of the street, some saluting, some throwing confetti and streamers; the rest waving their flags. What a homecoming. There is obviously going to be a 'reet good do' at the Palais tonight.

From up here to my left, I am able to see down many of the residential areas. Crompton Road, Brief Street, Tongemoor and more. Every street has tables lined up the center of the roads, laden down with fairy cakes and whatever else rations will allow. There are thousands of children with their party hats on, their mothers, aunts and grandmothers singing out and dancing around the tables. Bunting can be seen for miles attached crisscross from rooftop to rooftop of every house.

Eigh-up! What's this? Straight ahead, coming right towards me, linking arms, twelve across are hundreds of Bolton lassies and shopgirls sashaying right along. They do look happy.

Here and there amongst all the din, tucked in the odd doorway, couples are relaxed in each other's arms, kissing, swaying back and forth.

I am just going to turn around to see what is going on behind me. Here comes Harry Thornley's Stout and Ale lorry just pulling around the fountain. It is jammed to the rails with soldiers and landgirls all making the 'victory' sign as they pass by. You can't see the top of their heads for confetti.

The strongest smell up here is one of familiarity. Fish and chips. Everyone I see has a newspaper cone filled with a penneth worth of chips. Maybe someone will bring me one. I can see by the children's faces, wreathed in smiles, the chips must be good.

It is well past teatime and a dear lady has brought me summat t'eat. God bless you, love.

Over at the Marks and Sparks shop a double decker bus has come to a standstill. Some soldiers have climbed up onto the window ledges to get a good view of the celebrations. I think the Bobbies have adapted to 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.' They are doing a little jig around the bus. People are stacked four and five high on the bus. From up here it looks like a three-tiered wedding cake.

The celebrations have not abated. It is loud and happy and sad, all at the same time. The sound of freedom.

Darkness has just started to settle in around us and for the first time in years, the town hall clock is glowing. The town square is lit up like fairyland. Townfolk are carrying candles and lanterns. A perfect 'V' of lights enhances the front of the town hall. The clock has just struck eight o'clock. People are swaying and singing along with Vera Lynn to 'When the lights go on again, all over the world'.

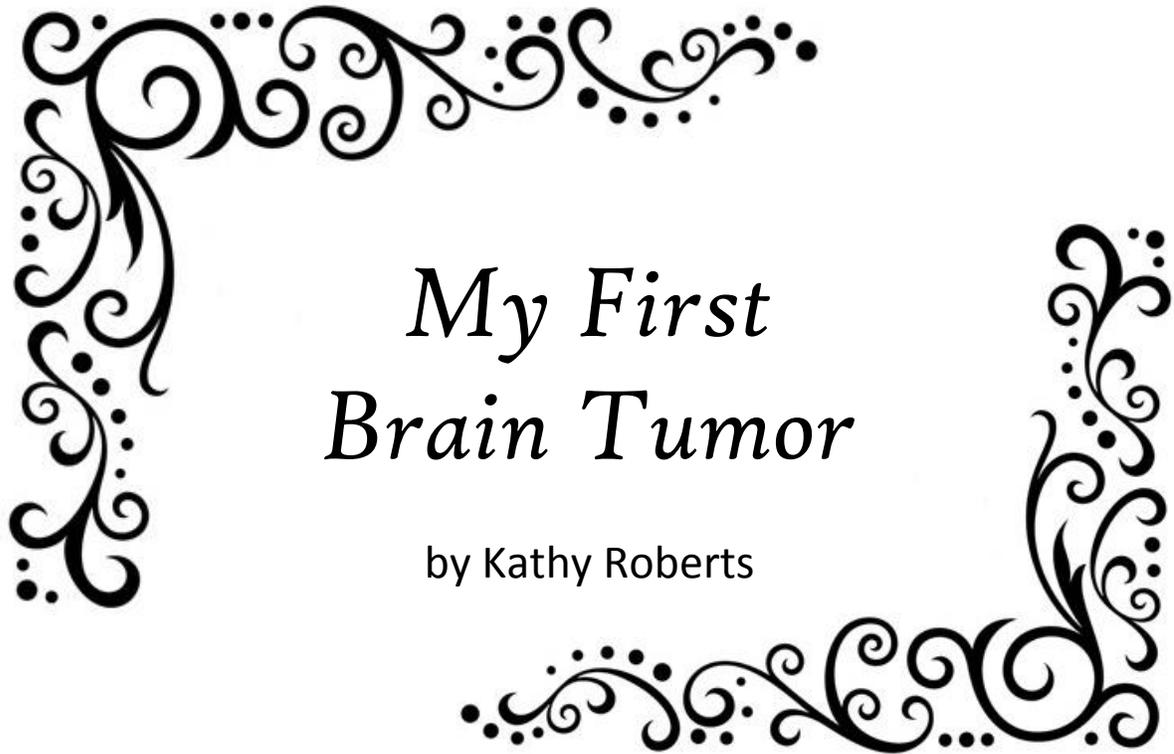
It has been an emotional yet glorious day and I am absolutely certain the same celebrations are going on in every village, town, and city from east to west, from north to south, right across Great Britain. The healing and rebuilding will start tomorrow.

This is Jack Burnley signing off 'til we meet again.

About the Author

Hi. My name is Gillian Holden. I have been writing poetry and journals for about 60 years. It is time to put pen to paper and write a story. My hobbies are scrapbooking, genealogy, card-making, sewing children's jackets, and writing class.

There are not enough hours in a day.

A decorative border of black scrollwork and dots surrounds the title and author information. The scrollwork is intricate, with swirls and small circles, framing the text in a classic, elegant style.

My First Brain Tumor

by Kathy Roberts

When I was fourteen, I complained about headaches. The doctor dismissed it as “woman problems”. He prescribed 222s with Codeine.

Eventually I had taken too many of them. “The room is spinning,” I said to my Mum.

“You should stop taking those pills,” she answered. “You’re probably allergic to the codeine.”

When I was sixteen, my friend Maureen and I took the bus into town to watch a show. “Why are you covering one eye to watch?” she asked.

“I see double if I don’t.”

“That’s not right. You should see a doctor.”

When I was eighteen, I was an active member of the track team, and on one track meet in Toronto, our coach noticed that I wasn't well and called home.

When I got back to Sudbury, Dad pulled some strings and got me an appointment with a specialist within the hour. He was minding the store (in town), so it was Mum to the rescue. She picked me up at School and drove me into town to meet with the doctor.

Barium Swallow

After some preliminary questions and basic tests, the doctor handed me a little paper cup with what appeared to be a quarter cup of thick silver liquid. It looked like the mercury we used in our science labs.

"What's this?" I asked.

"A Barium Swallow. Down the hatch."

"Will I die?"

"No, of course not. I can't guarantee the outcome of the test, but this won't hurt you."

That scared the crap out of me. Sure I wanted the pain to stop but I also didn't want to die.

I looked at it suspiciously, but he repeated, "Just drink it."

It tasted metallic. It was room temperature in my mouth but it got warmer as it travelled down and I had no control over it. That was scary and I began to worry.

Whatever was wrong with me, I knew it was serious. All this technology stuff, frightened me. After the test, the doctor left the room. Mum and I were left to wait for the results. I was patient for the first few minutes, then I let fear creep in. It quickly doubled in size and strength. FEAR loomed, time crawled.

Every one minute seemed to drag out to cover the span of five. I started to panic.

What was going to happen? What if they couldn't do anything? What if my life was over and all I could do now was wait for it to slowly peter out?

What if I died? What if, what if, what if?

The more I worried, the less logically I thought. A few years earlier, I'd started have a recurring nightmare. Every once in a while the dream came back. It started with a large white snowball with arms and legs sticking out. The snowball had already begun rolling down the hill. As it rolled over and over, it gathered snow and got louder. The last picture I saw of it was that it had grown to five feet in diameter. The noise was deafening and it wasn't even at the bottom yet. And now FEAR really was snowballing to become sheer terror!

Twenty agonizing minutes later, the doctor returned. "It's a benign tumor on the cerebellum."

"Can you do anything about it?" I asked.

"Yes. We can operate." My mind zeroed in on that "Yes". I really didn't hear or care about the second part of that sentence. I was just so relieved that they could actually do something and the pain would stop.

Later, I thought ... *hmm ... I've never been in the hospital – that'll be a new experience.*

Hospital

"Pre-Op" is a lot different today, but in 1972 the approach was to shave my entire head. Somehow Mum managed to talk them into only shaving the back half.

When I woke up after the operation, I was groggy and had a hard time breathing. My airways seemed to be clogged with phlegm. My pillow was soaked with drool.

Mum could tell that something was terribly wrong by my uneven and labored breath. She went out into the hall and got a nurse. The nurse replaced my soggy pillow and covered the new one with a towel.

Oh, the mood swings. They were awful. So total and so ... so utterly depressing. One minute I was feeling like my old self on the outside and the next minute my mind was thrown into a bleak abyss. The staff was not trained to handle me. They put me in a straightjacket at night.

The feeling of being all bound up – thoroughly restricted – I hated it. My spirit is often just naturally rebellious, but this tipped me over the edge. As far as I was concerned, no force on earth was going to keep me down. I worked myself out of the straightjacket and ripped out the IV.

Both sides of the bed were up and I felt safe but exhausted. I went to sleep.

This happened the next night too. Only this time the straightjacket was tied a bit tighter. It took more effort but I got out, ripped out the IV and went back to sleep.

I don't recall a chain between my legs, so it was probably just a restraining jacket. Same idea though – elongated arms that crossed in the front and tied behind my back.

When I got moved out of the ICU, I was still acting badly.

One of the nurses thought to give me a backrub. That soothed me. Soon the word was out and I was regularly offered the best of backrubs. They'd ask me to roll over. I remember eagerly turning over and hiking up my gown. They squirted hand cream on and massaged it in. Mmm I could just feel my skin relax under their touch. Some nurses were ever so good at it.

One night, I commented on a nurse's pretty white sweater.

“Do you like it?” she asked. “I just got it. It’s so soft.”

She came closer. I reached out to touch it. It WAS soft. Just then I began to hallucinate and thought it was fastened up the center with that new-fangled Velcro that I’d heard about. I ripped it right up the middle.

That’s the thing about hallucinating. One minute you’re thinking quite sanely, even being nice to someone and then suddenly something happens. Your brain misfires or a valve gets shut and then what you perceive is not reality at all.

And it has all happened so slowly and subtly that you are deceived and not even aware of the change.

Home

When I got home, my sister Dena rubbed my back for me. Her twelve year old hands couldn’t cover as large an area, but her actions were full of so much more love.

My clothes hung off me. I had dropped from 125 pounds to 90 pounds while I was in the hospital and it had continued at home. I couldn’t keep anything down.

Every meal just came right back up.

To try to make it less upsetting for everyone, Mum served me dinner in my bed. She tempted me with soft boiled eggs. The wooden egg holders were painted with smiling faces that had large eyes and tiny mouths. Mum would butter a slice of white bread too, cutting off the crusts and then quartering it. She tried to make it appealing ... and it worked. It seemed to be the only thing that I was able to keep down.

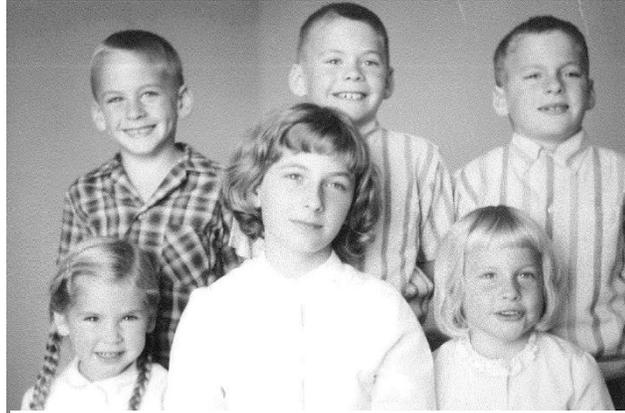
Every night, I would ask about my siblings.

“Mum, where is everyone? Ken?”

“Out with friends.”

“Bill?”

“Over at Marcel’s. I think they’re listening to a new album that Marcel got.”



Back row: David (7), Ken (9), Bill (8).

Front row: Lisa (3¾), Kathy (11), Dina (5).

“David?”

“Outside playing with friends.”

“Dena and Lisa?”

“Watching TV. And your Father is at the Pet Shop.”

It’s surprising how cold your head gets when you have no hair. Starting in the hospital, I wore a kerchief that was royal blue with tiny white polka dots. The right tie was six inches long. A few months earlier, I had been impatient and ripped apart a knot. The left side had broken off at the one inch mark. But it served the purpose.

School

When I returned to school, I kept wearing the kerchief, hoping that it looked cute. The year before, I had worn a blue beaded head band with my hair parted down the middle and long braids on either side. One of the teachers said that I looked like a blonde Pocahontas. A different style headdress from me wasn’t totally out of character.

I seem to remember putting my head down on my desk and falling asleep often in class, but no-one said anything – not teachers or classmates.

Moods were beginning to settle down, but still continued to bounce from total bleakness to bored apathy to excited social interaction.

All my poetry reflected this same bleak outlook.

Deers

*It had been a good summer
There was an overabundance.
They would die in the winter.*

*It's odd though,
Why she hadn't killed them all.*

*They weren't chosen – the ones that survived.
Or were they?*

(Interesting note – this dark side only came out in English class where I was encouraged to explore my feelings.)

My Mum and my best friend were worried by my dark moods. They decided to keep a close eye on me (Mum refers to it as a “suicide watch”. I didn't find out about that for several years later.)

Finally Mum got me in to see a psychologist. I was full of fear and anxiety. I think the only way she got me to agree to go to see him was that his office was NOT on the same floor as the hospital wards.

Even in the car on the way there, I needed constant reassurance from Mum that she wasn't going to leave me there.

For the first appointment we saw him together. Then as I got more comfortable, I began to see him by myself.

One week I complained that Mum was stifling me. She wouldn't let me do anything. The next week I complained that she didn't love me any more 'cuz she wouldn't do anything for me.

(Poor Mum, damned if you do and damned if you don't.)

To help with the weight loss the psychologist suggested that I drink "stout". I tried one bottle. As far as I was concerned, it just tasted like thick, warm beer – yuck!

Stratford

To celebrate grade twelve, our class went to the Stratford Festival. We stopped at Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, and also at Kleinberg to see the art of the Group of Seven. To this day, those are some of my favourites.

I don't know why (maybe we were being rebellious or maybe it just sounded like a good idea at the time), but Marian and I snuck into the boys room after curfew. When the teachers came, we hid in the closet ... and of course we got busted and banned from the trip the following year.

A few months later, Marian talked her boyfriend and his friend into driving us down to Stratford.

We drove all night and arrived there at 6:00 am. We pitched our tent while other campers were just getting up. When I did wake (close to noon), I ate an entire bag of oranges myself.

Afterwards the four of us played in the park and then went to the theatre.

The friend was from North Bay. I offered to go back to the Bay with him. Poor guy, must've thought I was nuts. I'd just met him. I think we'd held hands but nothing more. Fortunately he said no.

(In retrospect that was probably just my attempt at running away from my own head. That horrible depression and those unnerving and unpredictable mood swings!)

Simple but elegant

It was all about the dress. Or was it all about the hair? Actually, I think it was all about making me feel good.

The dress was self-made. In those days I sewed all my fancy dresses. I wore a “Miss, size 12” pattern and so that’s what I had made. Unfortunately I’d lost so much weight that the dress didn’t fit very well. I remember having to really puff out my chest to try to make it look like I filled it out even a little bit.

It was simple in design. The dress was sleeveless with a low scoop neck accented by a plain ruffle of the same material. The midriff was a straight band, also of the same material. The fabric was some kind of polyester. It was a light turquoise pastel print. It had the occasional big white flower but also Chinese fans and green brush strokes representing stems or tapered leaves. It was my Grade 12 graduation, so of course the dress went to the floor.

The front of my honey coloured hair was parted in the middle and draped over my ears. Mum had bought me a “fall” (hair piece) to cover-up the back of my head. The colour matched perfectly. Loose curls cascaded onto my shoulders.

I was wearing my most special charm bracelet from my Grandmother. It was real gold. Each of the charms had their own special story. If you turned the dial plate on the old-fashioned phone the letters lined up to spell *I love U*. If you turned the crank on the bottom of the tiny weather house a little man or a little woman came out to signify good weather or bad weather. There was a jet plane because Grandma loved to travel. An old fashioned sewing machine represented her love for sewing. There was a rectangular camera (that opened so that you could hide notes in it) because Grandma had really got into photography and was quite good. There was a set of rotary egg-beaters that actually turned because she loved to cook.



*Kathy, grade 12 graduation.
June 1972*

There was a wine goblet because she enjoyed a glass of wine while she cooked.

To complete the jewelry, I was wearing a simple chain with a hoop on it. It'd be gold to match the bracelet – though not real gold like the treasure from Grandma.

I remember that I already had a pair of white day-to-day sling backs with a 1¼” chunky, square heel and wide, horizontal straps. I remember thinking, *Oh well, they'll have to do*. But Mum insisted that we go shopping and we buy a new pair. The ones we chose had narrow straps that spread out from the top of the arch in a spider-like design. The heel wasn't quite as high (1”) and it was tapered – definitely daintier and prettier.

At Mum's suggestion I picked out a white knit shawl. Mum crocheted a little white drop-string bag to match. She had done everything to make me look beautiful. I sure felt like a princess that day.

To my mind today, I look back at this turbulent time and note all those tender touches. Backrubs, hair pieces, bracelets – all messages of love sent through God's angel/agents.

Follow-up

When I was twenty, the headaches returned. While I was at home in Sudbury for Thanksgiving, doctors performed an angiogram (making a 1½” incision on the inside of my elbow to insert some dye, which they followed as it traveled through my body). It showed “normal”.

At Christmas, I was again home for the holiday. I remember falling off my shoes (2” wedges heels). Friends teased that I'd had too much to drink – but we hadn't gone out yet. I blamed the shoes.

A week later I returned to school.

One Friday afternoon, my girlfriend and I stayed after class to talk to the teacher. The class was called Abnormal Psychology and I felt that I had many of the symptoms he had just described (apathy being the most predominant). My girlfriend suggested that we call another teacher who was also a nurse.

After talking with her, my life changed forever.

About the Author

Like all of us, there have been many experiences in my life. I hope to compile a book documenting some of them. This memoir is but one. It helps to set the stage for my second brain tumor, which left me physically disabled.

I am the oldest of six children. We lived all over Southern Ontario before moving to Northern Ontario. Now I live in Brantford. I enjoy challenges in different writing forms which include memoirs, Bible Stories for Children and unusual poetry forms. I appreciate folk and classical music, live theatre and art galleries.

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*When Paul Went
to the
Blue Jays Game*

by Paul Benoit

In July 2015 I went to a Blue Jays game in Toronto at the Rogers Centre.

It was my third Blue Jays game and my first time on the Go Train. I went with Doreen and a couple of people from Bell Lane. We took the Bell Lane bus and caught the Go Train in Hamilton. It was a little hard to find the station but after a while we found it.

It was a 4:00 pm game time. During the game it started raining and they had to close the dome.

I ate pizza at the game and it was good. I also bought myself a Blue Jays t-shirt.



Official Blue Jays Jersey.

The Blue Jays were playing the Cleveland Indians that day, and the Blue Jays won! It was the first time I'd gone to a game and seen the Jays win. The score was 5-3.

I was very happy.

After the game we had to wait a while for the Go Train to come. The train was very busy and we didn't get home until 1:00 am. I was tired, but it was a great day!

About the Author



My name is Paul Benoit and I have lived in Brantford, Ontario for about nine years now. I enjoy playing video games, drawing, and going to the movies. I was born and raised in Quebec.



*The Old
Grand Piano
and the
Power of Music*

by Ron Sutherland



The Old Piano was young once. Probably it was when Queen Victoria was on her throne.

The Bird family lived in the upper part of the City of London, England. Mr. Bird worked in the city, on the city council, and Mrs. Bird looked after their large house. She also had three children, two girls and a boy.

It may have happened like this:

One day, when Violet was very young and her brother and sister were asleep with the nanny, Violet and her mum took the family coach into the city and went into a large music store.

“Violet,” her mother said, “we should find a new piano for you and your sister and brother to learn to play. I have an old one I learned to play on and I have enjoyed all my life, but you should have a new one. Besides, playing duets, or the four of us on two pianos later on, will be fun.”

They looked all around the store. I imagine they looked at grand pianos from Germany, Italy, Spain, England of course, and possibly North America. They may even have looked at harpsichords, spinets, and some other instruments. But her mother decided that a large grand piano would be the best instrument for her children to learn on.

Several days later the new grand piano was delivered and placed in the bay window of their large drawing room. It was here that my mother, Violet, practiced her piano lessons with her brother and sister. Violet loved playing the piano. She even learned to play the church organ and used to play well. Eventually Mr. and Mrs. Bird retired. They moved to their Edwardian summer home by the sea in St. Leonard’s on the south coast of England and the grand piano went with them.

Then the Second World War started. Mr. and Mrs. Bird were getting frail, so Violet went to help them. I was about seven and my sister must have been about five and we went with Mum. The house was the largest we had been in and there in their large living room was the beautiful black grand piano. I always wondered what it sounded like. Mother may have played it after we had gone to bed, but I do not remember hearing it being played.

A year or two later I came home from boarding school for the Christmas holidays to find Mother in a large old farm house full of “Churchill’s Children”. She and a team of local young ladies worked all day looking after the children. This house was in the Weald countryside of England, and there in the living room was the large grand piano. This time, after all the children were in bed and the house was quiet, Mum, my sister, and I would sing songs and hymns – Hymn Sing, we called it later. Then when Sis and I were in bed and presumed asleep, Mum would play more hymns and classical pieces. But I was listening and enjoying her concerts.

After a few years we moved again, this time to Oakleigh, a 50-acre estate with a large house with many rooms. Mum said there were 100 windows in it, and she knew this because they had to be painted. Here again was the large old grand piano but I never heard it played again. My sister told me, though, that Mum continued to play it herself when alone, and even had a little house made in the garden to keep it in and play it. This was when she had to sell the large house and move into the small gate house.

My sister and I left home for college and the world. Mother had found work elsewhere and she could not take the old grand piano with her.

She tried to give it to her church but it was too big. I still find it hard to believe, but my sister told me that she took it into the garden, burned it to cinders and took the remains to the dump.

I am retired now and have been taking a look back over my life. What did I learn from Mother playing that old grand piano, so many years ago? The answer is more than I ever thought possible.

First, I have always loved singing in choirs, starting with the school choir (until my voice broke). Later I sang in at least two Billy Graham choirs, and I have since sung in several church choirs, where I still enjoy singing.

Then one day we bought my wife an accordion and I enjoyed hearing her play. About the same time we were getting coffee in a hospital cafeteria, waiting for an appointment, and found a gentleman playing classical and semi-classical music on a large grand piano. I really enjoyed listening and it brought back memories of Mother's old grand piano and her playing.

Mother did try to have me learn to play music. I had several music teachers who tried to teach me, first piano and then violin, clarinet, and even the chanter for the bagpipes. But they all failed, mostly because the teachers seemed unenthusiastic and I did not have enough uninterrupted time. I wish now that Mum had tried with her grand piano. I think she could have done it.

Anyway, I have a piano teacher now who had his own band for many years and also has classical training. I like to do my lessons even if they do get

difficult. I wish I had started sooner, but somehow I did not have the time or the inclination.

It helps to have a special teacher who loves teaching and music. He has been helping me find and play the music Mother used to play.

One day I found a sheet of music Mother gave me: "The Lord's My Shepherd." I also remembered other tunes and hymns I wanted to learn. At last I am enjoying learning to play the piano, and finding so much music that I had thought I lost.



A grand piano, much like Mother's.

Photo: © Steinway & Sons

There was a third thing mother and her old grand piano gave me, which I did not realize for a very long time. I felt her faith in God and it slowly started me on

my own faith journey. I knew she had been a medical missionary in both India and Palestine, but we never talked about why she went and very little about what she did there. I seldom went to Church with her. I was baptized as an infant, with water from the river Jordan she had specially kept for the purpose.

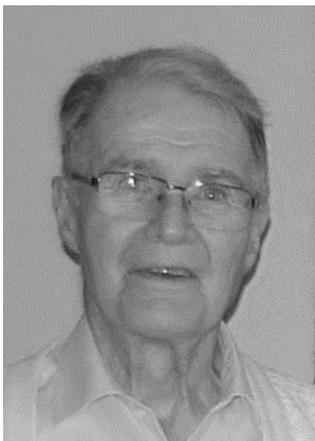
I remember the words to those hymns, "The Lord is my Shepherd" especially, which she played with different tunes and word arrangements. Later I found these words came from the book of Psalms in the Old Testament and learned that King David probably wrote them. Another hymn she played was "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so ..." This is so nicely explained in several places in the four gospels in the New Testament, how Jesus went to the cross because he loved us so much.

It took other people to show me that, to grow in my Christian Life, “You must be born again,” as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. He was a Rabbi and should have known. Holman Hunt’s beautiful picture of *Christ standing at the door and knocking*, shows in a different way how Christ wishes to be invited into your life, as John explains in Revelations 3:20.

I have found other gifts Mother and her Piano gave me, and I do not think she ever realized that she gave me these gifts. My love of nature and science started with her love of the hymn “All things bright and beautiful.”

I wonder what else there is?

About the Author



I grew up in the South of England during the Second World War. After the war I was fortunate enough to see several European countries, and traveled to several other places before arriving in Canada in 1959. Here I met a wonderful lady who eventually became my wife. We have enjoyed life together ever since. We have lived in several places in Ontario and have taken a travel trailer from coast to coast of Canada. In 2009 we arrived in Brantford to be close to our daughter and her family. Fortunately this also makes us closer to my sister’s family, who live in southern Ontario. We enjoy living in suburbia where we can read, write and garden all we like.

The Bible College

by Sharon Barnes

In August 15, 1966 my family and I were suddenly yanked out of our quiet secure world to find ourselves without a father, husband, or source of income. The worst part was the lack of emotional support. We all hung from fine threads just waiting for them to break, and they did. It was the hardest on my mother who had always been emotionally fragile.

Eighteen months after Dad's death mother remarried and moved far up north, further straining our fragmented family. Not all of us went with her. I did. I was only seventeen and I was not in school nor was I working. I was in limbo; that did not sit well with my step-father who quickly formed a critical opinion of me. I found myself unwelcomed in his house, not only by him but also by my own mother. My only option was to go to Woodstock with my boyfriend.



Sharon at age 17.

There we boarded with his sister and her family, who rented the lower part of a large country two story house that was aptly named, “The Bible College.” It was once a home for ministers and students of the ministry. Built onto the front of the downstairs apartment was a large classroom that became a great place for Mary’s three children to play in bad weather. It was also a great place to serve Christmas dinner for her in laws – all thirty of them.

Thinking back, I realize when D and I descended upon his sister’s family they thought I was there for a short visit, but that visit lasted a year. I had nowhere else to go. It must have put an incredible strain on Mary. I, being so introverted, made it hard for her and I to become friends or even be comfortable with each other, so I knew she couldn’t wait for me to move out.

Despite our inability to form a warm friendship, we did become a united force against some nasty intruders. The building sat on the ground surrounded by tall grass, making it a perfect environment for snakes. At first I was shocked at their size. They were too thick to wrap my hand around and five to six feet long. A few times, I caught one off guard, curled up in the grass, with its head high in the air hissing and shaking its tail. I was never sure if any of them were poisonous. Mary and I dealt with these creepy crawlies, who found their way inside the house in the evenings when we were alone. Our reaction was to grab the largest knives and chop at them. It didn’t have an effect on the snakes except to scare them into slithering back under the house until they were brave enough to come out again.



I found my first job in Woodstock at the downtown Woolworths store. I walked there every day except for rare offers of a ride. The distance from the Bible College to town was three miles. Half a mile of that walk was along a country lane that bordered a gone-to-ruin apple orchard. Feeling lost and alone, that stretch of walk

Photo: © maryswritingnook.blogspot.com

became my time to daydream and make up a world where I was safe and happy. Happy was not something I was in real life. Added to my despondency was the realization that I was in an abusive, selfish relationship and I had no idea how to get out of it. I became attached to him because he was handsome, and I felt abandoned and desperate. I didn't want to go back to my mother, nor did I think that was an option.

Although my experience living with D's sister was generally a strained one, there were a few times when we bonded, and one such time was on a bright winter day. We bundled up in layers of clothes to go rabbit hunting with the men. We were so overly dressed we couldn't keep up; we kept falling over in the knee-deep snow in fits of laughter. Not one of us was much of a threat to any creature. One lush white rabbit waited for the perfect moment to hop across the field, just when the men were too far ahead to notice, let alone take a shot at it.



My sister Mary.

Mary didn't win any awards for her housekeeping, yet at the same time, I was discovering I was a perfectionist. She was a great cook though and that more than made up for being a slob. She taught me far more than my mother ever did. Mary's husband and D did nothing domestic except eat. Household tasks that one typically leaves for men, such as disposing of the garbage, simply didn't get done, and that became a big problem. Of course, it wouldn't have if either of them had brought it to the dump each week. They took the lazy way out by letting it pile up in the classroom, until it grew maggots that started falling from the ceiling. Their second solution was to store it in a grassy area only a few hundred yards away from the house. It attracted mice, rats and more snakes. Rats began to find their way into the house, and Ray's brilliant solution was to sit in the kitchen all night with a rifle aimed at the lower cupboard ready to shoot one down. It was a ridiculous solution to a serious problem. I wonder why we put up with those men!

Two different families rented the upper apartment while I was living there. The first couple was bold, racy, and out spoken. I didn't like them, and I liked them less when the woman, I shall name C, thought I needed to look older

and sexy for an up-coming dance. She took it upon herself to set- up hair appointments for us and gave the stylist instructions to do my hair a certain way despite my objections. I felt cross, and when I got back home I undid all the work the stylist had done. C was furious enough to holler at me and tell me I needed to grow up, or some such thing. She was right of course; I did need to grow up. After all I was only eighteen. But I insisted on growing up on my terms. I may have been shy but I was not easily intimidated, nor was I going to let someone dictate my life or my style.

That couple knew no boundaries to fun and on one hot summer day their fun turned into a water fight. It started with a spray and a splash and ended with buckets thrown at each other. I wasn't impressed and I wanted to stay out of it, but Mary eventually poured a pail over me. I must have seemed like party pooper that day, but I hadn't told anyone I had just gotten fired from my job at Woolworths— my very first job.

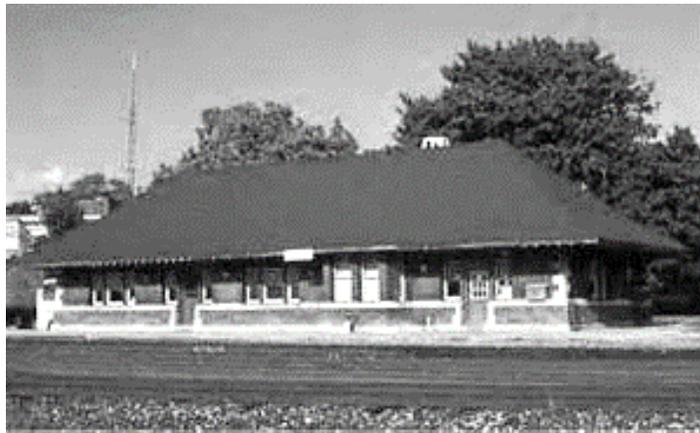
That same couple encouraged us to play poker for money. They were experienced in the game, and I presume they thought it would be easy cash. I had never played poker in my life, but I was blessed with beginners luck, and I would win hand after hand. If it wasn't myself winning it was D. Feeling like fools the couple's initial playful mood turned to anger and the atmosphere grew seriously tense, especially when they began losing whole week's wages to D. I stopped playing altogether. I knew the situation was heading for a fight. D hung in and continued to win. Eventually the couple's friendship with Mary and Ray went sour and they moved out. Thankfully, the new family that moved in were more mature and a better influence on all of us.

During that year in Woodstock I realized I needed to go back to school and make a career for myself, but finding a way to make that happen proved to be impossible. Not once during that year was I invited to return to New Liskeard and be part of my mother's new family. I also knew my welcome in Mary's home had worn out. With nowhere to go, I convinced D to move into an apartment with me. At least he had a job and could pay the rent. He wasn't what I wanted in a partner; staying with him went against my better judgement.

Life threw hard balls and it threw them with sharp curves. Just when D and I were settling into our new place we got news that my mother, step father, sister and brothers were in a fatal car accident on highway seventeen between North Bay and Sudbury. It was fatal for my step-father, and in a way, fatal for my mother, because she was never the same. In a state of shock we drove to New Liskeard to plan the funeral, settle the finances, and generally stand watch over the house so greedy relatives wouldn't walk away with anything valuable.

I remember that year living at the "Bible College" with mixed emotions. It was the start of a great many things. It was the start of my adult life with a husband and family. Living in Woodstock led me to Brantford where I have lived for the last forty-seven years. I will always have a soft spot in my heart for Woodstock, and I have gone back, over the years, to look at the big house. It's gone now. They have ploughed it all down and turned the land into a golf course.

*Right: Moving to
Brantford! Leaving from
the Woodstock Railway
Station.*



In my mind's eye, I can still see the charming plantation style building standing on a hill, and the long country lane leading up to it. The barn is only a few hundred feet away, and it's filled with bundles of yellow hay ... waiting. The pale tall grass gently shifts back and forth in the wind making a hushing sound. Behind the house is a half-mile tractor path with cream colour wheat growing on one side, a meadow on the other, and just beyond it ran a shaded creek. At the end of the tractor path is a dirt packed county road. Along it is a cattle farmer's barbed fence and inside is a lone bull, watching, snorting and following with keen interest. To the bull, the fence is more of a seductive invitation than a barrier. Night in the country is black except for the glint of

stars that create a heavenly romance across the sky. Not too shabby an ambience that has made a lasting memory in my mind.

About the Author



Sharon Ann Barnes/Bolger was born in the small northern town of Espanola Ontario. She aspired to be a doctor but became nurse. She loved writing from a young age. An entrepreneur at heart she started and operated two small businesses. Writing is her present passion.



I grew up in Brantford, living at home with my parents until I was ten years old.

In the early 1970s I moved to the Chedoke Continuing Care Centre in Hamilton. I would spend the next eight years in the hospital.

I was the youngest and had to share my room with five other people. I didn't really like it, but at that time there wasn't anywhere else for me to live. They didn't have places like Bell Lane or group homes.

You do grow up a lot and meet a lot of people. In the hospital we did different outings like to the mall, for dinner, or concerts at Hamilton Place. I made a couple of good friends during my stay. One of the nurses, Lynne Burns, was friendly and she would take me to her place for my birthday and for dinner. She had six of her own kids.

Then Bell Lane opened in 1978. I was one of the first nine residents, and would live there for 13 years. My parents and I had been waiting for Bell Lane to open so that I could move back to Brantford to be closer to them.

I'm also really thankful for moving to Bell Lane because I wouldn't be as independent as I am today if it weren't for them. I went back to High School for my Grade 12, which took about five or six years. I feel the staff made the biggest difference for me. They gave me my first step to independence! When I lived at Bell Lane I worked for the Rolling Thunder Theater Company. We put on plays to educate the public about disabilities and we travelled around. After the plays we would each get up and talk about our specific disabilities. I really enjoyed doing the plays and all the dramatic arts.

After Bell Lane I moved out to West Street for almost 20 years. It was difficult because at first I didn't know if I could live on my own. After living with 27 other people for 13 years it took a little getting used to. I grew up a lot because it's not as easy as people think, moving out on your own.

After High School I volunteered for at least 10 to 12 years at Woodman Park Community Centre. I helped do puzzles and crafts along with two other volunteers. I worked with 3- to 5-year olds. You have to have a lot of patience with children that young but they were fun to work with.

I have had some setbacks. My mother passed away in 2004, which was really difficult as we were best friends and did everything together. Then my dad passed away in 2011.

Sometimes change is good because you find out what makes you stronger. I think they would want me to be happy and to go on, to do the best I can. I still have my brother and sister-in-law who I see quite a bit, and my cousins, but the family is smaller than it used to be.

Nothing stays the same, I guess. Sometimes it's more difficult than at other times but most of the time I'm doing okay. I'm always trying new things. I go to watercolours once a week.

I think that you only get however much you can handle. You have to appreciate when life is good and to appreciate what you have. It could always be worse for someone else.

So I try to think about the good things. I think about my trip to Nova Scotia in 2014, for instance, and I go out several times a week to do different things. It's important to stay positive!

About the Author

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.



*Three Vignettes:
Glimpses of a Boy's Life
in the
Nineteen Fifties*

by Wayne King



I have never been able to see life as anything but a vast complicated practical joke, and it's better to laugh than cry.

– Robert A. Heinlein

The following three stories describe three memorable events that helped shape my life. The time frame is the period between 1955 and 1960 when I was eight to thirteen years old.

I. Riding Big Red

Get a bicycle. You will not regret it if you live.

~ Mark Twain, Taming the Bicycle

The Best Birthday Present Ever

The sun shone bright the morning of Tuesday, July 5, 1955, the day I turned eight years old. Mum, Dad, sister Janet, and I gathered on the front lawn to view my best birthday present ever, my first bike.

I felt the thrill and pride of ownership. This bike was all mine. I could ride it whenever and wherever I wanted. A bike spelled freedom.

All I had to do was learn to ride. I knew it would be a challenge for two reasons. First, I had never ridden a bike before. Second, Dad had chosen the largest bike available. It boasted twenty-eight inch wheels. The seat and handlebars were chest high.

As if reading my mind, Dad merely commented, "Perfect size for a boy your age ... you'll grow into it." Meaning: *don't expect another bike for a very long time.*

I thought about the challenge to come. I freely admit it made me a mite nervous. After all I had to master a man's bike and I was but an inexperienced boy. Thank goodness Dad knew what to do.

Because of its size and red frame, I named my birthday bike Big Red.



Me at nine years of age, a year later (1956), and proud of my bike. Note our front lawn and tree.

Where to Ride?

Dad felt our own front lawn was the best spot to learn the basics before moving on to other more challenging locations. It was safe from traffic. Left unsaid: unplanned falls could be cushioned by the grass.

There were downsides to the lawn. Two sides were bordered by privet hedge. Our house blocked a third side. Dad had just planted a young sugar maple ... right in the middle. Traction would be reduced on grass.

Left unsaid was learning at home would save me from being embarrassed in front of others who might find my efforts a source of amusement.



2014. View of the front lawn, showing the almost 60-year-old Sugar Maple.

Up and Down With Big Red

Mum and Janet retreated to the safety of the front porch to watch, while Dad and I assessed the situation.

My first question to Dad was an anxious, “How am I going to get on that seat, let alone turn the pedals?”

Dad had a ready answer. “Run, build up speed, mount fast ... pump the pedals fast enough to stay upright.”

He emphasized that “The important thing is to keep the bike moving.”

It made sense to me. “OK, let’s go. See what happens.”

I broke into a run, my left foot rested precariously on the left pedal. Both hands gripped the handlebars. I pushed mightily with my right leg to build up speed. Mum and Janet cheered. Dad urged me to go faster. When I figured I had reached the proper cruising speed I swung my right leg way up. My leg never even made it over the seat. Big Red slowed down. I lost my balance. Big Red and I crashed to the ground. I was buried under a mass of steel and rubber. In the background the women folk gasped.

I was unhurt, except for my pride. I fought back tears of frustration. *Don't let Dad see that.*

Dad pulled Big Red off me. He reassured me with a relaxed, "Let's try it again. You got to get your leg over the seat. You can do it."

If At First You Don't Succeed ...

Once more into the breach I went. This time I had experience on my side. With a superhuman effort I forced my right leg up and swung it over the seat, until it reached the right pedal. I balanced precariously on the seat, but somehow stayed upright. I pushed the right hand pedal. Big Red crept forward. I tried with all my strength to keep the pedals moving. The thickness of the lawn made pedaling difficult. I tried, but failed to build up appropriate speed. Finally, I ran out of steam and started to fall. Mum and Janet's gasps were quickly muted by my quick reaction to the situation. Just in the nick of time I stuck out my left foot and stopped myself and Big Red from hitting the lawn. As I untangled my right leg from Big Red, Dad again came to my rescue and pulled us upright.

....Try, Try Again

I just couldn't get Big Red moving at a fast enough speed. I didn't have the skill or strength to operate such a monster of a machine ... yet! Time for a new strategy.

“When you mount,” Dad suggested, “I’ll push the back of the seat to keep your speed up. You pump like crazy. Get the pedals turning.”

Quick as a wink I tried again. I mounted, this time without a problem. I pushed the pedals. Dad pushed Big Red. My steering was very shaky, but I was moving. Mum and Janet were excited to see progress being made. I could hear them cheer lustily. Five feet, ten feet, twenty feet. I rolled slowly, but surely. Just when I felt I was getting the hang of it I realized that I was running out of space. I was about to crash into either the hedge or the tree. I made a quick decision. Make a fast and abrupt turn to avoid those obstacles. I panicked and turned too sharply. The front wheel locked on an angle, Big Red came to an abrupt halt. Down we went. This time I lost my balance. Unable to stop I hit the lawn.

Once again, I wasn’t physically hurt, although I will admit to some discouragement. Mum and Janet cheered me up, while Dad exuded cool confidence. After all, I was making progress, although not fast enough for me. My skill had improved. Dad’s shoves helped. I hadn’t been seriously injured yet. It was time for the next attempt.

The Big Push

I had made progress. Dad’s mighty pushes should enable me to build up enough speed to ride the length of the lawn and back again. The trick now was to avoid the obstacles. If I had enough speed and was able to control my steering I should have enough room to turn one hundred and eighty degrees. I could then head back toward the driveway completing a full circle.

Once more I mounted. Off I went. The first turn went well, but on the second I ran out of space. To avoid colliding with the front porch and endangering Mum and Janet, I had no choice, I turned purposely too sharp and applied the brakes. Down we went ... I held



A CCM '50s style of bicycle, similar to Big Red. Photo: © "Saskcom" on VintageCCM.com.

out my leg just in the nick of time to stop Big Red and me from hitting the ground. I held myself upright and disentangled myself from Big Red.

Big Red and I Find Greener Pastures

A change of plan was required. I now knew I could manage Big Red. To advance to the next level I needed space to maneuver, space to build up speed, space to give me the time needed to turn corners, and space to dismount with more finesse.

Dad had the answer. "Let's go to the park."

Mum and Janet were all for it. They were enjoying the free acrobatic show. I greeted that solution with ambivalence. I understood that it was a good plan, but I also realized that kids I knew could be playing at Lions Park. They would certainly watch me closely. Maybe even jeer and tease.

However, the park *was* a practical solution. I had to leave the confined space of our front lawn. I was not yet ready for cement, gravel, or asphalt.

It took us ten minutes to walk to Lions Park. I pushed Big Red. Dad led the way. A couple of times Dad rode Big Red for a minute or two just to demonstrate how it was done. I watched with a mixture of envy and expectation.



Lions Park, 2015. This is the area where I learned to ride.

As soon as we arrived we found the perfect spot. Well-tended grass covered a very large area. There were no natural or manmade obstructions. The only kids were on the other side of the park playing on the equipment. Without further ado, I mounted and pedaled through the grass. Dad pushed. Mum and Janet cheered on the side lines.

Then it happened. Without warning, Dad let go. I was on my own.

The moment of truth.

I moved off the seat and stood on the pedals to exert more power. I pushed as hard as I could and could feel momentum building. Despite the initial shimmies and shakes I kept Big Red moving in a generally straight line. After cycling about fifty feet I made a wide, careful turn and headed back toward the starting point. The spaciousness of the park allowed me to better control my turns by taking them gradually rather than being forced into an abrupt action. What a feeling of freedom as I rode unhindered for the first time. I felt a cool breeze on my face and hair. The longer I stayed on Big Red, the easier it became. The family shouted encouragement. Spectators eyed us from a distance. I ignored everything around me concentrating solely on pedaling Big Red.

Keep the pedals moving, steer without violent turns. Most of all keep the pedals moving.

I kept right at it and completed my first circle, then my second. When I finally tired out, I pulled up beside my family, applied the coaster brakes until I came to a full stop, put myself back on the seat and dismounted by my now practiced routine of letting the bike fall, until I stopped it by bracing my left leg.

I practiced a few more times. Each time I went a little further, for a longer time and increased my speed. Soon I didn't need Dad to push. At last I learned to voluntarily dismount. I put reverse pressure on the coaster brakes, swung my right leg over the seat and planted it firmly on the ground, while I kept my left leg and hands in position.

I had done it. I had learned to ride with help from Dad and encouragement from Mum and Janet. I was ecstatic. I could ride a bike and a monster like Big Red at that.

Success

The family took the long way home that afternoon. I practiced my newly acquired skills on streets, both paved and gravelled. That worked out well, but I did not try sidewalks. They were still a little narrow for me. I would happily leave that challenge for another day.

Owning Big Red brought with it a whole new way of life. We became as one. Boy and machine combined to make a mechanical Chiron. My world decreased in size. I could ride to school, visit with school friends who lived in areas remote from my home, and cycle to many sites formerly requiring a substantial walk. I also learned that practice and patience are required to learn new skills.

They say all good times must come to an end. My time with Big Red ended in 1961 when I was fourteen years old and well over a foot taller. I traded in my companion of six years for a used but more up-to-date three speed street bike.

Rest In Peace, Big Red.

II. The KitKat Kaper (or, How I Met Anthony)

Let's not be afraid to receive each day's surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or as joy. It will open a new place in our hearts, a place where we can welcome new friends and celebrate more fully our shared humanity.

- Henri Nouwen

How right Mr. Nouwen is. His quote takes me back to my memorable summer of 1957. Accompanied by my mother and sister Janet, I lived with my grandparents in London, England. Westminster to be precise. Tothill House, Page Street to be even more precise. It was a long way from my home town, the small Canadian city of St. Thomas, Ontario.

As an active ten year old I hung out in the play areas with the neighbourhood kids. I came to meet many of my peers in the normal course of play. However, one particular meeting proved to be unique. It started out as a rather silly practical joke and ended in friendship.



Above, left: Tothill House, looking into the courtyard. My grand-parent's third floor flat is obscured by the right gate pillar. Above, right: My sister Janet and I under Grandma and Grandpa's flat (third floor, left).



*The Walkway:
My mother, Lily King
(1923-2014)*

This particular day I found myself returning home from yet another adventure. I climbed the stone stairs of Tothill House, reached the third floor, exited the stairwell and strolled along the walkway. As I rounded the corner I spied it. How could anyone miss it? There lay, right in front of me, not thirty feet away, in the middle of the walkway a deluxe size Kit Kat chocolate bar, displayed in all its glory.

Now anyone who knows me will tell you that I have a love of chocolate and a love of Kit Kats in particular, one that knows no bounds. And there, temptingly, within easy reach, was without a doubt an oversize Kit Kat showcased by its familiar gold logo set against

a predominantly red sleeve and highlighted at either end by silver foil protective wrap. The familiar taste of the rich but somehow light chocolate flavour, offset by subtly crunchy biscuit brought back sweet memories that stimulated my taste buds.

The Kit Kat screamed out its siren call; temptation reared its ugly head. This bar could easily be mine. All I had to do was bend over and pick it up. At the critical moment the rational part of my brain, kicked in with a timely warning.



*English Kit Kat bar, 1950s.
Photo: © Mirror Online.*

What's a Kit Kat doing there? It's too good to be true. Something's not quite right.

There had to be more to this than met the eye. My suspicions aroused I slowed down and focused my eyes more closely on the object of my desire. As I drew ever closer, I noticed the small knot made by a fine, black thread tied around the Kit Kat. Aroused, I traced the line of thread to the slightly opened window of the adjacent flat.

A-ha, a trick.

The flat's curtains were drawn. I did not know the people who lived there; had no idea who controlled the thread. It was obvious that a trickster was waiting for me to bend down to pick up the KK. They would then yank it away to safety through the window.

What should I do? Should I make a quick grab for the bar? Loudly announce that I knew I was being pranked? Or simply ignore the whole situation?

I chose the latter course. Non confrontation seemed to be the most sensible way to deal with the unknown prankster.

My mind made up, I nonchalantly strolled past the KK. It was tough, but I suppressed my mix of raging desire and curiosity. So near and yet so far.

Who? Why?

I had not gone more than ten feet past the intended trap when the door behind me creaked open. Brisk steps hurried out onto the walkway.

A boy's falsetto voice exclaimed, "Oy! Why didn't you pick up the chocolate?"



Wayne, Westminster. Summer 1957.

I came to a full stop. Warily I turned to face my questioner. I saw a boy, my age, my size, hovering over the Kit Kat. I decided not to tell this strange boy I had discovered his trick. I decided to turn the tables on him once again.

I relaxed and replied to his query with an outrageous lie. "I don't like chocolate."

"So that's why you didn't pick it up," my would-be tormentor calmly replied as he stooped to retrieve his KK.

With a bit of a giggle, he picked up the KK, slid the foil package out of its sleeve and unwrapped the foil. It was my turn to be surprised. The packaging removed revealed, not a Kit Kat, but a block of wood.

Dumbfounded, I stared at the block. Both of us burst into laughter.

We introduced ourselves. His name was Anthony.

For the rest of that memorable summer Anthony and I were bosom buddies and shared many adventures. Unfortunately when I came back to Canada I never tried to contact him. Nor he me. Such is the way of youth.

III. Wrong Place, Wrong Time

I'm interested in how innocence fares when it collides with hard reality.

- Geoffrey S. Fletcher

People are entitled to the presumption of innocence.

- Barney Frank

Wrong place, wrong time. I should have been outside hanging out with my pals, but instead here I was...

The autumn of 1960 found me, at thirteen years of age, in my final year of elementary school. I attended Edward Street Public School in my hometown of St. Thomas. My grade eight teacher and the school principal was Mr. Herman Ronson. I perceived Mr. Ronson as a stern and detached person, likely because of his responsibilities.

... But I digress. Let's get on with the story.

This particular day I was kept in class after the general dismissal with a mandate to complete the homework I had neglected. Mr. Ronson performed his administrative duties while occasionally dropping into the classroom to check on my progress.

Time ticked away uneventfully. Then two gentlemen, of my age, whom I did not know, entered the school yard. Each of them brandished a hockey stick. They began playing ball hockey on the asphalt playground right outside my classroom. Full length, almost full height windows covered the out facing side of the school. They afforded a wonderful view of the playground and drenched the classroom in sunlight.

My homework almost finished, I half watched the boys while they ran and tussled over the rubber ball. When my attention turned back to my homework a section of classroom window exploded in a crash and a clatter. A hockey stick's pommel had smashed through the glass only a few feet from

where I sat. Stunned, it took me a few seconds to understand what had happened. Both hockey playing lads swiftly disappeared, never to be seen again.

Well, this is interesting. Whatever will Mr. Ronson say?

I was about to find out.

A few minutes later Mr. Ronson entered the classroom. His eyes immediately spotted the broken window and shards of glass scattered around the window ledge and floor. He did a double take. His face registered first surprise then turned a beet red. I could sense his anger building. It was obvious that he was trying unsuccessfully to control himself. I watched him as he clenched and unclenched the fingers of both his hands.

Then he turned to me, pointed an accusing finger and, to my horror, angrily hissed, "You broke the window!"

Startled, I replied, "Sir, I didn't do it. Two boys —"

Mr. Ronson cut off my explanation, with a curt, "Come with me."

I had never seen him so angry.

My god, he thinks I did this.



*Grade 8 classroom (left) and Principal's Office.
Broken window, second from left, lower panel.*

I wanted to reason with him, but to what end? As I shuffled to his office, my mind searched for a way to convince Mr. Ronson that I was not the one who broke the window. Alas, I realized that a plea of innocence would be in vain. In Mr. Ronson's mind what other explanation for the broken

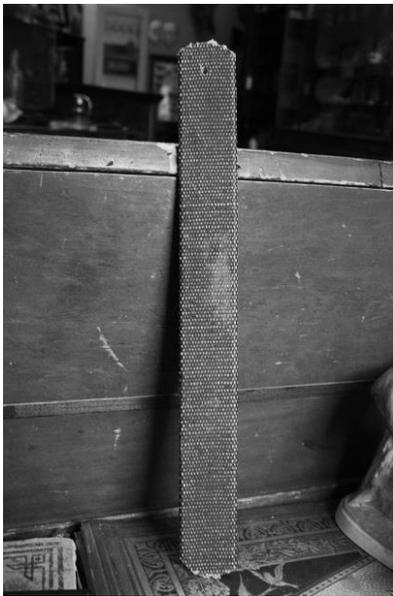
window made sense? There was no one else around. I was in his bad book. It was oh so obvious. A rational explanation, a Sherlock Holmes style of detection, was not going to have any effect.

A last resort appeal to his sense of mercy would be humiliating for me. I sensed it would be useless anyway. Mr. Ronson was beyond being merciful. I had to suffer for the damage, cost and inconvenience that he thought I had caused. It had to be me. Who else could it be?

The walk to Mr. Ronson's office took an eternity as my mind worked overtime. Finally I stood in front of his desk. I watched in horror as he opened a desk drawer. As I feared he pulled out the dreaded strap. My heart sank.

The strap struck fear into the hearts of even the most hardened of incorrigible pupils. I recalled times before that I had been strapped. The initial pain, though terrific, eventually did go away.

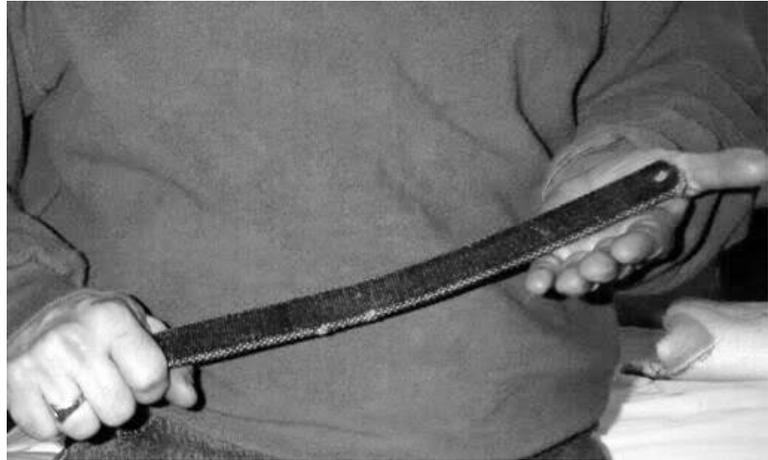
For those who are not familiar, let me describe the strap. It consisted of a rubbery, stitched material, over a foot long, at least three inches wide and thick enough to restrict some of its flexibility. When wielded by an angry, middle-aged man it became a fearsome weapon of vengeance.



The dreaded strap.

The proper application of the strap was a skill acquired by years of practice. The wielder either held the victim's hand still or trusted the victim to co-operate. Then it became a matter of exerting appropriate force. The wielder had to hit the right place, the palm, to ensure the victim's fingers weren't hit. I recalled the urban legend about the lad who moved his hand back as the strap came down. The wielder, unable to stop in time, hit his own knee. I considered that to be a faulty strategy. It could only compound the punishment.

The strapping began. I felt a sharp slap as the first blow connected with the tender flesh of my left palm. I cried out in shock and pain. Mr. Ronson drew breath. He lined me up for the second stroke. This time my right hand. Again the strap came down. Both hands now hurt mightily and he was just starting. Mr. Ronson



A fearsome weapon of vengeance.

quicken the pace as he became confident of his accuracy. I made a mighty effort to keep my groans from turning into tears. The pain was excruciating. I tried my best not to give my tormentor the satisfaction of seeing me cry. Dutifully, if reluctantly I held out each hand in turn. Mr. Ronson's breathing eventually became labored with the effort of raining down effective blows. My hands grew red and puffy. The blows slapped down for what seemed an eternity. I lost count of how many of Mr. Ronson's best I endured.

Eventually the strapping stopped. My hands hurt like Hades.

My homework forgotten, Mr. Ronson dismissed me. Chastened, but bravely staunching the tears welling up in my eyes, I left school and walked home.

Upon entering the house my father simply said, "Mr. Ronson called and said that you threw a book through a window. You got the strap."

I threw a book through the window? Why did Mr. Ronson say that? Did he have second thoughts about my guilt? Had he found it necessary to exaggerate my crime to justify the level of punishment?

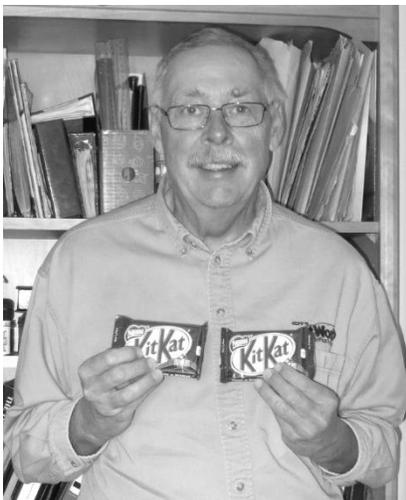
What next?

I had already learned that an explanation was useless. I knew Dad wouldn't believe my side of the story. Who would? My word against the principal's? To argue my case would be futile and perhaps would lead to more punishment.

The best thing to do? Forget it and move on. My hands recovered.

Today when I look back. I think, "Wrong place. Wrong time."

About the Author



Wayne, 2016. Two Kit Kats are better than one!

I was born and raised in St. Thomas, but have lived in Brantford for thirty-five years. I am partner to Sharon and father to Amy, Aaron and Ian. My work career was in sales/marketing for a variety of businesses, both local and international.

I have been retired for a number of years. My interests include gardening, history, photography, brewing and genealogy. Thanks to being retired I am able to devote more time to creative writing and reading.

