

Owen and Arline Coultrup's lives joined after escape from Burma

June is Senior Citizens' Month and each publication of *The New Tanner* this month will feature an article on the people active in the Acton Seniors Recreation Centre, by Julie Conroy. This week's features Arline and Owen Coultrup.

Arline Ferguson was born in Mandalay, Burma. Her father was of Scottish descent and her mother French and Burmese. Her parents owned a small department store that specialized in selling only British items.

Arline remembers as a small child sitting in the store and looking at the delicate china things, but not being able to touch. The lifestyle for many people was good, and Arline remembers parties, and entertaining with many servants at their beck and call. Her mother managed the store, after her father joined the Royal Signals in the British Army when war was declared against Germany.

She attended a convent school, and had fond memories of a beautiful city of temples with golden spires and gentle people.

When the Japanese were about to invade Burma, many people working for the British Army were evacuated by rail and sea, but Arline's mother (through some mix up) missed the last aircraft, and sea exit, so on March 8, 1942, with just three small suitcases, her mother, older sister and two brothers left Mandalay and joined a group of over 90 strangers and two British guides on the last government controlled convoy to leave Burma. They trekked 951 miles on narrow pathways over mountainous terrain.

After a month of walking and a diet of soup and bread, rice and lentils they reached a small town in Assam, India. They lived there for nearly two months until their father joined them. They then went to Calcutta, which was quite a culture shock after Burma.

India was then in the throes of famine. Arline completed her education at Loretto School and College in India. She worked as a secretary in an English engineering company. In 1947 there was political discontent and riots against the Brit-

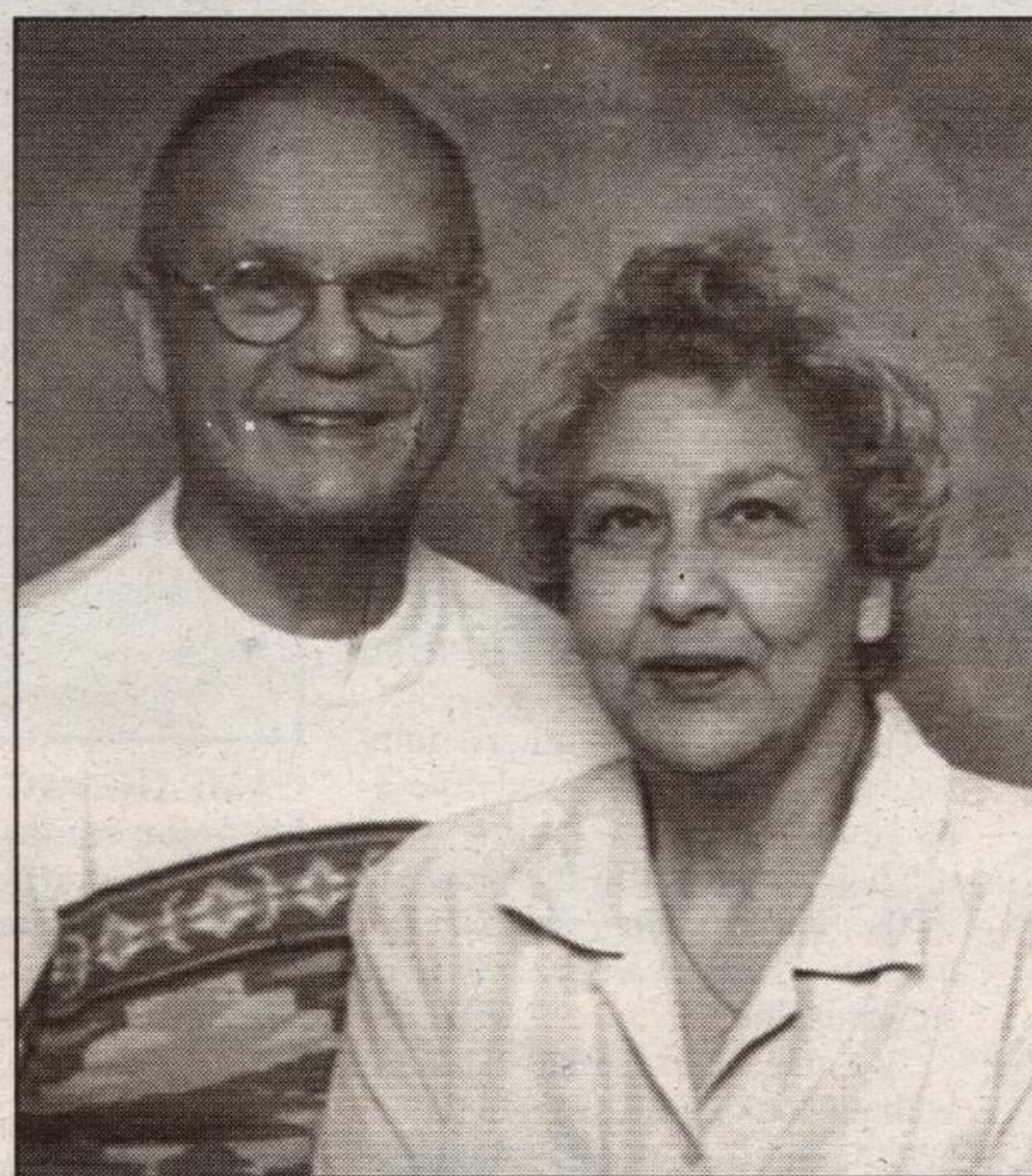
ish government, and India gained Independence in 1947. It was time to move on

Owen Coultrup was also born and attended school in Mandalay; he was seven years older than Arline, so although they knew each other to see, they didn't associate with each other at this time. Owen's stepfather was in the British Army, so Owen was airlifted out of Burma earlier in the war to Calcutta, India and later to Northern India.

Owen decided to immigrate to Britain in 1952 and Arline decided to follow him. She left India one year later and they reunited and married in London.

Arline had a rude awakening in Britain as she had been used to having everyday chores done for her and had to learn how to use the vacuum, clean windows and cook as well as holding down a full-time job, but as she says, "I matured fast." Their first two children (boys) were born in London.

The couple immigrated to Canada in 1957, and lived in Toronto for two years. Then they moved to Acton, where their third son was born. Arline started working at Mason Knit in the office until it closed, then went to



Owen and Arline Coultrup

Beardmore and Co. where she later trained for the position of cattle hide buyer. The new position opened up a whole new world for her. She travelled all over Canada and also some cities in the U.S.A.. She feels her life in the Far East gave her excellent negotiating skills, and life in England honed her organizational skills.

Owen was employed at the Metro Police Headquarters in Toronto, and then accepted a position as Assistant Purchasing Manager at H.K. Porter

which became Disston and then Sandvik. He later became Purchasing Manager. When the company closed its facilities in Acton he transferred to Mississauga, and then Guelph.

Owen used to be involved with the Acton Agricultural Society, doing some accounting for them. He was also on the board of the Acton Seniors Centre for three years, and became well known for the Seniors column he wrote for the *Tanner* for several years, keeping people up to date on events happening at the centre.

Arline became very busy with her volunteer work with the C.W.L. (Catholic Women's League) at St. Joseph's Church and there weren't too many executive positions she didn't hold over the year, ultimately be-

coming president. She also joined Toastmasters, and felt it gave her a lot of confidence in public speaking. She was on the reception desk for many years at the centre and really enjoyed meeting people, although due to other commitments isn't able to spend quite as much time as she would like now.

Over the years, they have enjoyed travelling, and visited Hawaii, cruised the Caribbean islands and Alaska, also Costa Rica and Tunisia, but the most interesting was Africa. They spent 8 days in Mombassa, then 11 days on Safari. She said it was fascinating going through the rugged countryside, and coming across a green oasis, with luxurious lodges where they would spend the nights and wakening to the sounds of lions roaring.

They travelled by safari van each day and saw many animals including huge African elephants. While in Kenya they encountered the Maasi tribes in their villages with their cow dung houses. Arline said the odour was overpowering.

The Maasi were very curious about their jewellery and watches and wanted to trade for their own native handcrafted items.

They also revisited Britain and noticed a lot of changes from when they lived there. Owen and Arline have certainly had an interesting life over the years, and I hope you have enjoyed learning a little about them both, two people who have contributed a lot over the years.

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Tuesday, June 15, 2004
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Arline, a child in Burma