

Local war brides to be honoured

BY ANDY COMBER

In recognition of 2006 as the Year of the War Bride, local war brides will be honoured at the Woodslee Friendship Club's Christmas Dinner, to be held at St. John's Hall in Woodslee Dec. 8.

"These courageous women were Canada's gain," said Joanne McMurren, vice-president of the Woodslee Friendship Club. McMurren felt it was important to recognize the local war brides.

Among those sharing in the tribute are two war brides from England, Eileen Stowe of Woodslee and Ruby Robertson of Essex. Both women landed at Halifax's famed Pier 21 in 1946 to begin a new life in Canada.

"I was just 21 years old when this dashing young man with a maple leaf on his shoulder, and who'd asked me to dance a tango, convinced me I'd be happy living in his home country, Canada," said Ruby Robertson, nee Wearmouth, remembering her first meeting with Bill "Robbie" Robertson at a village dance in July 1943.

At the time of their meeting, Ruby, the oldest of three girls, worked on the family farm in Northallerton, Yorkshire, and Robbie, from Windsor, Ont., was an armourer with the ground crew assigned to the 408 Royal Canadian Air Force Squadron.

"We got talking and a friendship developed," said Ruby, who lived not too far from the aerodrome in Leeming, where Robbie was stationed. "He'd ride his bike for miles to see me," she said.

"I had to do some deciding," said Ruby, remembering when Robbie proposed marriage in the spring of 1945 - at a time when the war was coming to an end in Europe. "We would have to get married before he was sent home."

The couple married on July 28, 1945, and were fortunate enough to have time



Fond memories - Pictured holding their wedding pictures are Ruby Robertson, left, and Eileen Stowe, right. Both women will be honoured with other war brides at the Woodslee Friendship Club's Christmas Dinner, Dec. 8.

for a honeymoon in Scotland before Robbie was shipped home. However, it would be over half a year before Ruby could join her husband in Canada.

Ruby landed at Halifax after sailing aboard the SS Aquitania, and was reunited with Bill in May of 1946.

"I will never forget the magnificent neon lights on Ouellette Avenue - after coming from a blackout country," she said.

Robbie worked as a stationary engineer with the Ford Motor Company, and the couple raised two children, a son and a daughter, living in Windsor from 1946 to 1997 before moving to Essex.

Sadly, Bill "Robbie" Robertson died on Oct. 2, 1998. Since that time, Ruby has worn a locket designed by Robbie - a button from his military jacket adorned with his picture as a young Canadian serviceman.

"This button locket still represents a union of love and happiness spanning 55 years," said Ruby, "It will remain with the earthly body of its owner when the spirit of the farm girl once again joins the button locket designer."

A resident of north London, Eileen Stowe, nee Graham, was 19 years old, working as a die caster in an ammunitions factory, when

she met Bill Stowe, a native of Woodslee, Ont., and a lance corporal driving a transport for the Royal Canadian Air Force 39 Reconnaissance Wing.

"I met him on a train. He was going some place and I was going some place," said Eileen, remembering her chance meeting with Bill in August 1943. Bill was on the last day of a seven-day leave, returning to his base in Ashford, Kent.

With little time to become acquainted, the pair agreed to stay in touch by mail. However, fate intervened when Bill's unit was posted at Red Hill, just outside of London, within visiting distance.

After they married on February 12, 1944, Eileen and Bill lived in a rented room, near his latest posting

at Odiham in southern England.

Eileen had grown up during the Blitz and would continue to face the dangers of "buzz bombs" and V-rockets when Bill's unit was shipped to France, just days after the D-Day landings on June 6, 1944. The war would take him through France, Belgium and Holland.

"I was pregnant then," said Eileen, recalling the worries of being separated from her new husband.

"There was something about the war - it was terrible - but it brought people closer together," said Eileen, who gave birth to their first child, a son, on Feb. 1, 1945, just a day after Bill had come back from Holland on leave.

Unlike many war brides, Eileen left for Canada in advance of her Canadian

husband, boarding the SS Volendam with baby William Jr., in May 1945. After disembarking at Pier 21 in Halifax, Eileen traveled by train to Woodslee, but was pleasantly surprised when Bill's parents met the train at St. Thomas to accompany her and the baby for the rest of the trip.

Eileen and Bill settled in Woodslee, raising their son and daughter. Bill worked with Canada Customs, retiring in 1979. Sadly, Bill Stowe passed away in October 1999. Today, Eileen still lives in the same Woodslee home they shared since 1949.

The Woodslee Friendship Club is still seeking local war brides, wishing to honour these ladies for their courage in coming to Canada to start a new life.

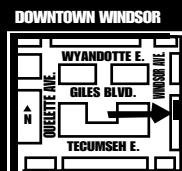
Please submit the names of any of these courageous ladies (living or deceased) to Joanne McMurren at 519-975-2409.

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Leah Durbin of Hartland, Michigan gets her hair cut for the "Locks for Love" campaign... Leah's teacher told her the true story of a little girl who lost all her hair due to medication, so Leah wanted her to have hers! Leah's memi, Ann Kennedy Perry looks on, while Debra McMillan does the honours.



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