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Rural Reflections

Going Back To My Rural Roots

by
Ruth
LeBlanc



For years, my mom said she wanted to take me to the place of her birth and childhood in Chester and Centreville, Nova Scotia.

Finally, with mom celebrating her 82nd birthday last October and life going by far too quickly, I decided it was time to take the plunge and head east by train, even though it was winter. Our accommodations were described as a private bedroom for two and I was actually looking forward to an amazing journey of mother and daughter rediscovering their roots. When we opened the tiny door, we stepped into a room the size of a double bathtub, where we spent 32 endless hours packed in like sardines.

As we neared the border between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, my mom pointed out landmarks and got more excited by the minute. Cousin Mary Kinsmen, who lives and works in Halifax and is a great lover of dogs and music, met us and before we could say Peggy's Cove we were sitting in Centreville in my 85-year-old Aunt Elsie's home, surrounded by family photos and steeped in a past filled with colourful memories.

Feisty Aunt Elsie has a memory that comes and goes with the hour. Now and then she forgot my name and retold the same old stories daily as I sat and listened to tales of a life I knew little about. Tales of living during the Depression, when Eaton's cat-

alogues had a dual purpose and what you produced in the fields kept you and your family from starving in the winter, are as vivid today as they were all those years ago.

There were also stories about the horrors of tuberculosis and the hundreds of people who were sent to local sanatoriums. My mom and aunt talked about going tobogganing during my childhood and looking up to see a black cloth in an upstairs window of their home, a sign that something was drastically wrong.

My grandfather Nauss and his team of horses had gone through the ice. Soon afterwards, he died of pneumonia at the age of 36, leaving behind a house full of children and my grandmother, who herself had fallen ill with tuberculosis. As my mom and aunt said, "The younger generations don't know how easy life is today, not necessarily better, only easier".

Laughing, they told me of taking red crepe paper and pressing it to their lips to add a little colour when they were teenagers going to a local dance. Heaven forbid their mother should find out!

Tired of homemade blueberry and apple pies, they had envied the little boy next door who taunted them, saying he was having Jello, the new treat many could not afford. That little boy, Albert, is now a 74-year-old man who sits by a wood stove in the same fam-

ily home remembering the good old days, when catching a mackerel didn't require a licence and people took time to know one another.

Meeting my relatives who live so far away, I wished I had taken this trip sooner. We arrived home filled with new memories and yearning for something that had disappeared, leaving only the stories behind. Life lesson learned; don't wait until it is too late.

Historical Society urges community to get involved

Whitchurch-Stouffville Historical Society is holding its annual general meeting Feb. 26 at 7:30 p.m. at the Silver Jubilee Club downtown, on the southwest corner of Main and Market streets.

Lack of membership and declining attendance at society programs have put the future of the organization in jeopardy and volunteers and executive members are urgently needed to ensure its continuation. Anyone who is interested in community history is invited to attend the meeting and bring a friend.

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