

Carole Hayes
Daughter of an
English War Bride
1945



I was almost four, but remember some things, a little vaguely, about our trip to Canada in 1945 and our arrival at Pier 21. There were the goodbyes and tears at Liverpool, England and everything seemed so rushed. Climbing the gangplank in the wind was scary. Mom told my sister and I to hang on tight to her hand and a man in a uniform told us to not look down. Of course, I had to look at the water and remember, that it looked so far down, cold and black. The next thing I remember was settling into our cabin, which was extremely small and my sister, and I got the bottom bunk and Mom the top. She took the top bunk as she did not want us to fall out. It wasn't long before we all became quite seasick. Ten days on the ocean, in this little ship, seemed like eternity and I certainly remember being deathly sick. Ginger ale did not help and I don't remember getting anything in pill form to help. Most of the rest of the trip was spent in the bunk and it became a blur.

I remember Mom telling us about two American pilots, who had ditched in the ocean and how our ship was going to rescue them. We eventually did find them and picked them up and I remember them being hauled on board by ropes. Another big ship, an American aircraft carrier rendezvoused with us to transport them back to the U.S. Holly mackerell!! I'll never forget the sight of that carrier and was simply amazed at its hugeness, when it pulled alongside our little Jamaican Producer ship. The pilots were rescued and we continued to the new land.

When we arrived at Pier 21 there seemed to be a great deal of commotion and we were rushing again to disembark. It was nice to see the blue sky, breath some fresh air and get our land legs back. From here on, I can only remember more confusion. My father, a Canadian sapper, was still stationed in France and his parents were to meet us. They did not show up, so the authorities then put us on the train to Toronto. I remember Mom being very worried and upset, as what was supposed to be, was not happening.

My next recollection was sleeping in the bunks on the train and it was fun, although we were still being sick. After the long train ride to Toronto, endless paperwork and lots of authority figures, we were then sent to the Ford Hotel. All three of us slept in a big bed in what seemed like a very big room. Mom slept in her slip and my sister and I slept in

our underwear. I'm sure it all must have been very traumatic for Mom. Here she was in a brand new country and did not know a lot of the terminology. She asked for directions and was told 'two blocks that way'. She always thought a block was a block of wood. Can you imagine, being in a completely strange country, without any family or relatives, pregnant with a third child and trying to keep me and my sister in tow as well.

It was also obvious, that my paternal grandparents were less than happy about our arrival, and the wonderful dream that my father had painted was not coming true. It meant we had to stay with the Humphrey family, some English friends of Mom's, who had arrived earlier to Canada. My father never appeared, there was no money and it was obvious we could not stay at the Humphrey's home for too long. Mom struggled with all this. To make a long story short, Mom finally gave all her children to the care of The Children's Aid Society. We remained in various foster homes - - some good, some bad -- for about six years. Mom never gave up, got a job as an English nanny and finally re-married. She retrieved us back from our respective foster homes to live with our new stepdad and we all settled, very happily, into his two bedroom apartment in Toronto. Dad died two years ago and what a dear he was to have taken us all in and take wonderful care of us. To this date, we've never met our biological father, who in my opinion was a bit of a cad.

To say that our lives changed drastically by this experience was an understatement. After experiencing the horrors of war, I'm sure the dreams and aspirations of my Mom were real. She had hope for all of us for the future. Although, there were rough seas (literally), to all intents and purposes, our family is surviving, has grown and we all are doing well.

Even though I was very young, I will always fondly remember Pier 21. It was a safe haven - a safe port for me. Thanks to all those, who have taken the time, energy and enthusiasm to continue to keep Pier 21 in its rightful place in history.