

Beryl Rosalind  
Densmore nee Goodall  
English War Bride  
Brittanic  
May 1945



Editor's Note: The following memoir is based on an interview that was



conducted by Elinor Maher and Beverly MacLellan for the Colchester Historical Society Museum & Archives as part of the museums Year of the War Bride research and exhibit of 2006. The Pier 21 Society would like to thank Ms. Maher, Ms. MacLellan and the war brides

that contributed to this collection by sharing their experiences and impressions of the war years and their early days in Canada.

Name:

Beryl Rosalind (nee Goodall) Densmore

Parents:

Frank and Daisy (nee Christmas) Goodall

Home:

Alton, 40 or 50 miles south of London, which is about a mile from Jane Austen's home.

"I had two brothers and six sisters. I was the middle child. My older brother Frank was in the navy during the war and my oldest sister was in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. The next oldest sister was in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and the next one was a WREN. My father

served in the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) which was later officially renamed the Home Guard. The members of the LDV all had uniforms and rifles. Dad hated to leave us to go on duty if there was bombing but of course he had to go out. Sometimes he was away all night which was difficult.

When the war began in 1939 I was still in school. Some children from the area were evacuated overseas but my mother wouldn't hear of us going. In fact we took in children from heavily bombed areas. Although we were near the coast we didn't have many bombs falling in the area, just the stray ones. But we could always hear the gunfire. By the time of the Battle of Britain (which began in the summer of 1940) we didn't have a bomb shelter and we would get under the table or stairs for safety. After we got a shelter in our garden we would all go there but my father never came into the shelter. He would stand at the garden gate and watch. My baby brother, born in 1939, didn't understand the bombing and would say 'Someone is banging at the door.'

What was the attitude in your community toward Canadian servicemen?

"They were well thought of. We were close to several large bases - Borden was five miles away and Aldershot was 13 miles. There was a small park with a bench across the road from our house. If my mother saw a soldier there who looked lonely she would tell one of us to go over and invite him for a meal. Because we had so many children in our family there seemed to be enough ration cards to make it a little easier.

I had also met other Canadians because of my older sisters. At Christmas everyone brought a lonely friend home from their base to spend some of the holidays."

Husband:

George Trueman Densmore

"George was from East Noel or Densmore Mills. He was the oldest son in the family with three younger brothers and three sisters, one of whom was older. He was twenty-three in the RCA (Royal Canadian Artillery) when I met him. He served in various parts of England during the war but wasn't sent to the continent."

How did you meet your husband?

"I met George in the public gardens. He asked if I would take his picture so he could send it to his family in Canada. Years later he told me there wasn't any film in the camera. We were both very shy but he asked me

to go to the show with him. After we had been dating for several months I took him home to meet my family."

Wedding date:

December 11, 1943

What was your family's reaction to the news you were marrying a Canadian?

"My family really liked George. My Dad was very strict about our being home early. One night I was a little late getting back. I explained that George wouldn't let me come until I agreed to marry him. That's how they found out it might happen. My Dad wrote to George's mother in Canada and she replied. I think he felt better then as he had a better idea of what George's family was like. She also wrote to me often. She sent me soap and other things that were difficult to get in England."

Can you tell us about your wedding?

"George and I were married two weeks before Christmas. I borrowed my wedding dress from my sister Chris who was married the previous August. The ceremony took place in St. Lawrence's Church and Gina was baptised there also. My father walked me down the aisle and gave me away. Following the service we had a reception at the Assembly Rooms for family and a few Canadian friends. My mother-in-law sent a fruit cake and a white cake from Canada. The fruit cake came through fine but the white cake was all mouldy. We had to make another one. The neighbours chipped in little bits of icing sugar so we could ice them and one lady kept hens so she gave us eggs to make another white cake.

We had a few days honeymoon in Woking and then visited my sister in Portsmouth for a few days.

I stayed with my parents until my daughter Gina (Georgina) was born in November of 1944. I moved in with an older lady who needed help for a while, then with another older lady. Then I went to Portsmouth to live with my next older sister, Chris, who also had a baby. Her husband was a POW in Japan.

We thought it would be at least a year before I was called to come to Canada so we were very surprised when I was told to come so soon. You weren't given any exact date very far in advance but when I knew it was getting near I went and spent a week end with my parents.

In London we were allowed to write letters to our family and husband telling them that we were leaving but we weren't allowed to mail them. For security reasons the letters were kept until after we arrived safely in Canada and then they were sent. So husbands and families had to wait a long time to hear from us."

How did you come to Canada and what are your memories of the trip?

"During the war any wives that came travelled on troop ships and for that reason no one could be told when you were travelling. Our families weren't allowed to come to see us off at the station in London or at the port.

The ship I came on was the HMS Britannic and it was divided between Canadian Air Force personnel and war brides. They weren't allowed to mix of course.

I was very sea sick but other girls took Gina up on the deck for a breath of fresh air because I was too ill. I couldn't eat anything during the trip but I know there were lots of good things to eat on that ship that we hadn't seen in years."

What was the date and memories of your arrival?

May 23, 1945

The boat was a day late arriving in Nova Scotia. I remember Pier 21 was just a big shed in those days. My in-laws were told to meet me at the train station in Windsor. When I wasn't on the train they checked with the Salvation Army and were told to meet me at the YMCA in Halifax. That's where I met them."



Children?

"Gina (Georgina) was born in England and in Canada was followed by Frank, Wendy, Peter and Andrew.

Plus I have eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren."

What were your first impressions of Canada?

"We came from Halifax by car. I kept thinking 'Are we ever going to get out of these woods?' That day was my first introduction to chewing tobacco because my father-in-law used it and spit out the car window. I was shocked. Another thing I found difficult was the use of a spittoon in the country store.

The very next day after my arrival there was a community social at the school across the road and at least six people asked me how I liked Canada. I hadn't been here 24 hours yet so it was hard to know. For a long time there were no other war brides in the area and of course George was still in England so he wasn't there to help me.

However, I couldn't have wished for a warmer welcome. My mother-in-law became like a second mother to me."

Where did you live when you first arrived in Canada?

"We lived with my in-laws at first. My husband came home in December 1945 so I was alone with them for the first six months. And there were no other war brides in the area for about a year. When another War Bride, Lil Hines, arrived from Scotland in 1946 to live nearby we became good friends and shared much through the years.

George said he would build a house for us nearby as he was farming with his father. My mother-in-law wanted us to stay with them so we divided their very large house. That's where we lived for 12 years and then we moved to this farm on Morgan Road in Hilden."

Tell us about the adjustments you had to make.

"George had always been called Trueman by his friends and family so I had to adjust to calling my husband by his middle name. He was no longer George. Then when we went back to England for a visit, he was George again.

I found it very hard to get used to everyone calling each other by their first names. In England no matter how well we knew the neighbours we called them Mr. and Mrs. And our older relatives were called Aunt so

and so or Uncle so and so. Later I had a hard time when my children used first names for people in the community.

I thought I sensed people making fun of the way I spoke so I worked very hard to lose my English accent.

I had no idea what it was like to live on a farm and not have indoor



plumbing. There was so much I had to learn. My mother-in-law showed me how to pluck and clean a chicken and I couldn't imagine I could do that but I had to. The first time I did it I neglected to remove the crop and that was embarrassing.

I always thought it was lucky that I lived on the East coast of Canada, just a half mile from the water. It made it seem closer to home some how. The most difficult thing was to be here in Nova Scotia when parents and family members in England were ill or passed away.

When we moved to our this farm (on Morgan Road in Hilden) in 1956 it was very quiet, not a single house in sight.

Even after 61 years I still get nostalgic for England in the springtime. My family used to go into the countryside to gather spring flowers to decorate the church each year."

Did you have trips home?

"After ten years we made a trip home with our three oldest children, Gina, Frank and Wendy. My parents were both still alive for that visit. Then I made another trip after 20 years. I've been home four times in total."

Did your family come to Canada to visit?

"Almost all of my family have visited. Someone from my family in England usually comes for a visit every second year. This September two sisters and a brother-in-law are coming. They all love it here."

Did you or your children have difficulties obtaining Canadian Citizenship?

"Like all war brides we were told we became Canadians by marrying Canadian servicemen. And that was also supposed to apply to our children who were born in England. However, later we were told we had to apply for citizenship but it came through easily."