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English War Bride
Aquitania
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Halifax to Halifax and Points
West

By Dorothy Schofield McIlveen

On the morning of June 20, 1946, I boarded the train in Halifax, Yorkshire, for London, leaving Mum and Dad with sadness, apprehension, and yet with happy excitement. I soon met a fellow War Bride and we chummed together for the whole journey until we parted at Pier 21.

London was very hot and the train ride to Southampton was pleasant.

In Southampton the huge ship Aquitania waited to carry us safely across the Atlantic to Canada and our new home. It was a beautiful evening as we pulled away from the dock. An American warship anchored close by playing tune after tune in farewell for us. We finally lost sight of England.

One girl, obviously Scottish, kept saying, "I'll never see Bonnie Scotland again!" Each of us had our own thoughts, some sad, some quiet. Later, this all changed when we found where we had to sleep. I, along with the wives without children, were taken below and there hung row upon row of hammocks

"What a hoot getting legged up at night!" The place was rocking with laughter. I had never been to camp or the YMCA. What an eye opener I got, seeing all these girls in stages of dress and undress and no dress. I slept like a top.

Rolling out again in the morning was just about as much fun as getting in at night. The food aboard was scrumptious, especially the fruit. Nevertheless, I found I could not eat much.

Before the war, Mum had bought a huge roll of crepe de chine, and I made cami-knicks, slips and bras, and nighties. They had lots of lace and looked quite dainty compared to our war time undies. Mum suggested I throw away my old undies as I traveled so as to have all

these beautiful undies when I arrived in Winnipeg. Each night the girls developed a ritual for me, tossing Dorothy's old underwear out the porthole. What fun we had!

The evening of June 29th, we anchored in Halifax Harbor. I remember there was a huge warehouse, I did not realize this was where I would be going the following morning. There was a girl dressed in white standing there, far below on the dock. I thought this was how they must dress in Canada. How fresh after our drab wartime clothes.

The following morning we were ushered onto Pier 21. It was big and noisy and I must say I was happy when I had been processed and could leave and cross the train tracks to board a train going West. It was a very old train with Colonist coaches, the temperature was in the mid eighties, the windows stayed open day and night. There was no air conditioning, we were covered in soot. There was always a queue for the girls to wash, not only hands and faces but also hair, and generally cool down.

The trees and rocks seemed endless and we were happy when we were allowed a few hours in Ottawa. Under unfortunate circumstances a girl was taken to the hospital with appendicitis.

The train stopped in Kenora Ontario. Someone asked "Who are these people?" The reply was, "They are Red Indians". All rushed to that side of the train. We were disappointed, they were not our school book Indians or movie Indians. They were not warriors wearing feathers. They were not "our Red Indians". By now lots of girls had disembarked and soon we rolled into Winnipeg. I thought THIS IS IT. My husband was waiting in Trilby hat (read Fedora) and tweed suit with a smile a mile wide, along with his parents. The temperature was 84 and I was cooking in my linen suit and stockings. My mother in law looked so cool in her pretty silk dress and floppy hat (a lovely lady and always kind to me).

We arrived at Mac's home, had lunch, then he had to go back to the office for a couple of hours. I couldn't wait to see the shops, I took the street car down town, my first stop being the Bay. I was in sheer amazement at all the beautiful things, I went crazy buying Coty perfume, lipstick, stockings and new bras. AS for the bras, I was tired of making my own from scraps, looking like two fried eggs. Now I would have points like the Canadian girls.

Strolling down Portage Ave., I spotted a white dress with blue cornflowers. I tried on the dress, bought it. It was size nine and a bit baggy but I could fix that. A few stores along, I bought blue linen shoes to match the dress. I was really on a roll and I had not reached Eaton's

yet! Ay Eaton's I tried on a beaver coat, so soft and elegant (I only tried it on). I was catching on to the currency even though I was mumbling to myself in pounds shillings and pence, I continued on my buying spree. When I returned to my mother in law's house, she opened the door and howled with laughter seeing me with all my parcels.

On my first Saturday, Mac and I and four couples took the moonlight train to Winnipeg Beach to stay at the family cottage for the weekend. Mac and I as the only married couple, were given the duty of buying the weekend food. Each couple chipped in \$5.00, I remember, which covered the food and beer. The only stores I had been in were the ones in Winnipeg on my first day. We bought bread, milk, eggs, bacon, and so on. At the meat counter, the butcher had a huge platter of wiggly looking meat. Mac bought two pounds and I asked what it was and he said it was for burgers. "Oh yes, what are burgers?" I wondered. I bought sausages. For dinner the burgers were made and barbecued and were truly delicious. I couldn't believe that awful stuff could turn out so good.

In the evening we went to the Beach dance in a huge hall with wood half way up and screened in at the top. How strange! I was the only girl in a dress. It was my white one with the blue cornflowers. Midnight saw us swimming in the lake followed by a late night dance at a small fishing village on Lake Winnipeg. All the band were tipsy drinking something out of sealer jars. Wow this is really wild! The sun had risen as we rode back to the cottage and rolled into our beds. A eight o'clock in the morning, Jim, with a booming voice was calling "Hit the Deck, breakfast is on." Making our way through the kitchen, Betty was screwing up her face and shaking her beautifully manicured hands, saying, "Wieners! Wieners! For BREAKFAST!!"

I said to Mac, "What's wrong with her?". He laughed, saying, "Oh, Dorothy, you bought wieners instead of sausages!" I answered, "Well I thought they looked rather severe," We still laugh about this episode.

The year that followed saw us living in Brandon, where our oldest son Tim was born, then Winnipeg where our daughter Margaret and younger son David were born. We spent years in Regina then back to Winnipeg and finally to Victoria on Vancouver Island where Mac and I celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary.

Canada is a big beautiful country, my life here has been truly happy. Our dear family, four healthy grandchildren and wonderful friends have made it that way. England will always be in my heart but Canada is my home.

