

Esme Butler nee  
Collins  
English War Bride  
Aquitania  
1946



I was born in Dover England on October 8, 1924 and my name was Esme Collins. When the war broke out I was 15 years old and my mother sent me to Haywards Heath to stay with friends. I worked in a hospital there for over a year and then met Roy (my husband).

I moved to London to work. We were married on July 24th 1943 in Westminster Cathedral. The church we were supposed to have been married in had been bombed and the closest Catholic church was the cathedral. We felt very fortunate to have had our wedding take place there.

Our daughter Pamela was born the following July 15 in Bexley Heath, Kent, where my two sisters wed. My husband returned to Canada after the war, nine months before us, so we stayed with my mother in Dover until it was time for us to leave England for Canada.

It was very sad saying goodbyes to my mom and sisters and friends at Dover Priory station. We stayed at a hostel near Southampton over night along with hundreds of other wives and babies. This is where I first met my best friend Pauline Dube and we have been best friends ever since.

The next day we boarded the ship Aquitania which we stayed on for seven days. I'll never forget the thrill we had when the ship was being towed into Pier 21 at Halifax Harbour. The band was playing and everyone was cheering on the decks. We were all so anxious to get off the ship, but were told we couldn't until the following day. I was so surprised when I heard over the P.A. speakers someone announcing "Will Mrs. Esme Butler please report to the pursers office?" Once I had found the office, I was told I could go ashore for a few hours. They gave me a pass and I was escorted off the ship by a sailor. As I was walking down the gangplank, I turned to wave at the girls on deck and they were all yelling at me.

We entered a big wooden shed on the dock and inside waiting for me was my sister-in-law Muriel and her husband Bill in his officers Navy uniform. They both looked so smartly dressed, they looked like movie stars. They took me out to a restaurant in Halifax. It was wonderful to see all the lights on in store windows and beautiful clothes.

The next morning we boarded the train for Ottawa's Union Station where we were met by more family.

Now 54 years later my husband and I have seven children. Five girls and 2 boys, fifteen grandchildren and two great grandchildren (so far). Canada has been a great country to live in and I am so proud to be a Canadian.

Esme Butler  
March 30, 1998