

Kitty Barne nee
Brouatta
English War Bride
Aquitania
May 1946



As told to Ellen Davies:

I first met my husband, John Clarence Barne, when I was sixteen years old. It was 1940 in Nottingham, England. He was stationed there with the Royal Canadian Ordinance Corps, on maneuvers. John ('Barney') was a dispatch rider. I remember it was pouring rain and I was standing in a queue for the fish and chip shop. He asked me if he could stand under my umbrella and I said yes. We dated and he was always a gentleman. He walked me home and knocked on the front door to make sure someone was there to let me in. We had dividers between the row houses and I was nervous about strangers lurking in the alcoves. But John Barne took care of me.

I was dating several fellows and John was concerned about competition. I was a bit of a brat. I told him I had another boyfriend in a brown suit. He was right worried.

I remember he got in to a spot of trouble because of me. He was on guard duty one day and he saw me pushing a baby in a pram. He left his post to come and find out whose baby it was - I really can't remember who the baby belonged to. Anyway, John was reported and they posted him away to Aldershot.

We wrote letters and I continued dating other fellows. I joined the Land Army and worked in several places.

A couple of years after meeting John, I met some Canadian soldiers in a pub. (I was of drinking age by then.) I asked them if they knew Corporal Barne. "Sure we do, but he is Sergeant Barne now." I laughed. Oh I was such a tease. "Well send him my love", I said. A few days later there was a knock on the door and there was John Barne to see me.

When he proposed I asked if we could get married in our uniforms - me in my Land Army outfit and John in his RCOC uniform. We wanted pictures of our wartime life to show any future children. So there I was, marching down the aisle in my heavy land army boots as the organ played "Here Comes the Bride". What a sight!

We married in All Souls Church in my hometown of Nottingham.

When my sailing instructions for Canada came in 1946, I didn't want to leave home and my mother. I chucked the papers up in the back of my closet and told Mum, "I'm not going!" She said, "You've made your bed and now you've got to lie in it. You've got to keep your promise." I went, with tears streaming down my face, like many of the other brides on board.

In May of 1946 I sailed to Canada on the last voyage of the Aquitania along with hundreds of other war brides and children. We docked on Halifax at Pier 21. I then took the train across Canada to Vancouver. John had rented us a three-room furnished apartment on Burrard and Forth Street. We were lucky to get a place, and at eighteen dollars a month.

I was so inexperienced with housekeeping. The apartment was above a store. The icebox had a drip tray at its base, and I forgot to empty it. The water overflowed on to the floor and seeped through to the store window below. There was water flowing down the big window, making a big mess.

I also battled with the woodstove. There were rats in the woodpile in the back yard. I felt scared of them. I chopped wood like an amateur. I have a scar on my thumb where the axe slipped and I cut myself badly. One day the creosote caught fire in the woodstove's pipes. Smoke filled the hallways and the store below. When the fire department arrived they put out the fire. The fireman laughed at my inexperience and said, "It's only a little war bride. She was scared." I could have burned the apartment down.

There was such a good supply of food in Canada, compared with post-war Britain. I used to go shopping and buy food to send back to my family in England. If there were a queue I would join it and see what was for sale. I remember buying a whole case of salmon and sending tins of salmon home to England. Finally, John's tolerance got stretched too far. He said, "You know there is only one of us working and bringing home a salary." (He was working as a truck driver at the time. Later he joined the Post Office.) I found a job as a waitress at the Yacht Club in Vancouver.

I went back home to England for three months in 1955, but after only three weeks I felt homesick for Barney and Canada. I stayed for the full three months, but it was tough. My mother wanted to do everything for me, just as she had done when I was a child. I didn't like it. My sister

married a Canadian soldier and immigrated to Toronto, which meant we had family in Canada. She came out to Canada shortly after I did.

We moved around to several cities over the years. We spent time in Toronto, Trail and Victoria. I now live in Salmon Arm B.C. and enjoy my dog, Golden Moon Kit. Barney died in 1984 after open-heart surgery. I miss him. We were married for forty-two years. He died on my birthday, August 25th.

Barney will probably have a lot to say to me when I get to heaven. He liked the odd beer and I scolded him about wasting money on beer. If he were here today I'd let him have his beer. We had a good life together.

I am glad I came to Canada. We did well in this country.