

Douglas Wide
British Evacuee Child
1940



Douglas Edward Wilde
C.O.R.B. No.5339 Peter
John Wilde C.O.R.B. No. 5340

At the time of evacuation in 1940 we were 9 and 7 respectively. We were born at Ickenham Middx.and lived until early 1940 in the south of England.

Our father was an R.A.F. Warrant Officer at the outbreak of war. He was posted to St. Vincents Grantham (H.Q. of the Dambuster operation) in the spring of 1940.

My brother and I had been evacuated briefly just before war broke out but had returned home to Hillingdon Middx. prior to my fathers' posting. My parents had applied for us to be evacuated to Canada to stay with his Aunt in Eriksdale Manitoba. The call came for us to go when we were at school in Grantham Lincolnshire.

We went by train to Liverpool en route we were delayed and on arrival we were in an air raid and had to go to an air raid shelter. We then went to a hostel to await boarding ship.

These facts may have cotributed to a stroke of good fortune for us.On visiting Public Records at Kew I discovered the passenger list for "City of Benares" , on turning the pages I found a number of names deleted in red . My first thought was that these were those that were lost in the sinking. I soon realised that there were not enough for this to be so. Then I discovered Douglas Wilde and Peter Wilde Had been deleted!! The next page in the journal was the list for the " Nova Scotia" I found our names as an addendum to the list.

Memories of the actual trip are sketchy. The things I can remember are that it was a big ship , in fact it was quite small.We were all abit queezy as it was moderately rough, I was better when out on the deck in the fresh air.

We had more or less a free run of the ship and spent a lot of time investgating and asking questions. We had regular boat drills , on one such occasion it was the real thing ! I distinctly remember seeing one ship go down, in Halifax it was said that two were sunk.I was interested

to read in "The Absurd and the Brave" that five were sunk. In an interview with the Toronto Star 8 Sept. 1990 John Haikings said that two were sunk in his convoy -he was on the "Nova Scotia",Who is correct? I don't know.

My brother and I travelled by C.N.R. from Halifax to Winnipeg taking three days. The journey was quite an experience for us, having meals and sleeping on board. The bunks were made up by Negro porters another first as we had not seen a Negro before.

On arrival at Winnipeg we had a medical and other details taken as well as being interviewed by the press an article appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press the actual cutting which I have was sent to our parents in U.K. We were then told we were not going to Aunt Hilda as she had been ill and was quite elderly. We had a night or two in a hostel then travelling by car - on the wrong side of the road to a small town called Morden some 100 miles south of Winnipeg.

We were to stay with Blanche & Les Kerr on 9th Street. They were a couple with no family in their mid 30's Les was a senior manager with the Morden Agricultural Station ,which was just outside the town .

I stayed with them for about a year, they found two of us a bit of a handful! My brother stayed with them for the duration of his stay in Canada. This included a move to Saskatoon Sask. when Les was promoted Director of the Forest Nursery Station at Sutherland.

I had a couple of moves prior to joining the Rowe family. The first was to the home of Rev. Henstock the vicar of Carman about 60 miles from Morden, when his wife became pregnant I went to the Knowles Boys School in Winnipeg, I was there about 9 months. and from there to the Rowe family in Manitou south of Winnipeg. Mr. Rowe was the manager of the Manitoba Wheat Pool Elevator. There were 5 children in the family 4 boys 1 girl and then me. I fitted in between the two younger boys. You may ask why did they do it? more later. I went to the local junior school along with the youngest son the others were in the High School.

After about 18 months Mr. Rowe was promoted to head office in Winnipeg so we moved to 334 Nairn Ave. Elmwood. I went to the Lord Selkirk school. Apart from the normal lessons (lots of Canadian history) I played football, baseball and played in goal at ice hockey in the winter, during that period I also learned to swim.

After returning to England on the "Rangitata" from New York to Liverpool during Jan. 1945, I lost touch with my Canadian family. As the 50th anniversary of my going to Canada drew near I decided to see if I could

trace them. I first wrote to the Canadian Embassy in London to ask for the names of the Town clerks in all the places that I stayed . I also wrote to the employers of Mr. Rowe.

After contacting the names that I had been provided with several contacts were made, all except the one that I really wanted - the Rowes'. I had arranged a trip to Winnipeg for the marriage of the eldest son of my cousin, he I had not seen since 1943. Just before we were about to leave I received a letter from Murray Rowe the eldest son who lives in Victoria B.C.

Apparently the Town Clerk of Manitou had put my letter to him in the local weekly newspaper. The Rowe family who by this time were all living in Victoria had been receiving the paper every week since 1946, in other words some 44 yrs. They made immediate contact with me just in time for us to change our plans and fly direct to Victoria, returning via Winnipeg for the wedding. We had an emotional, very friendly and hospitable visit. Mrs. Rowe (my Canadian mum) was in her 80,s by this time.

Two significant facts took place during a family reunion. One, Mum Rowe asked for a photo to be taken of her five sons (her 4 and me)and two, my wife asked her why when she had five children of her own why did she take another , an evacuee ? Her answer was that they were due to take two girls, relations of Mr. Rowe but they were lost at sea. That was the first that the family knew of this event, they were only told that they were not coming but not why.

She didn,t know the name of the ship I have often wondered if it was the "City of Benares", what a coincidence that would be. The Rowe family are trying to shed some light on the names.

Going back to our original home coming- losing the Canadian accent was top priority so that we could fit in. Our integration both at home , socially and school was not too difficult or painful.

After completing our education my brother joined the R.A.F. as a regular and became commissioned officer as air crew- Navigator. For myself, I took an indentured apprenticeship with the firm of Aveling Barford, manufacturers of Road Rollers and heavy earth moving equipment., studied at night school and did my National Service in the R.A.F., on returning progressed up the ladder to become Works Director and Managing Director of one of its subsidiaries.

I guess our Canadian experiences made us self reliant and more confident an experience we would not have missed.