

Tom Isherwood
Child Migrant
Aquitania
May 1925, 1947



Editor's Note: Excerpts from Mr. Isherwood's book are published with his permission. They may be quoted in the context of child migration or the Fairbridge Farm School but not in that of the Home Child movement.

As I write, my mind strains to bring back some semblance of reality of my young life.

I strain for words to describe the fragmented pictures that surface now and then in the dusty library of my mind.

I try to make sense of the scraps of the limited information that squeeze out from an overloaded mind.

I have struggled over fifty years with no help or understanding from the people that did this to me.

To rob me of my childhood and family forever is a crime, and the world should know about this sick British and Canadian tragedy that has been hidden these many years gone by.

The day came in May 1947 and I was placed on a train going somewhere.

My memory is fuzzy of this train ride, but is not bad when I boarded the Troop Ship Aquitania in the British Port of Southampton. I have since heard that the Aquitania was the third largest and most rat infested Ship in the fleet. Here I am wish 27 other kids heading to a place called Canada.

I remember soldiers on board that would give us chocolate bars and treat us kindly.

Here I am sailing the North Atlantic Ocean, without a care in the world.

My memory is dim of the long crossing and I did not think of my destiny as this was out of the scope of my young mind, besides, "children were seen and not heard."

I remember running on the huge decks of the Aquatania and looking at the huge mountain of waves the ship had to slice through. No land in sight and only the sound of the powerful sea.

Quite an adventure for a young boy! Little did he know, what danger to his mind and well-being lay ahead.

Crossing the Atlantic may have been rough, but after attending a war every day, it must have been some adventure.

I recall a documentary made a few years back titled Rough Crossing. It was about children being sent to Canada before the War got into full swing. This was to save them from the horrors kids like me were subjected to.

After the war, they got to go home to their Mummies and Daddies while little buggers like me were experimenting in the home land with the machines of war and the devastation and unknown sadness it handed to me.

We got kicked out of our country of birth after making sure it was safe for your return to jolly old England.

Wow! Wish I could have been there for you all. Country wise only, you kids got the dirty end of the stick.

Little did I know but my very own family protested violently as to my whereabouts, but to no avail.

England takes the cake and the world will know about War crimes committed against their own babies.

On May 25 1947 the Aquatania docks without mishap in Halifax, Province of Nova Scotia in Canada from Southampton England with 28 British Migrant children on it's manifest. This would be denied as the years rolled by. We eventually boarded a Canadian Pacific Railway Train pulled by powerful steam locomotives.

They were a beautiful sight to behold, the all aboard was given and the tons of iron flexed their muscle and started us on another journey. Smoke billowed overhead and I remember the shrill whistle of the train.

The train ride seemed to go on forever and ever and I had never seen sights as I did out of the coach window. The wheels of steel clickety clacked on

track that resembled ribbons of steel winding through changing countryside, mountains, lakes, rivers, streams and animals I could not identify or imagine.

Waterfalls and canyons, tunnels through solid rock. I had a million questions to ask, but nobody to answer them.

Life to this little boy was exciting and I did not have a care in the world.

From the Atlantic Ocean in the East to the Pacific Ocean in the West the powerful engines roared through the day and night. Somehow I had been chosen to leave Hell for Heaven, at least it appeared that way.

As I grew (older) more cracks would appear and I would ask God to help me understand these adult people that had deceived me and set the stage for many years of mental cruelty.

They robbed me of childhood love and belonging and the sowing of PTSD was setting it's unknown seed, growing slowly inside this child veteran.

Five days later we arrived on the West coast of Canada in the city of Vancouver in the province of British Columbia.

From there it was onto a ferryboat which took us across Pacific Ocean waters to a place called Vancouver Island.

We got off the ferryboat when it docked in Victoria, capital city of British Columbia. We had crossed about 38 miles of water that separated us from the mainland. Next we were on a bus to our new home at Prince of Wales, Fairbridge Farm School near the town of Duncan.

Again, I cannot remember everything perfectly, but getting off the bus I saw some awfully big boys.

Turned out that most of them came to Fairbridge before the war and were much older and bigger than our group and they appeared to be giving us the once over.

After the few short years I had been alive, not much could phase me.

I was probably the youngest and the smallest. I don't recall the older boys associating with us small fry.

Chapter 3

Life at Fairbridge Farm School as I remember:

The one thousand acres of land I would get to know as my home was incredibly awesome. Fairbridge was a picture framed in the wilderness of this place called Canada. The massive Douglas fir trees and the stillness of the forest and unbroken land captivated my mind.

I started to sense adventure and would imagine I was a pirate in a strange world.

I came back to reality as my name was called. I was assigned to a cottage made of wood, which housed 12 to 14 boys. A cottage Mother was in charge and lived in a suite in the cottage. Her job, I believe, was to keep us towing the line and doing all cottage chores. The first week or so was spent introducing us new kids to our new surroundings, rules, routines, boundaries, school and the layout of the farm. Let's not forget the Anglican Church of England where many hours were spent.

Years later I would find out I was baptized a Catholic and I would change my whole attitude toward religion. There were never ending chores to be done, regardless of your age or size. We slept on steel beds, (two sheets, one blanket, no pillow.) The bottom sheet would be washed once a week and the top sheet would now be on the bottom. Fairbridge had it's own laundry, where the Fairbridge girls toiled. I learned how to make what we called a French bed. This was accomplished by pulling up and folding the bottom sheet in half. The bed looked perfectly fine, the unsuspecting boy going to bed found out instantly his feet would not allow him to get into bed. The instigators at the time would double up with glee and the cottage mother would come running; seeking the culprit to no avail. Another mean thing to bigger boys would do was to pin me under a bed cover. I would be on the verge of suffocation, out of air and red in the face and gasping. This was a matter of concern and we little ones took care of it. Five of us formed a band of protection, as it was not right to squeal. Henceforth we were left alone. I have suffered from claustrophobia since I left the farm.

I learned to make a bed and mighty the corners as good as any soldier in boot camp. We were taught how to sew and darn. The limited socks we had would get holes, usually in the heel area. (I was taught to) use a light bulb, which was available for this chore. By pushing the light bulb inside the sock against the hole, one was able to thread wool horizontally and then vertically till the hole was patched. We never got to sleep in and were up and at it by six am. All kids did the chores assigned to them and after two weeks we would rotate. Beds were always made and you could see your reflection through the wax shine on the floors. A Train Bell that was donated by the CPR Railroad long before I arrived governed our lives to a large extent.

Different number of gongs meant different things, and after all these years I cannot remember them all. One could hear that train bell all over the inhabited area of the farm. We ate our meals in a huge common dining hall some distance from the cottages.

There were two of us on this detail. We ate of tin dishes that we had to transport back and forth to the huge dining hall. When the train bell sounded the right number of gongs, we would run as fast as lightening to get in line for food. Some of us being small and young had to stand up as a unit so as not to get bullied out of our place.

I still remember my arm around the tin plate protecting some of what we fancied to be a special treat or desert. After the meal we returned to the cottage and washed and dried the tin dishes and they were ready for the next run.

We only ate in the cottage for Sunday breakfast, which consisted of some kind of store bought cereal. Man this was a treat! I must tell you I have not eaten porridge, fatty stew or fat period since leaving Fairbridge in nineteen-fifty.

Chapter 4: Still at Fairgbridge

I adjusted pretty well to life at Fairbridge just as I was used to being institutionalized. The big difference was, I did not know what crime I had committed and quite frankly did not know any other way. Not knowing what placed me in this labor-intensive camp was not for me to know and sadly the truth will never surface. Fairbridge had fields that seemed to go on forever in the eyes of this little boy. Fields had crops and crops had weeds. Little boys got to pull the weeds from the endless rows of the future food supply. If it was not weeding, we piled firewood for the cottage and other buildings after the older boys split cord after cord. This work was done usually on Saturdays after our regular chores were done. There was our own private school which I recall liking very much. I remember getting a general proficiency award and receiving a book titled 'Tick Toc and Jim' which I treasured for many years.

The book was about the love between a boy and his horse and I read it over and over again; I have loved animals forever, especially dogs and horses. Even Wooly the only Dog on the farm had a special bond with me.

To-day I have a pure-bred Rotweiler, her name is Nikita or Niki for short. As in the past Niki gives all her love and devotion that only an animal can do.

The town of Duncan was about five or six miles from Fairbridge Farm School.

There was the odd time that we got to Duncan unescorted and strictly against the rules we were supposed to abide by. The hike into Duncan on the dusty road with one or two of the other boys is a fine memory. We must have looked like Dr. Mengle's children, the boy's from Brazil.

Cloned we were not, but we dressed the same if you could call it that. Khaki short pants were everyday dress, no underwear, socks or shirts in the balmy warm days of summer. We could hear the town's people talk and some obviously whisper about those kids from that Orphanage or Fairbridge. Little did they know, we studied them just as insistently?

When we did speak, I believe the people loved our English accent but were for the most part glad to see us head back out of town. If they had only known, we were not Fagan's vagrants, pickpockets or thieves.

Quite the opposite, we were curious, mischievous but knew right from wrong. We were disciplined severely the time we did get caught out of bounds, but it was worth it.

One day the school in the town of Duncan had a fire and our private school at Fairbridge was going to accommodate some of the town students till damage had been assessed and repaired. At first the town kids were weary of our dress, speech and general well-being. I can only guess they had heard things said about us in their own school and town.

However being kids we soon got accustomed to each other and they soon realized we were not freaks but well disciplined boys for the most part. We taught, shared and let them play English games that they had never heard of. Conkers was a good game, the conker was a chestnut, hopefully baked to take the greenness out of it and make it hard. A string or shoelace was threaded through the center of the conker. And you would hold your conker vertically, suspended by the string or shoelace. Your opponent would take a downward whack with his conker and try to smash your to smithereens. If he failed to smash your conker, then it was your turn and so on till one of the conkers bust. The winner took on other contenders and added the losing conker points to his winning conker. You could trade winners for new green ones or carry on till your got smashed. We taught them marble games we had learned in England and how to build their own kites out of a simple frame and paper and watched some of them fly in the wind way up in the sky. How to play soccer the English way as indeed that was our favorite sport and we played well. On the other hand, they realized that we did not have

material things like bicycles or store bought toys or a mum and dad to go home to when the school day was over. For us our work started again and I would look forward to tomorrow and my new friend Johnny to share school and playtime with.

There was a distinct difference and curiosity opening up in my mind.

The difference between the town kids and us struck fear of the unknown in my young mind. A million questions started to surface but would go unanswered for many years.

Somehow arrangements were made for me to spend a weekend with Johnny and his parents on the family farm. God I remember how awesome it was.

They lived in a lovely home, which did not resemble my cottage at all.

I have never been in such a place that was called home and only three people lived in it. I felt awkward and out of place with all the attention. Was this affection?

The house had many rooms and beautiful furniture that made my eyes pop and I would look but not touch. Johnny had his own bedroom and things called pillows on the bed. We ended up play fighting with them and got gently scolded by his mum. I tried to go to sleep that night with a pillow but it was on the floor in the morning. To this day I prefer to sleep without a pillow. When I enquired about a pillow back at Fairbridge I was told that pillows give you round shoulders and so be it.

Johnny had a mountain of toys and a crystal set you could listen to radio channels. I got on a bicycle for the first time in my life and after a fall or two got the hang of it, wobbly as it was. I could not remember having a meal, especially home cooked and delicious in my entire life. To eat all I want without fear and with only four other people at a family table had put me beyond my limits of comprehension.

I watched in awe as Johnny's mum talked on a telephone.

His mum and dad could not stop laughing and I believe they were starting to understand my tragedy long before I did. Their (old) farmhouse still stood vacant some distance from the main house. In it was an old wall phone and Johnny's mum said we could talk back and forth from the old house to the new one. We spent endless time and laughter on the phone. That visit was the start of my quest to try and understand my purpose in life.

It hit me hard and fast when I was alone. The empty feeling and reaching for something that was not to be had was difficult for a youngster to handle. I had no questions; for no one would answer anyway.

I was adjusted back to the world I knew as the town kids were back at their own school in Duncan. Winter cam with lots of snow and winter shores of snow removal and packing firewood were added to the list of our regular workload. My memory of Johnny and his family was just that, a warm pleasant memory of a time gone by. I was now facing a look at my own destiny, as I knew now at my tender age that something had gone drastically wrong.

I decide to try and survive the parts of life that were missing and excel in the good things that I was made of.

Then it happened! Johnny and his mum and dad were there to take me to their home again. All the caution I had built in my mind and any expectations had blown out the window of my life. I was hugged and cooed to and started to feel some emotion and a great feeling of warmth.

When we pulled into the long driveway to the farm, I noticed a beautiful black horse running along the fence line, a new addition. I thought of my book Tic-Toc and Jim and had a very pleasant daydream. This horse was nothing like the huge Clydesdale workhorses they used at Fairbridge to plow the fields and perform many other farm duties.

I got settled quickly as I was not at all shy around this family and was eager to join in. Johnny's Dad hooked up the black horse to a cutter, a horse drawn sled, silver bells and all. Talk about dashing through the snow, this would become one of my finest memories of all time as so many have disappeared like smoke in the wind.

That weekend closed the chapter on that part of my life, as I would never see that family again. My fortress of life was getting stronger and I learned not to dwell on things that were out of reach. I wish though I had remembered Johnny's last name.

Some of the older boys were putting snow sleds together out of barrel staves and anything they or we could muster. The sleds were built complete with steering and waxed runners. We were ready and were off to what we called chicken house hill.

Named such because of the proximity of the farm buildings that contained the farms own supply of chickens. Gad that hill was long and steep.

Some sleds would hold six or eight kids that would show no fear. My memory still sees brave kids trying the hill on a single barrel stave, sorta like slalom water skiing. Can't remember one of us making that run in one piece.

Olympic Bob Sledding which I have seen since, has nothing on the rush we felt roaring down chicken house hill.

I know one thing for certain, those sleds of yesteryear would out race anything store bought. At this time I spent at Fairbridge it was my life, and apart from Johnny's family was all I knew and had. For the most part I think we kids got along quite well even though today I have a severe memory block like part of my life is missing along with documentation that does not exist.

The one thousand acre farm was ours to conquer and try we did.

The river called Koksilah ran through farm property. Each year a big bulldozer was brought in and would create a dam with a sluice box to hold the river back. This made a perfect swimming hole where we learned to sink or swim in the coldness of river water. In you went, bare assed, one after another. We spent a lot of time in the river and got to be competent swimmers. When we had time for play or adventure, we would amuse ourselves with no supervision that I recall. We would try to catch the huge rainbow trout that every one spoke about with bent pins and string or whatever we could fashion or borrow. We put a fort together in the deep forest and pretend that we were in the world at a different time. We would make the fort out of windfall logs; branches, ferns or what have you and try to hide it like a pirate hides his gold.

Being young boys, we could be quite mischievous and was pretty good with my homemade slingshot. We would hunt for the might wasp or Hornet's nest and pepper it till it fell from the branch it was hanging from.

After stirring up the nest we would run like there was no tomorrow, faster than the wind could blow. Every now and then one of us would pay the piper with a sting or two but nothing would deter us from this sport. There was a pond situated on the farm in an area called the benchlands that was laden with frogs and tadpoles. There were a couple of rafts always afloat for our enjoyment. The pond was not clear water like the river, but murky and slimy from little movement. Now and then one would fall off the raft into this mostly stagnant water much to the merriment of our chums. A document from the cottage mothers report said "the boy has trouble keeping clean". The older boys taught us how to build our own kites form paper and flue made from flour. Some of the

kites did really well when the wind was right. As I put these thoughts of yesteryear on paper, some fond memories bring a chuckle and warmth as the reel of motion pictures goes through my agile mind. Fairbridge was my home and at the time I knew nothing different but the institutional way of life. I had no idea the pressure and turmoil that would be placed on my in the near future would stay till the end of time.

In 1948 one of the kids got tonsillitis and had to have his tonsils out.

First thing you know kids were getting what we referred to as laughing gas and getting our tonsils out whether needed to or not. Another time it was ringworm, this time we had our heads shaved and purple colored stuff was painted on our heads. Most other things like chickenpox, mumps, measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough I had already according to very old documents.

Church was a very big part of our lives at Fairbridge and we attended faithfully every Sunday to worship and put a penny in the collection plate. The chapel was very quaint and very Anglican and is still in use today for a lot of different functions. The wooden framed picturesque chapel could seat three hundred people. Trees, peace and tranquility surrounded it. Some of the old Fairbridgians meet there every year for a reunion. I returned with my family a few years ago and let my own memories guide me back in time. The sound of singing reached my ears and appeared to echo through the wooden boards of this house of worship.

Tears entered my eyes as my heart joined the singing. I believe a man named Tom Hipp was the minister and he had a son named Peter. My favorite memory of the chapel was harvest time when the fruits of labor were present. Sunday school was another part our life and was fully accepted by me.

My two daughters had a hard time believing we ate off tin dishes, but Dad you went to church, Wow!

The shock came years later when I found out I was baptized a Roman Catholic and sent to Canada as a Protestant. It would not be long now that cracks would appear in my life and I would face a nightmare of cruelty bestowed upon my young soul for the rest of my days.

A thought just crossed my mind that I had my fifteen minutes of fame at Fairbridge. I starred in the play (Tom Sawyer) live before my peers in the school auditorium. I remember Becky Thatcher and Tom had a problem with strawberry jam that was required in a scene.

The jam got all over our faces, the audience howled with laughter as I recall. I can't remember who played the part of Becky, but if you're out there please get in touch. In real time I guess I wasn't at Fairbridge as long as I thought, but to a small boy 4 yrs seemed like an Eternity.

The endless days and starry nights of the nineteen-forties linger in fond memories of so long ago.

Creating dreams as I stared into the heavens, picking, out Star formations such as the Little Dipper, and the Milky Way and wondering about the man on the moon.

Wandering how the Mariners, learned how to navigate by studying the world above.

I still have that fascination for navigation these many years later.

Life to me was okay on the farm, gee I didn't know any other way?

I was fed, clothed, schooled, disciplined, worked hard and could swear like hell!

I was verbally abused and forever bossed around. On the other hand I don't remember any sexual abuse against myself. But to be perfectly honest, I believe a lot of my young life is blocked out to this day.

Unfortunately there is no human being that can help me with my past.

The Government of Canada has stated I don't exist.

Some of the other kids now grown up have told me stories of sexual abuse that send shock waves through me.

They claim that indeed I was abused and made to perform sexual acts on older boys.

Even now at times, my mind will search the past only to shut down any thoughts that strain to surface.

Quite simply put, I didn't stand a chance in hell at that tender age of guiding any part of my own life. Always remember (children) should be seen and not heard.

One of my saddest times, just every now and then, I would wonder why I didn't have a brother or sister, like other kids. Something deep inside me told me I did. Time passed and memories of England faded. I went along

never trusting even my own thoughts to do with any kind of real or imaginary family.

I just did not know, and the adults at the time, sure heck as never spoke to me about my childhood in England.

The past became extremely dim and I accepted the fact that I was very much alone.

I received a document almost sixty years later from the Archives in Liverpool England.

It states in cold words "It is better to make the Lad forget about his family and life in England."

I can't remember ever hearing the word or receiving a thing called love.

Fairbridge was no comparison to the American TV Show Walton's Mountain that I watched in envy many years later. If only I could have had it that tough. Fairbridge beat or at least tied Walton's Mountain in natural geography. There certainly wasn't the family atmosphere the Walton family enjoyed. So much for fiction!

The day came and I noticed some of the kids were disappearing. I would never, I supposed, see them again. The only thing that had seemed stable was being taken away, it was enough to break my heart. Don't these old people realize the trauma they put us through?

Little friends that had survived a war, crossed the rugged North Atlantic Ocean, crossed a Foreign Nation, and now total separation. And we were told there was a 'God.' My turn came to be looked at and evaluated. Adult people that seemed very nice³ were checking me out. I was told to speak and the people got a big kick at my English accent.

Some folks tweaked my cheeks and were very pleasant. They left and I thought that was that, and things were back to normal for me. I couldn't have been more wrong.

I was dressed up real slick one day, and driven to Victoria where I boarded a beautiful Ship. I have always remembered the steam ship (Princess Margaritte) She was sold for scrap in the nineteen ninety's.

I remember it was dark as we crossed the thirty-eight miles of Pacific Ocean that separated Vancouver Island from the mainland. Miss Christopherson accompanied me. I must admit the lady stuck by me through thick and thin as the time marched by. Turned out she was a

social worker with the children's aid society, which as I grew, learned to hate their system with a passion.

The voyage and the Princess Margaritte to a kid like me were awesome.

The dining room was absolutely the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

I was used to tin dishes, one knife, fork and spoon and a tin plate and cup. It was a lot to endure, let me tell you.

I had manners from the days of Oliver Twist, the very basics.

The silverware alone were hard to comprehend. So many knives and forks for one meal.

I can remember steaming under Lions Gate Bridge and looking at all the lights of the harbor, and the magnificent splendor of the Hotel Vancouver.

Of course I did not know the names of anything at this time, but to this young boy it had to be a fairy tale. At this point in time my little world was spinning with excitement, and any thoughts of Fairbridge were on the back burner.

Check this out, we docked in Vancouver and disembarked. I then followed very obediently my mind reeling with all this excitement. Then it happened, I was being introduced to a man and a lady who for the first time in my young life I would call Mum and Dad. The man smiled and I believe called me son. The blonde haired lady was beautiful, and I sensed what I would later confirm in life: I was truly loved and wanted.

A lot of coldness was trying to escape my body.

Fairbridge, and bits and pieces of the war years would flood my young mind. God it was hard, but I knew I belonged to these people and I should try to be on my best behavior.

We got into this shiny red car, which the man drove, turned out it was a Packard which are not made anymore.

A thing of beauty it truly was. The lights of the downtown core flew by. I didn't know where I was going and did not care, as long as this wasn't a dream. I could begin to cope with this new world. The Packard pulled into a driveway, and the engine stopped.

You think I would be tired from all of this, but I wasn't.

My eyes must have popped at the sight of the home I was looking at. I am going to live here, Wow!

I was introduced to a boy and a girl who would be my brother and sister.

Doug was three years younger than I was and Pat was three years older.

I was between ten and eleven years old. Looking back we hit it off quite well, even though I wasn't a city kid.

I have to be honest and tell you, I could swear like a Trooper at that age turning it off and playing the Angel was second nature.

As I said, the house was like something out of a fairy tale, this was nineteen-fifties and we had a television.

What is that I thought? A huge piano that I would actually take lessons on. Looking back I wish someone had kicked me in the butt and made me follow through with the lessons.

There was a swimming pool in the back yard, another mind blower.

Life was beginning to look up for this kid I thought as I dived into the pool, much to the horrified look on Mum's face when I surfaced. I suppose she thought I was fragile? Wrong! I didn't even think! How could Mum know what we did at Fairbridge where we were growing up with little hearts of stone and feeling that were stretched like elastic bands, ready to snap at any time.

The tin dishes, the never-ending chores, the strict way of life to be banished forever.

Gad this had to be heaven for this little boy.

I shall tell you about the live-in Main; her name was Miss Poshman, and a name I should never forget. I loved her to, she prepared the meals and set the tables and such. There was a little bell on the dining room table and if you needed her, you rang the little bell.

I got severely scolded for ringing that darn bell.

I was simply timing Miss Poshman with my new watch, to see how fast she could appear.

On the other hand we shared precious moments. I would be up early and down to the kitchen to see her, she would always squeeze the orange juice the natural way as it was good for my health she said. We became best friends. But she had to leave because she was getting married and how sad I was. It was rather unusual for me to show emotion.

However, all good things have a way of falling apart. It was about to happen to me.

My brand new world was to be invaded. I was placed in a school called Vancouver College, an astute Catholic school in its day.

That's all I needed my mind was thinking, more bloody discipline and now a strange religion. My heart was broken, but who did I tell? Didn't anyone think of my history with my own Church and my own religion?

After all I had witnessed and lived through at such a young age, was I the only one that knew I was a Protestant.

All the praying and church during the Second World War and Fairbridge, plus all the hours spent at Sunday school meant nothing, What was I to do! Rebel of course and so this other saga of my young life began.

When I arrived at the Catholic school, my mind was on full alert.

I remember vividly sitting in a classroom with a bunch of kids that were all dressed identical that didn't phase me, I had been there before. When this man came in I remember thinking he looked like a bat all dressed in black his robes flowing as he walked. I was totally unhappy in this environment, and raised my hand. The man acknowledged and I asked, "please sir! May I leave the room?" The man replied, "You must call me father like the rest of the children." I came back with words of ice, "You are not my father; he died during the war."

I can still see the cold stare he gave me and the bland expression on the other kids faces along with the look of shock!

The silence in the classroom was as though the air quit moving but I remained defiant.

I never went back and was now forever to be labeled a problem child for the rest of my young life.

God it hurt something awful to feel so damn alone.

I felt like I was no a roller coaster of emotion and sensed change then and there.

Yes Thomas you are no longer at Fairbridge with your little British friends eating and working along side them.

All of a sudden a great loneliness came over me and I longed for the people of my own kind. Riches could not replace what I had, lived through. I was ten years old and my strong religious beliefs had been tampered with three time. I made up my mind about that time to believe in myself only, and park all that other stuff forever.

Fifty years have gone by and the whole world knows what went on with the Christian Brothers of the world and that very school I attended. At least I saved my young body from possible destruction. My brothers and sisters shipped to Australia were raised under the Father Rules.

There is no way I would dance to their drumbeat.

Life continued with my adoptive parent's to be and I went to a public school named Maple Grove Elementary, I felt much better, but I lacked something inside. I had a sense of being wanted and liked, loving or being loved by anyone up to this point would be hard to understand the meaning.

I had an untouched soft spot in my heart but I lived defensively and learned to evaluate situations quickly.

I was badly skilled in the cuddles department, but I thought I was getting the hang of it.

I guess it did not show, but looking back I cared for and loved those four people more than any of us would ever know.

The turbulence seemed to have subsided, and things appeared good.

We all took a train trip from Vancouver, British Columbia. I was excited and looked forward to a new adventure. The stations in all their grandeur and the steam engines were in my life once again. All aboard was called and we were on our way to Chicago, a city in the state of Illinois in the United States of America.

I still remember the dining car on the train, absolutely beautiful. I was used to the place settings pretty good by now, but theirs always something new or unexpected. The waiter put this pretty long stemmed glass full of scented water and pink things floating around.

I could not wait; I raised the glass and chomped what turned out to be a rose petal in a finger bowl. The dark waiter's eyes showed his disbelief and he must of gone and hid to stop from laughing, I think I was the only one that wasn't uncomfortable.

Eventually we ended up at Lake Simcoe in the Province of Ontario where Ottawa the capital city of Canada is. The four of us enjoyed a fine holiday at the lake but Dad commuted by car to his office in the city of Toronto about sixty miles south of Lake Simcoe.

Overall we got along very well, other than the pains of my adjustments to a new life style. Barring a vicious lightning storm around the lake area, which appeared to only excite me the travel was wonderful and I never ran out of questions to ask. I was indeed inquisitive and absorbed all things new.

The holiday wasn't over yet; a brand new Oldsmobile car showed up. We would travel across all the northern states of American back to Beautiful British Columbia Canada. What more could a kid ask for. I can't remember anything that seemed out of the ordinary after that.

One thing that bugged Mum was my inability to keep footwear on, especially rubber boots. Must have been a throw back to the orphanage where barefoot was always in season. One day I was put in the big red Packard, Mum was driving and she seemed very upset. I had no idea and could not believe what happened next, my new world was about to blow up.

I still remember street signs, stating Fourth and Alma streets as the Packard rolled to a halt in some part of Vancouver. I was greeted by someone saying come along Tommy, come along now. The first time in my life my whole body seemed paralyzed except the sobbing and tears that ran down my face. I looked at the lady that was my Mummy and she looked devastated, and so upset that I cannot describe in words.

The Packard roared off as I stood there, still sobbing, with no understanding as to what was going on. A beautiful thing happened many years later when we teemed up again. Mum is going on ninety-three years old soon and we are in touch often. It's late in life now and she was the only woman I ever recognized as my Mum then and now.

I have remembered Forth and Alma forever and still don't know why?

There has to be something I wasn't told. Mum says "It's the worst mistake I ever made letting you go." All I can say is tell me about it.

What I don't know is my pilgrimage through my young life has many Foster homes and schools yet to chart and run the gauntlet over and over again.

My young life would here of no more tears and for a while my heart turned to stone. Nothing came in and another went out.

I was on a journey to become a survivor, happy outside but very sad inside.

It applies to this very day if I allow myself to slip back in time and revisit those days of yesteryear. Who said the Past could come back to haunt you was dead on the money.

Summary

After being so alone for so many years like a newborn animal all alone in the forest this Child Migrant had to find the way to survive as the path gets lonelier as the years go by.

I was to be seen and not heard and harsh loveless discipline was normal to my way of life as I recall.

Being such a young a child placed in an English emigration home with many other children I had no thoughts and paid no attention to what other child may have been my brother or sister.

Being confined to the homes and bomb shelters of England for my first six years on earth was normal for this child.

The sound of whistling bombs, sirens, death and destruction has stayed hidden only for my mind to endure all these years.

Arriving in Canada in 1947 I was to be isolated in what was really a British Orphanage.

The Fairbridge Farm schools in Canada and Australia were named after the founder Kingsley Fairbridge.

Fairbridge Canada and it's 1000 acres was to be my home till 1950 when we kids were put up for adoption or placed in foster homes as the farm was broke before I arrived, I found out much later in life.

Many schools and foster homes later I left the school I loved and joined the Royal Canadian Air force.

All the homes weren't bad but I lacked the love and affection they gave their own and loneliness and fear would creep into my young soul as I knew by now just how different I was.

Almost sixty years later I went to Australia with my wife Sheryl and met my brother and my two surviving sisters at long last.

I sobbed at the grave sight of my oldest sister Beryl as I tried so desperately to talk to her and asked my forgotten God for help which seemed to ease my heartache and pain.

Another trip followed to the UK and Wales to meet Uncles and Aunts well into their healthy eighties and many family members I never knew existed.

It was a short visit but now forever branded in my heart.

I had learned little of my Mum and Dad other than they were nice people, like most Brits trying to survive a War and keep their children safe.

I was asked to go home by the political assassins who rudely informed me none of my questions would be answered.

In summary it was OK and exciting to meet family after such a long time. But it places a heavier burden on a much older body and heart with the mystery of my lonely journey to Canada still unanswered.

I wake up often wondering if the stone should of remained unturned as what I didn't know about my beautiful foreign family couldn't hurt me and my Canadian family, at is does now and will forever more.

Branded Childhood, Youth and Adult
Which now includes all members of my Canadian made family

Tom

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First Christmas in Canada-1947

I was 7 years old when I tried to sleep, the room was dark, there wasn't a peep.

Christmas eve was here at last, in my new country that is so vast.

I hung a darned woolen sock at the foot of my old iron bed, one blanket,
no pillow for my tiny head.
Pictures of war played in my mind, a gruesome reminder I could have
died.
My first Christmas in Canada in 1947, the dormitory is quiet like it must
be in heaven.
Rhythmic soft breathing of other little boys, some no doubt dreaming of
magical toys.
As morning came with broken sleep, I had not counted many sheep.
I fumbled quietly in the dark, a strange feeling in my heart.
My sock had gone from the end of the bed, fear set in that Santa is dead.
Silently I lay in bed, tears of sadness I did shed.
I went outside and scanned the skies and prayed that Santa had not
crashed and died.
To my family that had abandoned me, you broke my heart till eternity.
Elders tried to make me understand that Santa had not changed my
address in this great big land.
Man is born equal so it's said, tell that to the Orphan in the iron bed.

Written by Tom Isherwood
CAN-A-DA

Never Forget The
Forgotten Children of War

A two minute silence would be observed around the world at the 11th
hour on this 11th day the 11th month of every year.

The mist rose slowly in the early dawn, leaving dew drops glistening on
manicured lawns.
White crosses and poppies come to mind, mixed with sadness in a child's
mind A special day this would be, to thank the veterans that kept us
free.
The only sounds are heart beats in the chest, as comrades remember
who gave their best.
Standing quietly feeling sad and alone, minds flood with memories of
those who never came home.
As the Bugle sounds one more time, remember those who gave or put life
on the line.
One historical battle sadly forgotten on Remembrance Day, are the
unmentioned veteran children, exiled from family far away.
I am one child of war that lost it all, why do children take a life-time fall?
Adults failed to keep me safe after Wars end, this Orphans war will never
end.

Written by Tom Isherwood

Abbotsford
November 24, 2004