

Marie Ori Burns  
Hungarian  
Displaced Person  
General Stuart  
Heintzelman  
January 17, 1948



To my best recollection the name of the steamship that tied up in Halifax Harbor on January 17th, 1948, was the General Stuart Heintzelman. She was a merchant vessel. She sailed out of Bremerhaven, Germany, the voyage lasting eleven days, many of which were violently stormy. They were, to a novice sailor like me, dreadfully frightening.

I was then an eighteen year old immigration girl, sailing alone, leaving my family behind on the outskirts of Salzburg, Austria. They and I had endured the life of refugees, called displaced persons, from December of 1944, until December of 1947.

My voyage over the Atlantic at the start brought me three miserable days of seasickness, when I realized that the way to take my mind off my misery was to ask for a job in the ship's gallery, where I was granted a minor service- that of passing out trays to the ship's passengers for three meals a day.

I "forgot" to be seasick. The food was splendid and the crew was great, mostly Americans, I think.

I was most fortunate to be among the early arrivals of D.P's in this wonderful, free and prosperous country, my beloved Canada. To be here felt like being next door to Heaven.

Since I had a basic knowledge of the English language, I was sent to Brockville, Ontario, to serve as a ward-aid at the Ontario Hospital for the mentally ill.

The weather on the day of our arrival in Halifax was cold and rainy and the trip to Ontario seemed nearly endless, as we traveled by train.

My early experience at the Ontario Hospital was frightening, because I had no previous training even in the rudiments of psychology, nor any contact with the mentally ill.

One thing I had determined: to learn to speak English to the degree of perfection I was capable of and also to lose my foreign accent. It was too

late for this latter objective. Now I feel that my accent is no hindrance, but, rather, I hope that it adds spice to my speech.

My host Country could not have been kinder, or more generous, and I often thank God for assigning it as part of my destiny.

The Opus No 1 of my life was the loving work of bringing up my daughter and son, aided by my fine Canadian husband, Robert Burns, of Scottish-Irish descent. People joke about him being related to the famous Scottish poet. Robert, by the way, does write Christmas poems to me.

As a miracle, a life-long wish was granted me in 1984, when I had earned the degree of B.A. in English Literature. My joy was double, as my son received his B.B.A. also from Bishop's University, of Lenuoxville, Quebec, on the same day.

I jokingly say that I am walking in my daughter's footsteps; she also majored in the discipline I had.

As added relish, The Record, our Eastern Townships newspaper, published a monthly column by yours truly, giving a small taste in journalism.

This, in brief, is the history of a former refugee, who is now an enthusiastic and patriotic citizen, having obtained my citizenship at the earliest opportunity.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to God and to Canada for the privilege of being one of this country's citizens.

Yours truly,

Marie Ori Burns

P.S. I failed to state that I was born in Budapest, Hungary, and spent the first fifteen years of my life there, until we evacuated in the spring of 1944. We were being bombed by Soviet planes by night and allied bombers by day.