

Anne Silins
English Immigrant
Europa
May 26, 1951



TO CANADA via PIER 21.

Sailed from Plymouth - 19 May 1951.
Arrived Pier 21 - Halifax 26 May 1951.
Arrived Victoria, B. C. - 30 May 1951.

To me, as a young girl of thirteen years of age, Canada was a dream. I had heard so much about Canada during the war years and the years immediately following the war. We had many picture books and it all seemed to be vast and beautiful. Snow capped mountains, forests that filled the landscape, mile after mile of country without a man, woman or child. This is the vision I had in my head. The big world map which hung at the front of all my school rooms showed big patches of pink spread all over the world. Our teachers had proudly pointed out over and over again that these pink bits were the British Empire and I saw that Canada was the largest patch of all. My Father told of ice cream by the gallon, sweets which were not rationed and opportunities for anyone who was willing to work hard. We were going to live in Canada.

My Father had been in the Royal Air Force and he had been stationed at the Patricia Bay Airport on Vancouver Island in British Columbia for much of the Second World War. He, and many of the men who had been stationed there with him, fell in love with that enchanted island. Vancouver Island was so like England in many ways with its traditional tea rooms and formal gardens. But also mysterious and almost 'oriental' when the cloud level settles on mountain tops and mist swirls around the tree tops. Victoria was a perfect combination of elegant sophistication and rural charm.

We were going to leave our village of Appleby Magna in Leicestershire in the heart of agricultural England. A few men from the village left to fight during the War but because we were very much an agricultural village many men stayed to work on the farms. Those who didn't worked in the 'pits' and coalfields of nearby Swadlicote and Moira.

The war was over in 1945, I was seven years old. Life continued as I had always know it - school, village life and the daily work of a farm. But all this was to change in 1951. My Father made his announcement at one Sunday tea when the family were all gathered together. My Grand-

parents, Aunts, Uncles and cousins were not a bit surprised as Father had been telling everyone who would listen to him that opportunities in Canada were so much better than opportunities in post war Britain. It was no surprise to me then that one morning as I waited at the end of the farm driveway for my school bus, our Post Mistress stuck an envelope in front of me and asked, "What sort of an animal is on this envelope?" "Why, that is a Canadian Beaver" I replied very quickly. "There is no such animal Miss. Smarty Pants, if you don't know the answer, you shouldn't make names up." But I did know and at that moment I knew my Father had his reply from Canadian Pacific Railway, and I knew we were most likely going to Canada.

All day long I couldn't concentrate on my school work, I was in a 'dither' and was reprimanded for day dreaming. When I arrived back at the farm, Father announced that for certain we five would be going to Canada. It was only a few weeks later that we all travelled to London to a Harley Street Clinic for medical examinations and chest x-rays. We were all declared fit. We were emigrating to Canada.

My Mother started the task of packing. She bought two huge brown suitcases at the Ashby de la Zouch Market Day. These were to hold our clothes. We didn't have a lot of clothes, after all the rationing was only just coming to an end. Everything fitted into the two cases easily. Next came the chore of packing all her household essentials. These went into two tea chests that my Mother had begged from the local Ashby tea merchant. Pots, pans, dishes and linens filled the two wooden chests. We even found a corner for my Mother's ancient Singer sewing machine. We would each be allowed one small suitcase to use on board ship. What we had to keep in mind, and this seemed impossible at the time, was that the one small suitcase would need to hold everything we would need for the seven days at sea and also for the five days on the train across Canada to the west coast of British Columbia.

Our Father left three weeks ahead of us, travelling on the S. S. Europa. The local newspaper had the following article about him leaving.

APPLEBY MAN GOES TO CANADA TO FARM.

"Mr. Charles Rowland Bates, 35 years old, ex-airmen of Lower Rectory Farm arrived at Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada last week. Vancouver is a few miles from where he and his family - who will sail from Plymouth on Saturday, May 19 th. - are to make their home. A native of Appleby Mr. Bates served in Canada as a radio operator in the Royal Air Force during the war, and he believes he will find opportunities there for a career on the land. Since demobilization he has been helping

his brother-in-law, George Burnham and lately, his father Mr. Charles T. Bates, farming. Looking forward to joining her husband is Margaret Bates one of the younger daughters of Mr. Bert Sutton, who farmed at Snarestone, and her children.”

We leave Appleby Magna.

The day came to leave my Grandparents, the farm, Appleby and England. All familiar things would be left behind. I had my final look around the village, the church, the farm, the garden, and gave the last hugs to family and friends. Grandma said her goodbye in the kitchen, with many words of encouragement to we children. My Grandpa was standing in the barn yard under the big oak tree, all by himself. He did not want to be among the rest of the kisses, tears and promises to write. He said nothing, he just looked at us, his eyes full of tears. He then turned and walked away up the field. I can still see him, shoulders hunched over, the dogs around his ankles happy for the unexpected walk. We drove away down the driveway to the railway station, the train, the ship and our new life. We turned the corner and could see familiar things no more.

I think perhaps, country people get far more attached to things than city people. Everything is so real and one learns to love every stick and stone, every field, every tree, hedge, just everything. Even with the excitement of the journey, we knew that deep down we were going to miss the countryside of home.

We had a stop and changed trains in London and then we were on to Plymouth. The train pulled into Plymouth - it was May 19, 1951. My Mother reported to the Shipping Office. Our ship the S. S. Europa, the same ship that our Father had travelled on earlier, was anchored off Plymouth Hoe. We learned that we were to go out to the ship on a tender. This, we were told, was a small boat which ferried us out and then we transferred to the Europa out in the ocean. One look from the window of the Shipping Office looking toward the tender and then to the Europa at sea told me that this was quite impossible. However, once the paperwork was all done I bravely jumped with both feet from the dock to the gangway. I needed my departure to be significant. I had made up my mind to jump into my new life. In fact, I jumped back and forth three times, much to the other passengers dismay, I needed to make sure I did it right.

Rumours on board the tender said that the passengers ahead of us had a difficult time transferring from the tender to the ship. Ours would be easier my Mother said, the tide was turning. My Mother knew nothing about ocean waves and tides and she had never been to sea; but I needed to believe her. I knew for sure as we neared the S. S. Europa

that we were all going to drown. The ship looked enormous as we came along side. We bobbed up and down like a cork on the tender and my stomach was beginning to feel very strange. A covered gangway was rigged which closed the gap between the two vessels. Trunks and suitcases were already being moved overhead on pulleys and derricks. The time had come to walk the gangway. I felt like Peter Pan, the ship's officer looked like Captain Hook, and it was no gangway but a gang plank! My sister Kathleen proved to be the fearless one. She started across first and there was nothing but to follow. It turned out to be quite easy. Because the crew had enclosed the gangway, you could only hear the sound of the sea sloshing below between the vessels, we couldn't actually see it. That was good.

As soon as we were aboard we were shown to our cabin somewhere in the bowels of the ship. It all smelled oily and damp, but we had been assigned one large cabin which contained four bunks, two up and two down. Our four small suitcases were unpacked and clothes stored on the shelves of the locker, empty suitcases were stowed under the bottom bunks.

Sunset that evening was brilliant, and seemed a good omen to us all. We were all on deck to see the ship pull away from the tender and watch the coast line of England fall behind. My feelings were a mixture of sadness and excitement. At the grand age of thirteen and a half I felt very grown up.

My sensation the following morning, however were clear. I awoke early and felt very, very sick. Sea-sick, one of the crew informed my Mother, she was feeling the same as I. Seasick was bad enough, but seasickness and homesickness together are a horrible combination. My Mother and I were very troubled by seasickness the whole voyage. We lived on dry cobs of bread and weak tea for most of the voyage. Kathleen was only bothered by seasickness for one day. A kind women from the adjoining cabin took Kathleen and our brother to the dining room the following day and from then on Kathleen who was nine years old, took charge of their trips to breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The S. S. Europa was a twin screw trans-Atlantic liner belonging to the Inces Compania De Navegacion, it was registered in Panama. The crew were Italian, so the food was entirely Italian and very strange smells filtered down to our cabin. Little did I realize that later in life, I would enjoy Italian food very much and become quite good at cooking it.

The S. S. Europa had started this voyage at Le Havre in France, and many Displaced People boarded the ship there. The few times that my Mother and I did walk around the decks, and attended the life boat drill,

we heard many different languages spoken. People were from many different countries, some had been waiting a long time in Displaced Person Camps in Germany. Nearly all had escaped from their homeland as it was being over run by the Russian Army toward the end of the war. In 1951 it was the married couples with children who were left waiting for a new country to take them in. The single Displaced People had been taken first. So there were many families among us, and all excited to be going to Canada. They had few belongings and in most cases they had no money at all. They had 'hope', and excitement - new life in Canada was ahead of them.

TRAIN JOURNEY ACROSS CANADA.

Left Halifax 26 May 1951.
Arrive Victoria 30 May 1951.

After seven days and nights at sea we docked at Pier 21 in Halifax. This was our Gateway to Canada. We disembarked from the ship into a large reception hall. We were allowed to carry our one suitcase, the one which we had with us on the voyage.

After our papers had been processed and each of us had been inspected, we walked towards the baggage area under the big letter B. This was where we found, piece by piece, our two large suitcases and the tea chests. Standing in a line with the baggage on a trolley we waited for these to be inspected. It seemed to take forever, but finally all was checked and with the baggage on the same trolley we walked outside to a wide walkway into the fresh air. Kathleen and I were told to guard the trolley while my Mother went off with our brother to find some food. This food would be our evening meal on the train.

With Velveeta cheese, bread, apples and four of those lovely brown bottles of Orange Crush we gathered ourselves and our baggage trolley and crossed the street to where the train was waiting. This train was the Canadian National and would take us as far as Montreal. It was getting to be late afternoon and the light was fading as the Porter settled us into our seats. Four seats facing each other, these he told us would be made up into two bunks later in the evening. "All aboard" we heard, a whistle sounded, and the train pulled away from Pier 21. By now seasickness and all its effects had left my Mother and I. I had an appetite and bread and cheese never tasted so good. I was in happy spirits and could help keep Kathleen and our brother occupied with 'I Spy' and 'Twenty Questions'.

Out of our window on the left side of the train the sun was setting. We gazed out on mile after mile of farm land and then just as the sun dropped below the horizon, the trees were silhouetted against a golden sunset. Small towns and lakes of every size passed by our window. Everywhere looked so beautiful. The black porter arrived as the train grew dark and the lights came on in our carriage. This man was so kind, he was the first black person I had ever seen and while at first we were all a little frightened, it didn't take long to realize what a happy, helpful and always smiling man he was - he had a cheerful word for everyone.

When we were boarding the train this porter had come along with a telegram for my Mother. Mum had been busy settling us into our seats and she had stuffed the telegram into her pocket, she later told us she thought it was a Welcome to Canada telegram from our Father. Just before bedtime she opened it. Her face went quite white. Yes it was from our Father far away in Vancouver and it said that he had given up the C.P.R. farm job in Ladner, B.C. as it wasn't to his liking. He had sailed to Vancouver Island to visit friends he had known during his war years, he was looking for work on the island and we were to take the ferry to Victoria on our arrival in Vancouver. This he said would mean another sea voyage by Canadian Pacific Ferry. Mum and I looked at each other in fear - another sea voyage - more seasickness.

Slowly our porter made his way along the carriage making up the bunks for the night as he went. This was a Pullman Car and Mum and our brother had the upper bunk and Kathleen and I had the lower one. I think the love of new places and travel started that evening for both Kathleen and I. We pulled the curtains back from the window and gazed out into the black night. We watched the lights of lone farm houses, and here and there a clump of lights as we passed through a village.

Canadian trains were so big and clumsy compared to English ones which we had been used to seeing at our local Snarestone Station. We listened to the bell and the mournful whistle as we travelled those five days and nights crossing the breadth of Canada from east to west. It gave us a feeling of great excitement. The next morning we had a 30 minute stop and we all got out to see the engine. We had heard that there was something called a 'cow catcher' on the very front of the engine and we wanted to see this thing for ourselves. We were not disappointed. It was a huge triangular piece of metal. I thought that I wouldn't like to be a cow caught on that. Why a farmer would allow his cows to be on the railway tracks where they could be hurt, I couldn't fathom. But later in the journey we saw miles of fields were unfenced and we could imagine the 'cow catcher' was needed.

The journey from Halifax to Montreal took approximately one day. We arrived at the Canadian National's Central Station in Montreal in the late afternoon. We transferred by taxi to the Canadian Pacific's Windsor Station as quickly as we could. We had been warned by my Father that it would be best not to talk to people in Montreal as they would only speak French. Mother was in a great 'dither' because she could only speak English and she knew we had to talk to people, even if only for directions. First she found a platform porter to help us with our suitcases and the tea chests. This kindly porter loaded up his trolley and then found us a taxi cab. He pushed the suitcases into the cab on top of us and the tea chests he pushed up on to the roof of this poor cab. It was a short ride, but there was no other way to get us and the luggage moved to Windsor Station. Once at this next station we had help from the taxi driver and Mum found yet another porter to load everything on to yet another trolley. Everyone was so helpful and all went well with the porter leaving our big brown suitcases and the tea chests right next to the baggage car and our four small suitcases on the platform beside the door to what would be our carriage. "Now" he said "you can go and check in at the ticket booth, the one with the word - 'Vancouver', over the wicket. How helpful everyone was to we weary immigrants.

We couldn't actually board the train yet, the cleaners were still working inside, we could see them sweeping and dusting their way along each carriage. We all needed the bathroom and not just to wash our hands and faces. We tried the words we knew, wash room, W.C., necessary and bathroom, but the people around us just shook their heads. People swirled around us each in a hurry and we were just rooted in a clump. Finally Kathleen had a brain storm, TOILET! she exclaimed. That did it. A woman who was collecting the trash close to us understood what we wanted. She not only pointed the way to the toilets, but escorted us and then went on to find us a nearby shop where we could buy bread, cheese and drinks. Loud announcements were made over the public address system and this woman took us to our carriage. All this had all been accomplished with much hand waving, pointing at things, little English and a language we didn't understand.. Mother was delighted to have the help of this wonderful cleaning woman, she opened her handbag to give her a tip, but was waved it away firmly and told Mum that the money was for the three 'kinder'.

So much for our Father's concerns of Montreal. We had been helped, aided and all so kindly done with smiles.

There was still some time to wait until we could actually board the train. We walked two of us at a time the full length of this enormous train. Two of us watching the suitcases, while two walked. We stood and watched as a great steam locomotive backed towards our carriages. It was

terrifying! The bells clanged, the whistle screamed and the wheels shrieked to a halt and were coupled to the front carriage. Everything about it was hissing, panting and gushing steam. I thought we were in the presence of a giant dragon. Finally the carriage doors opened and the cleaning staff got down, taking all their brushes and pails with them. Our kindly Porter helped us gather the four suitcases and showed us to our seats. Once again we had two double seats facing each other and these would also be our bunks for the four nights of our journey.

Mum had made two friends on the ship on those rare occasion towards the end of the voyage when she had managed to go to the dining room for a cup of tea. One lady, Miss. Gray, was travelling from South Wales to visit her niece in Windsor, Ontario. First she was breaking her journey in Ottawa to see a friend for a few days. The other woman was Mrs. Hudson, she was travelling much farther with us to a place with the odd name of Medicine Hat, Alberta. Both of these women were in our carriage. Miss. Gray would be leaving us after only a few hours, while Mrs. Hudson would be with us for three days. Shortly after midnight Miss. Gray got off the train in Ottawa. Mum and I watched from the window, no one seemed to be there to meet her. She had told us that across the street from the station was a large hotel and she was booked to stay there while visiting her friend. What a lonely figure she was walking along the deserted platform and disappearing into the dim station. I am sure it was because it was night time, but Ottawa looked like such a sad place. What would I have thought if a fairy would have whispered to me that night, 'you will live in Ottawa for forty years'. Maybe I would have wanted to return to England as quickly as possible. But Ottawa was to be a vibrant, happy and interesting city to live in and I enjoy it for forty years.

It is impossible for me to try to explain my wonder and amazement during those four days. The countryside of Canada was so beautiful. First miles of forest and lakes inter-spaced with out cropping rock. On the second day out of Montreal we travelled for hours and hours along the shores of Lake Superior. Yes, we told our little brother, it is only a lake, not the ocean. The porter told us with great delight, that if England could be dropped into Lake Superior, it would be lost forever, that is how big this lake really was.

I went to bed dreaming of the little ponds on our farm in Appleby but seeing the enormous Lake Superior instead. The following day we were told we would be in Winnipeg. Winnipeg had only been a romantic sounding name on that big map of my school room wall. Now I was actually going to see this prairie city. As we pulled into the station we were told we would have a two hour stop-over and that we could go for a walk and buy food if we needed to do so. We were all so scared that the

train would leave without us, so we didn't venture far from it. We found a nearby shop and bought the food and drink we needed. More bread and cheese and more of those lovely bottles of Orange Crush. Then we stood beside our carriage door and waited, just in case the engineer decided to leave earlier than was scheduled.

After Winnipeg we travelled mile after mile of very flat prairie. It was late May and little bits of green shoots were all we could see in these huge fields. There were no hedges or stone walls here on the prairie, the only edging between fields was barbed wire fencing and not much of that. Just miles of open space and the telephone poles running along side the railway tracks. Soon after our cheese sandwiches the Porter came along and made up our bunks for the night. Yet another night to go to sleep to the swaying and mournful whistle of the train. Sleep didn't come so easily that night. I lay and listened while my Mother and Mrs. Hudson talked. I hadn't known how sad and scared my Mother was about her new life in Canada. She would miss England, her eight sisters who remained in England. She spoke of her sister May going to New Zealand in the 1920's and wondered aloud how she managed living so far away from England and her sisters. Mum was evidently very concerned about our Father moving to Victoria and not fulfilling his promised year contract on the Ladner farm. The conversation went on quietly far into the night with Mrs. Hudson giving encouragement for all Mum's concerns, except for how she would miss her sisters. Finally I must have fallen asleep and then near morning Mum woke me to say goodbye to Mrs. Hudson. We pressed our noses against the window as she alighted at Medicine Hat. There behind her we saw a neon sign belonging to a restaurant. The way the coloured neon light flashed on and off made it appear as if a Stetson hat was being taken on and off a man's head. Or was it just waving at us in the carriage. Years later when I passed through Medicine Hat in 1965, and once again by train with my two sons, that sign was still waving the Stetson hat. I felt like I was seeing an old friend.

The most dramatic scenery came on our last full day of travel. The Rocky Mountains seemed to reach right up to the heavens. Snow still lay in the high valleys and on the mountain peaks. The mountains folded on to each other. We didn't know whether to look at the tops of the mountains, or at the lovely valleys with rushing rivers beside the tracks. After the Banff, the Spiral Tunnel, Field and Rogers Pass came bedtime, bunk time, our last night on the train. We were due in Vancouver at 9.00 a.m. the next morning.

We awoke to excitement in the air, the smell of the sea in our noses. Slowly the train pulled into the station. We had knelt on our seats for ages with our noses pressed against the window watching the rivers and

then the shoreline of the Burrard Inlet. Our Father's Auntie Jenny Jewell and her daughter Nancy met us on the station platform. After recovering our baggage and seeing to the transfer of it all to the Canadian Pacific Ferry terminal below the station, we all walked up hill to the White Lunch restaurant on Granville Street. It was a fair climb, as our legs were lazy after two weeks of just sitting. Behind us as we walked the Coast Range mountains glittered with snow in the sunshine. I had a hard time walking in a straight line as I couldn't stop looking at those beautiful mountains.

During lunch, which we three children found a good change after days of bread and cheese, I listened as my Great Aunt gave forth on the reasons why our Father shouldn't have left his farm contract. How she and Uncle Alf were happy they had never agreed to sponsor our coming to Canada, especially since Father left whenever he felt like it and without a backward glance as to the consequences. The conversation continued until we boarded the ferry. This didn't help my Mother's peace of mind and she was very worried about the money Father might have to re-pay and the coming sea voyage.

We trudged down the hill with depressed spirits, and were thankful to board the ferry even though we might get seasick again. We waved goodbye and soon found seats on the top level of the ferry. This was only a 4 ½ hour voyage so we may as well enjoy the scenery Mother told us. She had heard that we would sail right under the Lion's Gate Bridge, that big bridge at the entrance to the harbour, she pointed ahead. This voyage was wonderful. No seasickness for any of us, just beautiful sunshine and calm ocean. In the distance we watched the Gulf Islands, large and small, slowly slip by us. These islands were covered in tall trees, here and there a brightly coloured roof showed where a house stood. As we approached Victoria harbour the number of houses increased along the shoreline and then the ferry turned a corner and we were sailing right into the Inner Harbour.

The ferry slowed as it approached the dock in Victoria. The British Columbia Legislature Buildings and the Empress Hotel were directly in front of us - for all the world they looked like a fairy castle. Our Father stood waiting for us on the dock. A friend and his car were with him. We loaded our baggage and we children scrambled in on top of it all. We drove along Wharf Street, over the blue Johnson Street Bridge to the house where we would find a temporary home and a new life.

