

Donald Beattie Martin
by Daughter Fiona
Maarhuis
English Immigrant
Aquitania
May of 1947



Editor's Note: Graham Martin graciously donated to Pier 21 the suitcase used by his parents on their journey to Canada.

Donald Beattie Martin was born in Kettering, England on January 31, 1908. Educated at Aske's Hatcham Boy's School he became the youngest actuary in the British Society of Actuaries. He joined the Royal, London and Liverpool Insurance Company in 1933. An avid mountaineer he often went climbing in Skye where he met and subsequently married Olive Avril Fitch. Avril was a true cockney having been born within the sounds of Bow Bells in London. Interestingly she had attended the Aske's Hatcham School for Girls and was very active in a Drama Society although we do not believe they knew each other at that time.

They moved to Liverpool just before the war and had three children - Graham (1939), Fiona (1941) and Howard (1944). During the war, Actuaries were declared an "essential profession", so Dad could not enlist and had to stay in Liverpool. However he joined the Liverpool volunteer fire department and in the evenings fought many fires on the Docks. Our house in Heswall, outside Birkenhead, on the river Dee was hit seven times by incendiary bombs but, thanks to the steeply pitched roof, they fell into the garden where my mother extinguished them.

After the war, he was transferred to Canada as Assistant Manager of the Royal London and Liverpool Insurance Company in Montreal. The family with an aide Margaret, (called Peggy whose surname I do not know), took passage on the Aquitania arriving in Halifax in May 1947.

I cannot remember much of the trip but I am sure that it was not, unlike some of your other cases, filled with any hardship. I suspect we traveled First Class and while upon arrival, I remember the luggage barn, I also remember that we were met and whisked through the formalities and on to the train to Montreal. Peggy went on to Winnipeg where she had a fiance waiting and we have lost touch with her.

The family stayed in Montreal until 1967 when my parents relocated to Toronto and my father became President of what was then the Royal,

British and Western Insurance Companies. He retired in 1973 and died in 1999 having been predeceased by Avril in 1995.

The children dispersed across the country with Graham staying in Montreal, Fiona in Toronto, and Howard in Victoria. There are seven grandchildren and so far one great grandchild, all proudly Canadian.

Shortly after his death, the attached article was in the "Lives Lived" column in the Globe and Mail.

Lives Lived
The Globe and Mail
Tuesday May 18, 1999

Scaled Heights in Many Ways: Rock Climbing actuary popped the question on the top of a mountain

Donald Martin
Actuary, amateur sportsman, fire fighter, executive. Born in Kettering, England in 1909. Died in Toronto aged 90.

Donald Beattie Martin, also known as D.B., got off to an unconventional start in life as the only, and probably lonely, son of clever but eccentric parents.

His mother, an early woman university graduate and championship golfer, did not think much of motherhood and often introduced Donald as her nephew. His father was ahead of his time in following multiple careers, as a barrister in London, a mathematics professor in Saskatoon and a tax collector in Kenya, leaving D.B. to complete his schooling in Britain's capital.

Failing to win a coveted scholarship to Cambridge, he turned in a fit of pique to the actuarial profession, and even now holds the record as the youngest man to qualify in the history of the Royal Society of Actuaries.

At about this time, he finally achieved another long-sought ambition: to become a sportsman.

He had felt hampered by poor eyesight and a clumsy physique, but discovered that these handicaps were of no consequence in water polo where, as he would recount with a grin, your object was to force your opponent under water.

Buoyed by this success, he tackled rugby football, finally becoming good enough to play with the Blackheath rugby club. On his request, he was

cremated wearing a Blackheath blazer, with its simple but arrogant crest of a spring of heather about the single word Club.

Rock climbing was another love. In 1932, D.B. and a few friends started the Tricouni Club, which still meets today. He made good use of his mountaineering skills when he invited Avril, the love of his life, to take a climbing holiday. Only when safe at the top of a mountain in the Isle of Skye did she finally trust him enough to accept his proposal.

For the rest of her life, she cherished more than 50 love letters he wrote in the four months before their wedding. These letters show a romantic yet practical man who was confident in undertaking family responsibilities.

Together, Avril and Donald survived Second World War, producing three children: Graham, Fiona, and Howard. As a member of a "necessary profession", D.B. was not required to go into combat but spent six years as a part-time fire fighter in the Liverpool docks, which were heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe.

After the war, convinced that future promotions would depend on "someone dying", D.B. looked overseas and passed up Mexico for Canada, arriving with his family in Montreal in 1947.

Canada was definitely his country. Over the next 30 years, he rose to the post of president and general manager of the Canadian companies of the Royal Insurance Group. As a spokesman for private insurance ownership and management, he also completed stints as president of the Canadian Underwriters Association and the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

A recent book on the history of the Royal portrays D.B. as an eccentric executive who liked to organize his papers in piles on the floor around his desk. Nevertheless, the Royal kept him in the saddle until he was 67, two years after his scheduled retirement.

He then joined Canadian Executive Services Overseas for two years as assistant actuary to the government of New Zealand. His opinions of the then Labour government's superannuation plan were scathing. Subsequent New Zealand governments heeded his warnings and revamped the plan, finally making it a model for other countries.

A couple of years after he returned to Canada, an undiagnosed neurological disorder rendered him immobile and gradually destroyed his mind. This hitherto determined man, an achiever in today's terminology, showed surprising grace and strength as he passed quickly through anger and depression into acceptance.

Years of water polo, rugby and squash had given him a strong constitution, and he spent more than 16 years in chronic care before he finally died.

By: Fiona Maarhuis (Fiona Maarhuis is Donald Martin's daughter)