

Janette McGowan
nee Shelley
Returning Canadian
Empress of Canada
February 8, 1949



I was born in Thunder Bay, Ontario in 1928. My Scottish parents decided, during the Depression, to return to Britain to be with their families.

A similar experience was happening to a young John McGowan who later became my husband. These two families, unknown to each other, lived within 10 miles of each other, their children and myself went to the same high school but we did not know one another.

In 1942, John went into the Royal Air Force, becoming a navigator and serving for four years in Africa, Egypt, Israel and Italy. Since there is four years difference in our ages he was released from the service about the time I was finishing high school. Where do you think we both started to work? Yes, in the same government office in Glasgow. I think we were destined to meet!!!

John decided in 1948 to return to Canada, with the understanding that I follow in a few months time. Being an only child, my parents would not allow me to come on my own so Mum, Dad and myself came in February of 1949. First class on the Empress of Canada - what a luxury trip after wartime Britain. It was one I will never forget. I found it amusing when we arrived at Pier 21 and I was allowed to go straight through customs because I was Canadian born but my parents were delayed to answer the necessary questions from immigrations.

Proof of the saying that it is a small world came about years later when John and I had been married for almost 25 years. One of our three daughters was about to be married and for the first time I met the best maid's mother - a Scottish woman. She had a sister I met on another occasion and when we started asking questions about backgrounds I discovered that these two sisters had been in the next cabin to ours on the Empress of Canada. What a surprise!

