

Marion Campbell
Pier 21 Volunteer



By Marion Campbell

War time in Picton was a far cry from what was going on in Britain and Europe. But we still had share of hardships- for those who went overseas to serve their country, and for those who stayed at home.

My father was overseas for six years, which made it difficult for my mother, but for me it meant I was pretty free- my mother and I became more like sisters. My brother wasn't in kindergarten yet - he didn't know my father when he returned and felt he was an intrusion. Many families suffered from this after the war.

We all did our part in the war effort. At school we had penny drives, and concocted all kinds of ways to make miles of pennies in the corridors and create completion between classes. We collected tinfoil from cigarette packages-I still don't know why unless they made bullets out of them. We were all knitting socks for soldiers. Many students went out on farms to pick apples and work in factories to compensate for the lack of manpower. We always felt we were doing our part.

We had lost all the men from the County, so it was great joy when the RAF was sent here for training. There was an airbase on The Hill and thousands of 'jocks', 'paddys', 'taffys' and Englishmen were welcome here. I think the first thing they did when they hit the town was order 'bacon and eggs'.

There was Pope's tea room in Picton where every grade-inner got her first job, and we could put out the orders as soon as the airmen came in the door because the men had come from war torn Britain where rationing was strict.

With the return of men to the town, dances were the entertainment of the day. There and we also had the regent Theatre. The churches were full in times of trouble and many of the airmen filled seats in the choirs. We often had seven or eight airmen at our house for a singsong while my mother played the piano. Many local girls were swept off their feet by these visitors and were married.

It was difficult because the RAF were only here for training and soon were sent back to the war zones and took part in the most dangerous air fights of the war as pilots and tail gunners. Sadly, some were killed. I

would venture to say that after the war those men who married Canadians for the most part returned to Canada, to make a new life.

A similar scenario was taking place in Britain where our Canadian troops were stationed. When the armed services returned to Canada after the war they left 69,733 dependents behind, 47,783 wives and 21,950 children.

These war brides - as they were forever dubbed-came by boat, sponsored by the government, not knowing any one but their husbands, to a strange county at a very young age, having no idea what kind of reception they would receive.

The Red Cross was helpful in getting these families across Canada by train and notifying their husbands of their arrivals-an awesome task!

Any war bride I spoke to had a warm reception here, but I have heard of others whose in-law were not happy. They felt their son should have married the girl next door who was left waiting.

Editor's Note: see Nancy Jones Story below for further details.

Many a bride such as Nancy Jones said they had never seen the husband in civvies, which could have been a shock! The war bride didn't have much choice in those days but to stick it out, as they had no money to return home often to parents who would be ready to say, "I told you so."

Air flights were not common and cheap as they are today. One War bride recalls her mother saying: "I said I didn't want you living next door but I didn't mean for you to live 5,000 miles away!"

There were lots of tears shed. The cultural and social life was different. One said, "I missed the Scottish and Irish clubs and the pubs where you can meet people and socialize."

When the soldiers returned they were busy trying to find a job and housing and didn't always seem like the men they had met in wartime. In 50 years, after all the tears and trials and bouts of homesickness, most have weathered the storms and they are our best citizens. With flights available now, there is many a trip to the 'old county'.

As one bride said, "When I landed on Canadian soil a second time I knew I was home."

Nancy Jones is typical of the young brides who were transplanted to Canada to join their husbands after the war. This is her story, in her own words:

A New Husband; A New Land

By Nancy Jones

There are many war brides in Prince Edward County. I came to Canada in August, 1946. In those days, you came by ship and a long journey it was. It was very sad leaving your family but you were young and you wondered what lay ahead in a strange land with different customs- a completely different world.

On the way over, the Adjutant aboard gave us a long talk on how we should try to adapt quickly and be a credit to the county you had just left and - uppermost in your mind- say, "I am now a proud Canadian."

I think maybe the immigrants coming now expect more than we did. I felt like Christopher Columbus when someone shouted 'land'. I was seasick, homesick and pregnant so I couldn't have cared less.

With great anticipation we arrived in Halifax and, of course, not having studied the geography of Canada too much, it seemed forever to get to Belleville. But then the train stopped at very available stop to let the brides off.

It was so frightening to land at four o'clock in the morning in Belleville. There of us got off and, of course only two husbands were there and it bad to be mine that wasn't there! He had been given the wrong time to arrival. I was petrified as you can guess and especially when the officials asked me if I had been on good terms with my husband when I had seen him last! Being five month pregnant I just burst into tears: "What had I done? I should have listened to my mother."

A very kind man phone to picton and got a very sleepy husband out of bed. They handed me the phone and I just wailed into the phone: "I want to go home!" About an hour later a taxi screeched into the station and this guy in a brown striped demob. Suit jumped out. All I could think was, "Gosh, I thought Al Capone was an American not Canadian." I only had seen my husband jack in uniform with a brush cut-Who was this with a shock of curly hair? However I was at home at last.

Life was very hard in '46, but it was for everyone, so we all

Pulled together in the same boat. I was young and very homesick and I cried a lot, it was a wonder I wasn't sent back to Scotland for keeps. I was lucky I came in to a warm loving and kind mother-in-law so in that way I settled down quickly - as I had a baby that I had to look after.

I know it was hard for most of us coming from a strictly rationed country to adjust to all that lovely Canada food. I still can taste my first piece of white bread from Morden's bakeshop. I had difficulty with my accent- it was a pretty thick one then. Once I went to buy 'brown pepper' and ended up somehow with 'brown paper& string'. They thought I wanted to send a parcel home! I learned to say, "I'd like a pound of something" instead of "I'll have a pound of Hamburg." I'd end up with half a pound of Hamburg!

My mother would always read the births, deaths, and marriages in our city paper when I was home. One day she read a girl's engagement to a boy from picton. She said let's get in touch with her and you will know each other when you get there. Well, she did, and to this day this same girl is like a sister to me -Sadie Manlow.We have laughed and cried together through the years.

There are lots of stories from other War Brides. One girl said her husband picked her up at the train, brought her home, left her in the kitchen with his parents and went out to the bran-chores had to be done.

It's great fun when a few of us get together and rehash it all; how we met our husbands - Most of us met them at a dance. I met mine at a dance, and as there was a demonstration going on I couldn't see the action, as I am so short. So he said get up on that table and lean against me. Of course, he got interested in the performance and he walked away and I fell on the floor and that was it- he's been sorry ever since.

Actually he was on a seven-day leave and he was going to Edinburgh but was directed to the wrong train and ended up in Glasgow. He said if he ever gets his hands on that man that directed him he'll have a lot to answer for.

I've come a long way since that fall on the floor. Canada has been good to me and I hope I have a credit to it. Sure, I cry when I hear the bagpipes but I also cry when I'm away and I hear Anne Murray sing Snowbird - they call it Transatlantic Blues.

I think that some of the immigrants coming now expect too much. You have to give of yourself and you can find extended family in any organization you join. I found it in my job at sears for 30 years; I met the

most wonderful people of the 'County', the people of Prince Edward are a special breed of people... warm and caring.

I feel I was one of the lucky ones to marry a County boy. Jack

And I have a lovely daughter and son-in-law Tom and Nancy Finora, two special grandsons Kevin, studying to be a vet, spends his summer at the picton Animal Hospital, and Chris with Toronto Dominion stocks and securities.

I hope my contribution as In all the brides who came to picton has been as the Adjutant said on that ship a long time ago: "a credit to the country we left and to the one we now live in." We brides may not have three generations in 'Glenwood', but we are new true country girls.

We do have an Overseas Club in picton it was started in 1969-70 by Kay Wright (Mrs. George) and Betty Payne (Mrs. Derek). It was originally the war Brides Club but is now the Overseas Women's Association, as we now have younger members. We meet once a month at the Carriage House opposite the A&P. We just get together and have a good lunch over a cup of tea.