

Elsie Nadeaw
English War Bride
Ile de France
1943



I married my Canadian husband on June 28, 1940 at St. Josephs Redhill. It was a sunny day. Baby son was born on July 06, 1942, a Saturday morning in a public air raid shelter in South Mersthan. I could no longer get down into our Anderson garden shelter or under our Morrison table shelter. In October 1942 Norman came home for a 48 hour leave on a Wednesday this I thought odd he use to come home on the weekends. After we had put the baby to bed under his Morrison I said Norman the truth why are you home in the middle of the week, he said we are on the move. I said where to, he said your guess is as good as mine. Captain Elliot (his CO) said this is it the big push. Before he went back to camp he said Elsie if I can get you to Canada will you go, what could I say, he said he was fed up with me and the baby sleeping in air raid shelters, about a week later I got a letter he said he was well, loved us and he had asked Captain Elliot to try to get me a passage to Canada.

In the letter was a silk handkerchief with map of Scotland, on the plain side was a small pencil cross he had marked of Killmanock, of course I thought he could get home from Scotland, but I still kept getting letters post marked C.A.P.O. (Canadian Army Post Office) Christmas 1942 came and went still his letters C.A.P.O. In early summer 1943 I got a parcel three pairs silk stockings (not nylons) a very pretty head scarf and a box of dates, you remember those oval boxes we use to get a Christmas, we enjoyed the dates and I thought I would keep the bows and put some safety pins, needles, thread, buttons etc. and have it ready for my journey to Canada well when I took the wax paper from the bottom of the box there was a little red silk handkerchief. In the corner Riccordo 'D' Africa a palm tree and a man on a camel, Norman's way off letting me know he was in North Africa. Part of the First Canadian Division with Field Marshall Montgomery 8th army 'The Desert Rats' I had forgotten about going to Canada until September I went to Canada House London for a medical (boy that was something else) picture taken for passport and explanation on Canadian currency, weather, shopping ect. We were told to have trunks ready, prams, push chairs must be able to wheel and hand luggage that we could manage ourselves. I had A pre war Maimet pram thick tires, canopy and a basket bought from cousin.

I packed that pram with baby clothes, boys and linens. My home being Ramsgate in Kent hop picking had just finished so my dad went to the Hop Oasts and got a large piece of the fine sacking they used to protect the primms with this, he covered my pram and the old sailor he was he sewed it and shaped it perfect. October 10, 1944 I received in the mail passport, rail tickets Redhill to Victoria, mom and dad went with me a nurse met me took my baby and we said goodbye. I saw my trunk and pram loaded into an army truck. I was put on a bus with other wives and babies. We went tot a large building an were given a meal. It was just getting dark when we were on the bus again and then put on a train and away we went several stops to pick up more babies, one quite long stop one girl said it was to pick up crew, most of us slept off and on.

Then the train stopped by some shipping sheds with the river Clyde there we were in Greenock. We waited and waited sitting on the suit cases trying to sooth babies, the stewardess told us that we would soon be away. At one end of the shed they, the girls said they could see a big ship it seems it was unloading soldiers. It was on the II De France, enforcements for the Canadian Army, they started to ferry us girls out, when we got aboard everything was soaking wet the crew had hosed down after the soldiers had left. I was on a deck in a cabin with a girl with a little boy and two girls without children. There was for steel bunks, mattresses, no bedding and a piece of canvas for a door, but we were lucky there was a toilet, small but it was ours. We four War Brides got down to talking, one going to Manitoba, two to Ontario and me to northern New Brunswick.

There seemed to be a lot of shouting orders, then all was quiet. We were told we were on the II De France, but we were suppose to be on the Queen Mary, but she was still at sea. Everything would be done to make us comfortable. Mothers with babies have bunks, wore life jackets to bed. Brides with no children to help at meal times. It would make rounds every morning our destination Halifax, Nova Scotia. The France was the fastest ship afloat, The Blue Ribbon of the Atlantic. There seemed to a lot of footsteps, people shouting the France gave a great shudder and her turbines started to turn. Boy what a thrill!

We settled down for the night but none of us slept, but the two babies slept right through. Our port hold was of course blacked out, so one of the girls went out on deck to see what was what. We were out of the Clyde, there were Canadian soldiers and wounded soldiers returning to Canada and with good sailing we would be in Halifax in five days!! There was a small lounge on our deck where mothers could go between meals and we were helped by Canadian nurses (very nice). We also noticed changes in temperature, sometimes we were very cold an often so warm we could have gone naked. I asked one British why? He said the bloody

sub is lurking out there somewhere so we zig zag and then reason for the change in temperature was at times we were way up north and at that time of the year icebergs are forming and sometimes we were very south picking up warmer tides. He told me we would not make it to Halifax in five days. We also noticed there was less food at mealtimes, but still more than what we were use to, (bowls of oranges, bananas, grapes) We arrived 4:22, eight days after leaving Greenock. It was gif bond. We laid out in the stream overnight, custom officers came aboard, stripped our passports and gave us train tickets. We four girls helped each other wash down and laughed at our black and blue legs, backs, bottoms and shoulders were so bruised from those steel bunks but we slept so peaceful that night October 22.

Next morning October 23 took on the pilot and were edged to Pier 21. We had watched this but were asked to return to our cabins around 11 o'clock they bought us lunch, then we sat on our suitcases and waited, then a seaman came to our cabin he said Mrs. Nadeau and baby, I could hardly say that's me, he took my baby and suitcase. I said goodbye to the girls and followed him to the gang plank. We waited while the other girls left the France. He asked me where I was going and where was my home in England. Then he said we have been crossing as a troop ship since 1940 and you girls were the best of the lot, no trouble at all, then he said we had been in trouble a couple of nights but you girls knew nothing about it. A nurse took my baby and a soldier my large suitcase down the gang plank to a bus which was nearly full of wives and babies. We were taken to what I think was the YMCA. We had a lovely lunch and tea in a teapot and china cups and saucers.

In the evening we loaded the bus and went to the station. My heavens the sight off that train, three steps to get into it. What comfort! Some of the girls were upset with the swaying of the train, but there were nurses to help them. We stopped at several stations in Nova Scotia, two girls had no one to meet them, the train stopped at New Castle and Bathurst New Brunswick.

It was now October 24. After Bathurst the conductor asked for Mrs. Ferlatte for Jacquet River, when he passed our seat I asked what were the lights I could see, he said that is there Gaspé Peninsula in the province of Quebec, the water Bay of Chaleur. Looking at my ticket he said your stop Eel River Crossing is about 30 minutes. After Jacquet River it was then I got cold jebes, would there be someone to meet, how could I get off the train with a baby, suitcase and a shoulder bag. Well the train came to stop, the nurse took my baby a soldier my case and bag and the conductor took my arm and the next thing I saw were faces in the light of a lot of lanterns, Normans father, two brothers, wives and their friends and neighbor. Trunk and pram unloaded, had not thought

about them since leaving Victoria. My mother-in-laws home was just house away from the station.