

Mary I. Bourgeois
English War Bride
Ile de France
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Here is a letter I wrote to my parents on the 13th Feb '44 & 21st Feb '44. It gives a good idea of my journey over, arrival in Halifax, and the welcome we got etc.

I came to Canada because my husband was here. I've had my ups and downs but I have a wonderful family 2 sons and one daughter and 7 grandchildren. My husband passed away 9 years ago. I now spend 7 months of the year visiting my children. One lives in Toronto, my daughter is in ?? Pa. And my son in Miami. They are all doing well and Canada has been very kind to me. I'm friends with some War brides who came over about the same time as I did and we have some lovely visits together.

My Dearest Mum & Dad,

I am not yet at the above address but am on the train for Montreal. I'll start at the beginning and tell you about the trip. As you know we were delayed 2 days in Glasgow then we were on the boat another 2 days before we set off. Then we ran into 2 terrific storms and we had to go a long way South then just as we got to Halifax, practically, we ran into a blizzard and couldn't find the port so instead of being 5 days on board we were ten. Mum, what a trip! I'll never forget it as long as I live. I was a bit sea-sick for the first few hours but was O.K. after that, even through the storms when the boat just rocked about like a thimble. It's amazing that ships of such terrific size should be tossed about so.

Tess was with me in the same cabin and she was prostrate with sea sickness, she was ill, she had one wish, just to die. It's an awful thing if you get it badly. So I'm glad I'm a good sailor. The meals on board were marvelous - turkey, apples, oranges, apricots, chicken, roast pork, bacon and eggs and lots of other things.

It wasn't so bad going through the Customs, we got through pretty quickly. We got parted from Paddy as Tess and I were traveling first class and they were third but we saw them quite often. Peter was ever so good the whole time. He didn't sleep much at first so I took him to the Doctor and he said his brain was too active and that there was such a lot of excitement going so he gave me some powders and he sleeps like a top

from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. with only about three breaks. He said to stop giving him teething powders as they were harmful. Peter had nurses, many on board as there were lots of the fellows going back home and they nearly all had kiddies of their own to go back to. There wasn't much provision for babies, none at all really, but we managed. I was furious about his bath, as I put it among the "not wanted" things and couldn't get it. However we managed. I started giving him rusks or bread. He now holds his head for himself for so long then he drops it. The things we could get in the canteen on board - Craven A cigs. 8d for 20! Milk chocolate and marvelous biscuits and sweets.

When we got off at Halifax, Red Cross nurses were there to meet us. They took Peter to a nursery, changed him and fed him and put him in a little cot while I went to deal with my luggage. It certainly was a marvelous welcome as I could never have managed if I had to have carried Peter and then they mixed a bottle of food for him for on the train. They used their own nappies and gave me two for on the way and they gave us tea and sandwiches. At the moment the train has just stopped and Red Cross ladies have been on and given us all oranges. The scenery is marvelous just like the pictures we have seen. The sun is shining brilliantly and although it's very cold you don't feel it. There's a lot of snow. The trains here are certainly marvelous and the sleeping berths etc. All the attendants are coloured. Peter does stare at them, he can't understand it at all.

One night of the journey on the train is over and the sleeping berths were wonderfully comfortable. Peter slept the whole night through. The meals are very good on the trains and they are lovely and warm. I think this trip must be fated, as last night something went wrong with a coach and we were delayed four hours. We just stopped at a station and were able to get out for a few minutes, was it cold, I nearly died! I didn't take Peter. An officer who is sitting near me brought a huge bag of apples, lovely big red ones, they are marvelous. You had a lot to say about my snow boots but I've never been so glad of them in all my life. There's dozens of women on the train would only be too pleased to have them.

When the babies were in the Red Cross Nursing in Halifax, photographers were taking their photos. Peter was just having some vegetables soup from one of the nurses. If they come out O.K. and I find them in the paper, I'll send you one. After he'd finished one lot of soup, he howled the place down for more, so the nurse came to ask me if he could have some, so I said yes and he had a real good feed.

It's a marvelous day again today, marvelous sunshine and yet you can see icicles of gigantic size. We don't seem to be getting along very fast, the train keeps stopping and we look like landing in Montreal about

midnight, but the authorities are in touch with our respective husbands. I shall certainly be glad when we get there as we shall have been nearly three weeks. However, we landed safely and that's a lot to be thankful for.

You've heard me speak of Mrs. Mc Gelhager at Wellesbourne, well I was on the same boat with her husband. It was a very nice seeing her. Her baby is two weeks older than Peter but Peter is twice his size. I left the carry-cot on board as a handle broke off and he seemed to grow so much he just didn't fit in it and I could manage him better without it. I'm very glad of his bag that Mrs. Dalgetty gave him. He hasn't got any teeth yet, but the ships' Doctor said they were formed beautifully. Two or three were coming through together. It will soon be lunch-time so I'll see if his Lordship will sleep a while so I can go for it in peace, so I'll write further news a bit later.

---- a little bit later

I didn't have a chance to write any more on the train as I seemed so busy and now at least I'm at my journey's end. I had a wonderful welcome Mum and Dad, and Gus' parents are lovely also his sisters and friends I've met and they all have made me feel so much at home. I actually arrived in Montreal on Tuesday the 15th February at 5:30 am. Peter was asleep, we left the train about 6:30 am. And so I left him and went to see if I could find Gus. I couldn't see him anywhere but a lady came and said "Are you Mary Bourgeois? And it was Madeleine, she is a nice person. Apparently Gus had gone down on the platform and I'd come up a different way. However, Margaret Gus' sister was also there so she, Madeleine and I went back to the train and we met Gus carrying Peter.

He'd gone the whole length of the train and recognized Pete at once, he was pleased with himself. It is a lovely home Gus' people have and beautifully furnished. It's so funny during the day you don't close doors into other rooms and some haven't a door only curtains. It's a flat of 8 rooms all on one floor. The houses are awfully warm and it's the same in every room. Cecile has lent us a little cot for Peter until we get one for him. It's a beauty and is on wheels so he stays in it all day more or less and it can be wheeled from one room into another. In the house one only wears a thin smock as it's so warm. Pete is in his white silk rompers and I'm never afraid of him being cold. When we go out we have to dress well. I went out yesterday and although everyone said it wasn't cold, it nearly took my breath away. I was warm enough except for my face.

Gus and I went shopping and really Mum I could have just wept to see the shops so full of everything and you at home so short. The furniture is positively marvelous and so reasonable and such lovely things. They

have lovely little bedroom suites for kiddies all painted with pictures, bed, dressing table, bureau, chairs only £10, they are cute. Well the furniture one can but here is just like we've seen on the films. Lovely carpets and sheets about 10 a pair, lovely towels and tablecloths. I think we'll send Kathleen and Jimmie linen for their wedding present as cutlery is as expensive here as at home. I bought some thin rompers for Peter and some overshoes for myself, black velvet and fur they are nice only 1.0/-d and some stockings about 44 - a pair. Clothes are very reasonable and I still feel something is missing when I don't have to give up coupons.

As for food, well, its wonderful. The meals mother has prepared have been gorgeous, plenty of butter, lovely peaches and plums Mother bottled, tomato juice, grape fruits and I've had a banana !! Last night I went out to dinner with Gus and two of his best friends and I had a steak and honestly Mum the size of it was one week's ration at home. I couldn't eat half of it. Tonight we're going to Margaret's. Peter has been ever so good and he sleeps from 6.0 pm to 6.0 am and quite a lot during the day. I don't know how long it will last. Everybody makes such a fuss of him and as you know has got lots of smiles for everyone. They can't get over him being such a big boy and he gained about 3 lbs on the boat.

Mother said she ordered a joint last weekend and when she got it, it weighed 12 lbs ! There's reams of poultry and fish. I've been busy washing as the colour of Peter's nappies was yellow with the water on the ship but washing is very easy with a machine. I wish I could send you one. René, Ceciles baby boy, is 20 months old and he is cute. He and Peter are very interested in each other. Cecile's second baby is expected in about three weeks. We're going to stay a month at each of Gus' sister and then get a home of our own but it depends where Gus will be stationed but all the same we're going buy furniture and store it if necessary. Houses are quite easy to get and so cheap this here is 5.10 d. a month rent can you imagine it? It's just like coming to another world. Crockery is very expensive here as most of it comes from England but war time tea services etc. are made of glass and they are nice and only about 10/-d a set.

I'll try and get a catalogue and send you. Gus has sent Jimmie a parcel and I'll get one off for you.

I'm enclosing a photo from the newspapers of Gus' homecoming. We certainly made news and under separate ?? we're sending another one of him alone, it is good. I'll have Peter's photo taken very soon and let you have it. He's certainly been a wonderful baby the whole crossing and he seems so happy now he's settled.

The only thing I want now Mum and dad dear is for the war to end and for you to come over here as soon as you can. You would like it and the people are so hospitable and kind. They try to realize what it is like at home but they just can't imagine it. I'll have to close now Mum as its lunch time steak and onions and chips etc. not forgetting orange juice and I hope you got my two cables quickly as I know you would be anxious about us as we were such a long time.

It snowed a bit yesterday but not much and all the time the sun shines brilliantly.

I'll write again in a day or two. I promise you to write twice a week. This letter is a bit long and disjointed but I've tried to tell you things I know will interest you most. Rest assured Mum and Dad everyone is doing their best to make me happy and I'm sure that I shall be able to make a big success of our lives. Gus sends his love to you and all the family send their regards. I hope Jimmie's wedding was a success, we'll be with you in our thoughts of Saturday. I did want to be able to be there. Look out for a parcel in the next few weeks. I haven't written to my Canadian aunts yet but will do. Give my love to each and everyone of you and always remember I'm not so very far away, a first class cable ordinary rate will reach me in 36 hours.

All my love or affection, dearest Mum and Dad

Your loving daughter,

Mollie.

Peter sends a great big kiss for you all.