

Mary Oliver nee Wilson
by Son Alex Oliver
Scottish War Bride
Aquitania
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A Friend's Influence - A World War II War Bride Story By Alex Oliver

This is a story about my mother Mary Wilson and my father Private William Earl Oliver during the Second World War in the highlands of Scotland. It is also a story of the loving influence of my mother's good friend Peggy Craig who was instrumental one long week-end in 1942 in fanning the flames of love between my mother and father.

Mary Wilson was born in Braemar, Scotland on January 11, 1906. She had five brothers and one half sister. When her mother died in 1921, she took on the task of looking after the house for her father and the brothers who had stayed at home. Her father died in 1926 and Mary kept a bed and breakfast to make a living.

In 1928, when she was 22, she met an 18 year-old girl who was visiting from Aberdeen with her parents at Mary's B&B. This was Peggy Philip and they would become the best of friends for life. Peggy and her parents often came to Braemar and as the years went on, they became closer.

In 1938 Peggy was now Peggy Craig. Tragically, her husband, a captain in the British Royal Navy, went down with his ship in South-East Asia. Peggy, who was living in Malaysia at the time, returned home to Aberdeen to her parents' home in 1942. In May of that year she and her parents visited Mary in Braemar.

Here is Peggy Craig's personal account of that week-end.

We drove by car to #1 Fife Cottage in Braemar in May, 1942 from Aberdeen as we always did for the long week-end. We arrived on a Friday and while in the kitchen while Mary was making our evening meal, I asked her what had been happening in Braemar since our last visit. We discussed several people and happenings, and she said a battalion of lumberjacks have moved into camp at the Lynn o' Dee. Donald, her brother, had persuaded her, against her will, to go to the Saturday night dance put on by the Canadian Forestry Corps Company #25 in the Auchendryne Hall the week-end before.

I said, "Did you enjoy it?"

"No, not much," she said, "I am not going again."

Then she told me that one of the lumberjacks had danced with her; and that he said he would come for her this Saturday which would be tomorrow for the next dance.

Mary said, "I told him not to bother because I would not be going because I will have visitors and I'll have to look after them."

I said, "If he comes, you should go."

However, Mary insisted she was not interested and said, "Anyway, he won't come."

The next day we had just finished our evening meal, when I saw through the sitting room window which looked down Chapel Brae, a soldier coming up the hill. I ran through to the kitchen and told Mary.

She said, "Well, I won't let him in. I told him not to come."

By this time he was knocking at the door. She wouldn't go and told me to open it and say she was out!

I opened the door and of course he seemed surprised as he expected to see Mary.

He said, "Is Miss Wilson in?"

"Yes," I said, "I'll get her."

Mary was not well pleased with me, but then she let him come in. I thought I would leave them alone, so I went into the other room with my parents and told them.

I said, "He's not getting much of a welcome, and I don't think she will go to the dance tonight."

My father whispered, "Go and ask him if he would join us for a chat."

I got him through to the room and Dad and he had a drink together and talked about his work out at the Lynn o' Dee where the Canadians were camped.

I went back to the kitchen and asked her if she was going with him to the dance. She said she wasn't going and again I said that I thought she should.

After a time, he came back to the kitchen and he said that my mother and dad were coming up to the camp tomorrow morning and he would arrange with his C.O. to show us around.

She still said she wasn't going with him to the dance; he seemed very disappointed.

Then she said she'd go to the dance if I came too. I'm sure that was not what he wanted; but as it was the only way we could get her there, we both agreed.

After the dance he said he would walk us back up Chapel Brae. I thought as we walked up that we'd ask him in for a cup of tea. As we approached the gate, I asked would he have time before the bus took them all back to camp to come in for a while.

Mary was not very keen.

As he was leaving, I said, "Well, I'll see you tomorrow at the camp."

He said, "Mary, do you think you would come?"

Of course, Mary held up her arms in horror. She couldn't go. She had visitors' lunches to make!

His face said it all. Things were not going his way.

When I related all this to my parents the next morning, my father immediately said, "Of course - we'll take her with us."

And we did and all of us including Mary had a very wonderful tour of the camp and thoroughly enjoyed our visit.

Before my parents and I left to go back to Aberdeen on the Monday we told Mary that we all liked this Canadian soldier and that he was a very nice fellow.

"You should go to the dances with him," I said, "He certainly seems to like you."

Mary just laughed and said, "I could never go to Canada!"

But to Canada she did go.

After almost a year of courtship Mary finally accepted my father's hand in marriage and he applied on March 24, 1943 to the military for permission to marry.

On May 27 Captain K.C. McIntyre, my father's Commanding Officer, granted my father permission to be married and this permission was further ratified by the Commander of the Canadian Forestry Corps Brigadier-General J. B. White on June 3.

My father and mother were married on September 25, 1943 at the East Church in Braemar, Scotland. Chaplain Captain Vincent officiated.

On October 6, 1943 my father filled out the application form to have my mother transported to Canada. She was given a monthly allowance of \$58.00.

After two weeks of being sea sick my mother arrived in convoy on the Aquitania at Pier 21 in Halifax and had her immigration card stamped on October 19, 1943. She was destined for Lone Rock, Saskatchewan where she was met by her in-laws with a wagon and a team of horses.

My father eventually had his discharge papers signed by Lt. Col. J. W. Littleton in Calgary on Tuesday, April 11, 1944 after 3 years, 10 months and 2 days in the Canadian Army. Five hundred and seventy-two days of that time were spent in Scotland.

My father hitchhiked back to Lone Rock as a civilian. He worked on several labour intensive jobs - farming and the railroad. He hauled his old former bachelor shack into town for the winter. That winter the Canadian Red Cross did its obligatory check up on war dependents and visited my mother.

The Red Cross Report, dated February 22, 1945 reads, "Mrs. Oliver is fine and likes Canada very much. Her husband is working on the railway and they are getting along fine. They are looking forward to taking up farming near Lone Rock."

Their one and only child, Alexander William Oliver, was born on July 31, 1945 in Lloydminster. In the spring of 1946 they bought a half section four miles west of Lone Rock. They lived there until 1968 and retired in Lloydminster.

Mary had a very positive outlook on life. Her only negative comment about Western Canada was that there was always mud, mud, and more mud. She returned to Scotland once in 1968 for a visit.

They led happy, productive lives, supporting each other throughout their marriage. William Earl Oliver died in Lloydminster on August 24, 1978 and Mary Oliver died on August 20, 1995 at the age of 89.

Her good friend, Peggy, died in 1998 in Scotland also at the age of 89.