

Eveline Steckley
by Daughter Elaine
Bell
Irish War Bride
Samaria
December 11, 1946



Across the Deep Blue Sea: A War Bride's Story

She was a young girl from Belfast, Ireland. He was an education officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force. They were brought together by war, but left in love. This is their story.

Reesor Ernest Steckley was stationed in Bleasdale, England in 1943. The officers were granted a short leave, and Reesor and his air force buddies travelled to Belfast. During their visit, they stopped for coffee at a department store called Littlewoods. Not only did Reesor satisfy a caffeine fix, but he also happened upon Eveline Ferguson, an auburn-haired vision of beauty standing behind one of the counters.

It was love at first sight, and Reesor continued to frequent the store, hoping to catch a glimpse of the young Irish girl. He eventually summoned the nerve to ask her out on a date and fortunately, the answer was a resounding 'yes.'

In September of 1944, Reesor and Eveline got engaged. They were eventually married on Valentine's Day (February 14, 1945). He was finished his tour of duty by June of 1945 and travelled back to Canada to resume his teaching career.

However, Eveline could not join her husband because her mother was suffering a debilitating illness. Even though Eveline was booked on many war bride ships, she refused to leave her mother's side, staying with her until she died.

In December of 1946, two weeks before Christmas, Eveline boarded the ship called Samaria that was leaving from Liverpool, England. She was mourning the loss of her mother, and sorry to leave her father Thomas, sisters Norma and Lila, and brother Bobbi, but she was excited to begin her new life with Reesor in Canada.

The trip across the Atlantic lasted ten days, made more comfortable by the companionship of Eveline's friend Maureen, who was travelling to

Vancouver to also join her husband. Maureen and Eveline slept on bunks (Eveline on the top) and were housed with many other brides.

One of those brides was a young English girl and her baby. The two Irish friends would care for the baby when the mother left the cabin. She was very appreciative of their help with the young one.

Eveline spent most of her time on the Samaria walking on deck and writing letters to her loved ones back in Ireland.

Eventually, the large ship approached the new continent, but because of heavy fog the ship was unable to dock at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia until later in the evening. Eveline was frightened of leaving the boat so she waited out the night for the morning train trip to Toronto.

Before she left the ship, the captain gave the war brides a speech whereby he told them that success in Canada would depend on their attitudes. Eveline possessed only one suitcase and was wearing an Irish tweed suit, a camel hair coat and a tan hat. She was excited to reacquaint with Reesor.

The train arrived in Toronto, and Eveline was escorted to a waiting room. 'Eveline Steckley' was eventually announced over the loud speaker, and Reesor, his mother, his sister Kathleen, and Kathleen's daughter came to welcome her. It was a joyous time for Eveline because she finally got to meet her future family and embrace her husband. They travelled to their new home in Stouffville, stopping on the way for sticky buns.

They lived a very fulfilling life, having five children named Colleen, Anne, Elaine, Lorraine and Gregory. Reesor worked as a teacher and principal with the Toronto school board for thirty years, and no doubt told his students about his experiences overseas and the woman he brought back.

Reesor's duty in World War II and Eveline's trip to an unknown land were both extreme acts of courage. It was tumultuous times during World War II but Reesor and Eveline clung to the hope of a different life in Canada, crystallized in a poem written to Eveline before she left for Pier 21.

"Someday we will sail across the deep blue sea to the land of sunshine and snow. You will like it and I am sure I will do everything in my power to give you the best I can and make you happy "Love Reesor"

Note: Our mother's adventure to Pier 21 has come alive in recent years as we have been able to relive her story. We recently purchased a brick in Eveline's name for the Sobey Wall of Honour. My sister Colleen and I will

be travelling with our mother to see Pier 21 this September to celebrate her 85th birthday. Thank you for keeping Pier 21 alive!