

Mrs. Taylor
Scottish War Bride
Scythia
March of 1946



LEAVING MY BELOVED
HEBRIDEAN ISLAND

This story is based on a true experience that can never be fully expressed in words, one has to live it to understand the emotional impact.

It began on a day in March 1946, a message came to say an ocean liner, the Sythia, was leaving from Liverpool, England. The date was set for our departure from our beloved Isle of Lewis. Until that message came I had given very little thought to when this would happen, although deep down in my heart I knew it would come eventually.

I had two sons, one three years old and one three months old, and the very thought of travelling across the Atlantic Ocean was rather frightening to say the least. My husband had been discharged. The six year cruel War was finally over but now without taking its toll of young men, among them two of my brothers.

The stark reality of having to leave my parents, brothers and sisters was indeed heart breaking and there were moments in my heart and soul when I wondered if I could face up to it. However there were hundreds of others leaving and although they were feeling the same way it gave little comfort to me at the time.

We left Stornoway in a small plane that took us to Glasgow. From there we travelled by train to Liverpool where we were to board the Sythia, enroute to Halifax, NS, and from there to St. Johns, Nfld., on the Baccalieu.

I shall never forget the tears and goodbyes. We had to line up to board busses that took us to dockside, and the children, poor dears, didn't know what was happening to them. At one point my arms ached while in the lineup holding my three-month-old son in one arm and my three-year-old in the other. I had a small suitcase with some necessities and while still waiting I laid my suitcase down and sat on it and my little three year old sat on the ground by me. I could easily have burst into tears right then but didn't, simply because it would upset the children. At this point I thought to turn back home but didn't, otherwise I would not be writing this, thirty-three years later.

Finally we were on board the Sythia, and all the attention and care that anyone could have was given to us. I shared a cabin with two women who had no children. A crib shaped cot was attached to my bunk for my infant son and my three-year-old had a bunk by mine.

The pipe band played Auld Lang Syne as our ship sailed away from the pier and then I surely gave way to tears I could no longer hold back. The accommodations on board were excellent. The captain's name and address was T.A. Fraser, 230 Hospital St., Montreal. It was a good crossing although the weird sounds of ships foghorns and the creaking of the ship gave us a feeling of loneliness. Once or twice I went to the promenade deck and all that was to be seen was the broad Atlantic Ocean, to the horizon as far as the eye could see, so I decided to stay close to my quarters with my two little ones. I felt safe there.

Many were very sick and had to be cared for in the hospital quarters of the ship. We were very fortunate not to be seasick and enjoyed to the fullest the elaborate meals prepared for us.

The voyage took approximately eight days, and when we arrived in Halifax we were transferred to the Baccalieu. It was a rough crossing from there, the crew said it was the worst they had experienced for fifteen years. At one time I got to my feet unsteadily holding on to whatever I could grasp, making my way to the bathroom, when a sack of sugar burst through a cupboard door and I was knocked down. At this point one of the crew came to rescue and helped me get to the bathroom and waited to lead me back to my cabin. Nearly everyone was so sick they couldn't move, but I think I was too numb with fear and caring for my children to be sick. No one was allowed out of the cabins, the decks were awash and when the programme Decks Awash is shown on T.V. I think of my voyage from Halifax to St. Johns, Nfld., and after 35 years it is still quite vivid in my mind.

When we arrived in St. Johns, my husband and his parents were anxiously waiting as they were aware that our crossing had been a stormy one. I must have been in a sort of daze while I prepared to get off the boat. After getting the children dressed I sat on the edge of my bunk unable to move and holding my children close to me. Everyone was streaming out through the corridors, but there I sat making no effort to leave the boat.

Then I heard my husband's voice asking one of the crew where my cabin was and I called out 'Here I am' and we clung together, there were more tears, but at last I felt safe and secure. I walked off the boat and with

him like someone in a trance, but when I met his mother and father and family I knew I belonged. They were such warm people.

This was my new home, and the country of my adoption, and after all these years I can safely say Newfoundland has been good to me.

I have been back to my beloved Hebridean Isle. Although fifteen years went by before my first trip back, and during that time I had many lonely moments, missing so very much those I had left behind.

I have a very strong feeling of family unity, and if one does not have that, their world surely crumbles and society as we see it today is a stark reminder of that.

My story is a very personal one, but I am sure there are hundred more war brides that also have their story to tell. I think it is good to put our stories on paper for our children and our grandchildren making them more aware of their heritage.

This is only a brief summary of it all, it would take much more time to write in detail about it, and I am in the process of doing just that for my grandchildren. It's too personal to be of any interest to anyone else.

Speaking of family unity. May I conclude in saying, 'There is strength in unity, weakness in self-indulgence.'