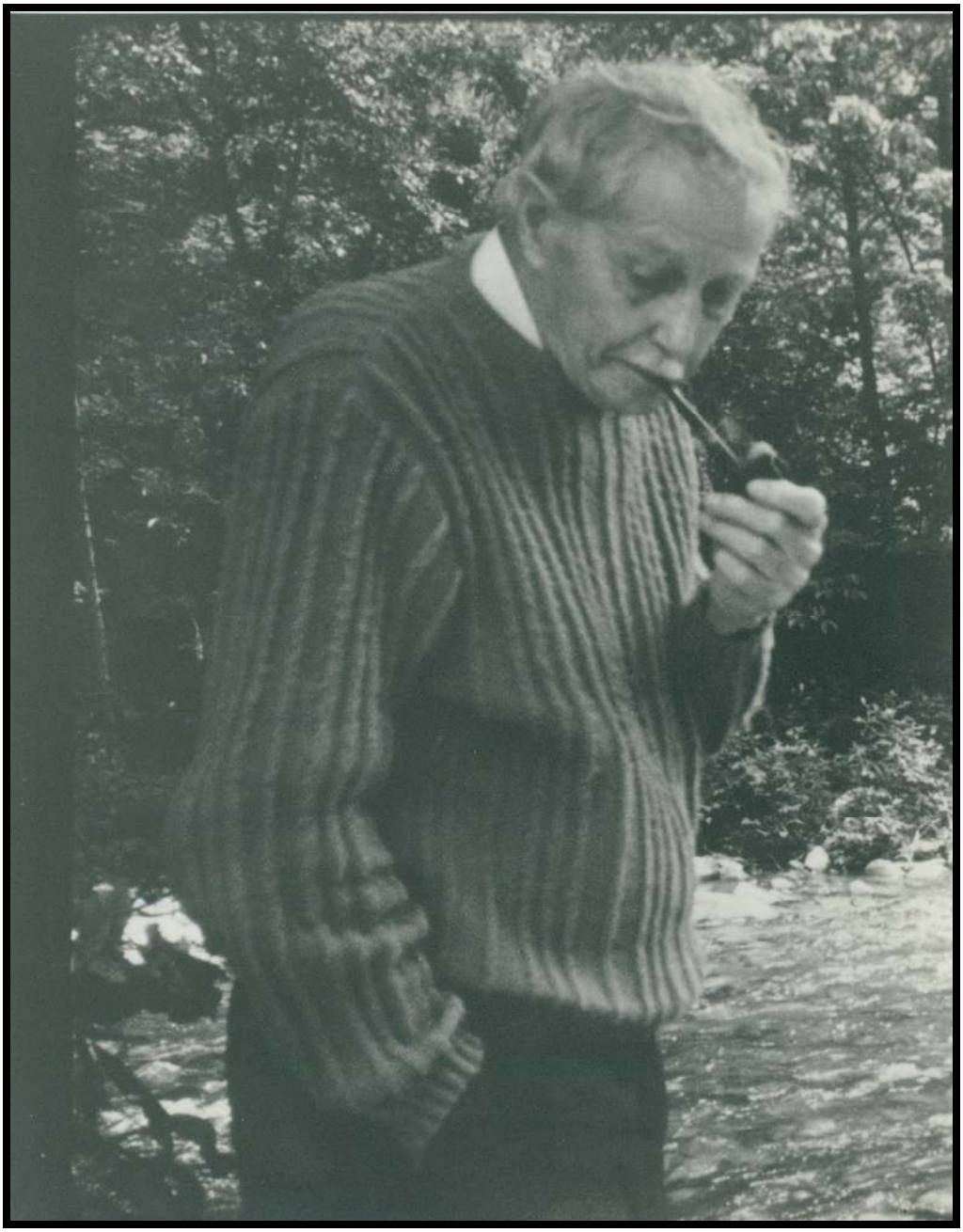
THE SHELDON SAGA



Briddon Fletcher Sheldon

Here, under a sycamore tree in Hexham Abbey's ancient park in Northumberland, England, on Monday, June 9, 1997, begins my chronicle of the Lacey and Sheldon families.

The story begins, for me, on a November day in 1885 when the first son of Joseph and Florence Sheldon was born. It was Guy Fawkes Day (November 5) in England when bonfires were lit in villages, town squares and back gardens to commemorate the failure of Guy Fawkes Esquire's attempt to blow up the Westminister Houses of Parliament. He was the black sheep of the Percy family of Alnwick Castle, Northumberland that was given to the family after their help in the conquest of 1066. When one thinks about it, it was a rather grisly celebration, as on top of most of the bonfires would be a straw-stuffed effigy of the poor fellow. However, in the years running up to World War II, no one thought anything of it.

Years later, we all had a laugh about the tradition. When Alison Lancaster was a little girl and Grampa was staying with them at Cookham, the family went out after supper to light their bonfire and fireworks only to find all their neighbours had theirs already burning. Alison clapped her hands in happy surprise. "Everyone knows it's Grampa's birthday!"

"Grampa" was Briddon Fletcher Sheldon, the little boy who was born on that day back in 1885. He hated those two names – Briddon Fletcher - from his grandmother's and mother's families. "Nothing anyone can call me" he'd grumble, wondering how his beloved parents could have done such a thing to him. We never heard what his parents called him, but as a husband he was 'Brin' and at Southall Minster School, everyone was sympathetic and called him Dick. We always thought what a nice distinguished name 'Brin' was. It suited him.

He grew up to be 6 foot 2 inches tall, with a spare build, dark brown hair with a ginger moustache, grey-blue eyes and a great sense of humour. He was proud of the fact that his weight never changed from the 172 lb he weighed at 17 to when he stepped on our scales when he was 92. He also never lost any height as most people do as they age. Perhaps it was the cold showers he took every morning as a young man, the fashion in Edwardian days.

He was an avid football and cricket player, who made sure to follow the news of both all his life. His uncle, John Coleshaw, faithfully sent him copies of the Manchester Guardian each week for most of the eighteen years he was in Canada. It was at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, where England was playing India for "the Ashes" he happenchance met Sam Fletcher, who opened a conversation by asking Pa where he lived. When he learned that he was from Canada, he said that he had been trying to find a member of his family who had gone out there "Sheldon his name was, don't suppose you know him?" We all felt pleased that by such an odd chance, our names were added to the Family Tree in his book, ' The Fletcher House of Lace'.

Pa's brother, Gilbert Edward, was born two years after him, in 1887, but we never heard when his birthday was. We used to have one of those hard-cardboard early photographs of the two of them, dressed in frilly Victorian shirts, Pa about 3 ½ years and Gilbert 18 months old. Like so many things, it disappeared in a move. Gilbert was fair-haired and a bit obstreperous and they were great friends.

The family lived in Burton Joyce, a village a few miles northeast of Nottingham, in a large, sunny house called 'Summerside'. It was not far from a 'cutting' where gravel had been taken for the embankment for the new railroad and had grown in with bushes and young trees, as well as "flowers that didn't grow anywhere else". It was a great place for the boys and their friends to play.

Life was an enchantment for them. "Home" had an acre or so of orchard and garden, a cow which was rented from a farmer and replaced when it went 'dry', as cows do, a lawn where they played cricket. There was also "Cook", who was always in a starched white "pinny" and cap and a sly smile as she gave them current buns with "don't tell your mother". Dickens looked after the property and a feisty little horse named 'Lady-go- Bang' which could "pass any other horse on the road". They also had a dozen hens and a rooster which woke them up every morning with his crowing. No wonder Pa loved to talk about those early years of abundance of everything young boys could wish for.

Their parents, Joseph and Florence, were extroverts who loved to entertain and Pa would tell us about the time guests were there for dinner and the cook brought in one of the deep dish apple pies for which the house was famous. It vanished quickly. She brought in another which also disappeared in a hurry. When a third one came in, Pa worried that they were eating the staff's supper.

The boys grew up with strict discipline but lots of freedom. "Children should be seen but not heard" was the mantra in those days. Good table manners were a 'must' including to say, when asked about second helpings, "No, thank you, I have had an excellent sufficiency" which little Gilbert once embroidered with "and if I had any more I would bust!" Often there were ladies in for tea and Pa remembered Gilbert bursting in from school one day with a polite "Good Afternoon" and then "I can spell! I can spell!" "That's nice," said one of the guests, "spell ginger". "JUNJUR – now ask me another!"

There would always be tall glasses of creamy milk waiting for them in the dairy. Apples, oranges were often a treat at Christmas, which they would play catch with until they were soft and then, with a lump of sugar pushed on the top, lie on the black bear-skin rug in front of the fire, and suck the juice while they devoured their new 'Boy's Own Annual'. Pa said he was 10 before he realized that not all boys had the wonderful life he did.

Other treats were their regular visits to their grandfather, Grampa Fletcher, in Nottingham. His factory which manufactured lace-making machines was one of the city's major employers and in the late 1880s, lace was the rage around the world, so there was a huge demand for his machines. A book, "The Fletcher House of Lace" showed his daughter, Lady Ada Jardine, looking very glamourous. By the time the boys knew him, 'Grandpa' had gout. On days when it was hurting, he would be in his library, bad foot up on a 'hassock' – a padded stool. When the boys came bursting in, he stretched out a hand, saying "Keep your distance! Keep your distance!" After he had heard all their excitements, he would keep them enthralled with stories of "the old days" when there were no gas lights, no post, highwaymen made journeys scary, very few books, no trains, Africa had just been discovered, the 'Grand Old Duke of York' was still a national hero and the new empire was a source of pride.

The house was haunted and when Pa was old enough, he was asked to go down to the cellar to get a tankard of beer for any happenchance guest. A 'wheel' of Stilton cheese was kept under the spigot of the barrel so the drips would ripen it. The rest of the cellar was dark and scary and Pa always expected a ghost to spring on him as he bent over to fill the tankard. Two six-foot maiden aunts lived there as Grandmother had passed on, but I never heard their names. The house was at the edge of Nottingham's popular arboretum which had trees from around the world growing along with native oaks and beeches, and after Grandfather and the aunts died, it was incorporated into the 'High School for Young Ladies'.

Grandfather always sounded like such a sweet man, we were sorry he was so far away and we were a sad household when news came of his passing.

Pa's mother loved the theatre and once persuaded her husband to go with her to a special play. Afterwards, he would regale friends, demonstrating how the heroine, alone on the stage, stretched her arms wide, crying "Let me be free!! Let me be free!" and "there was no one within yards of the lass." He obviously didn't get the message!

Pa's father would go to the office in Nottingham by train and told the story of how, alone one day with one other man in the compartment (eight seats in those days), he opened his cigar case to find only one there which he felt duty-bound to offer to his fellow passenger – "and the damn fool took it!" He took 'The Morning Post' with him, which was very often tucked under his waistcoat on chilly mornings. He had a lucrative business buying barley from local farmers for the many pubs that brewed their own beer and ale. There was fierce loyalty by the brew masters to the grain from a particular farmer, and sometimes, from a special field.

The business ended abruptly when the large brewing companies were established. Nearly all the privately-owned pubs were bought out within a year; the brewers fired and trade-name beer brought in to fierce local antagonism. About the same time, when Pa was 15, his beloved Mother died – we were told of pneumonia, but later heard that it was from a doctor's negligence after a hysterectomy. Poor lady. Poor family.

Both boys were attending Southwell Public School at the time. 'Public school' in England is 'Private School' in North America. Latin and Greek lessons were the norm and daily attendance at the nearby Cathedral was generally hated. The boys,–no girls there, got up to mischief (nowadays classified as delinquency) – like making little wads of blotting paper soaked with ink and firing them at the classroom ceiling with forbidden sling-shots, as well as fastening half walnut shells to the school cat's feet (with softened wax) and letting her go clackety clack during a dull class. This caused pandemonium for an hour as they pretended to catch the cat. Climbing out of the dorm windows and going down to the riverside games field to play soccer by moonlight was another pleasure. They would have been strapped if caught, but I think the staff must have turned a blind eye to those pranks.

With the family upheaval, Pa left school and went, as planned, to work at the lace factory. By that time, Sir Ernest Jardine, who had married Ada Fletcher (Florence's sister), was in charge. They had a son, Don, who was the same age as Pa and the expectation was that the two of them would learn the business 'from the bottom up' and eventually take over ownership. Jardine wasn't the kindly boss his father-in-law had been. In the days before unions, workers had no legal rights and their welfare was totally at the whim of the managers and owners. Pa hated the exploitation and rough treatment, but his uncle dismissed his argument that kindness pays dividends. Pa was there for 9 years.

One morning at 6:10, one of their best workers came running in, out of breath, apologizing for being late, saying that his wife was giving birth and that he just couldn't leave her until the midwife arrived. Jardine gave him a cold look and fired him on the spot. This was long before any social security or recourse was in place. That finally sickened Pa of the whole unfair situation and he decided to go to Canada. I always admired him for that, although I think Mary, my oldest sister, sometimes longed for the life that might have been.

Shortly before that incident, Pa had lost his father, Joseph. He was under reproach in the extended family as he had remarried too soon after his wife died. Not only that, but the new wife was "a dancing teacher, my dear, with three children". Apparently, this was a no-no. He also had diabetes which at that time had no treatment. One could tell that it was still a shock to Pa, when many years later, he would tell how he and Gilbert went to the hospital after a soccer game one Saturday afternoon and were sitting on the edge of his bed with their father sitting up, joking and laughing, the sun streaming in through the window, "and he died, just like that" Pa would say with tears in his eyes.

Margaret Clarissa Domleo was the boss's secretary at the factory and she shared Pa's hatred of the callous treatment of the workers. She promised to go out to join him when he got settled in Canada. So in 1910, full of hope and excitement, Pa, aged 25, took off for new adventures. In fact, she followed him a year later and they were married in Winnipeg on July 19, 1911.

Grampa was what would have been called in a Victorian novel "a well favoured man". He was lean, active and interested in everything. People in Dorchester admired him when he would walk down across the river to get the mail for the first two years after he came to live with us there in 1976. "A classic English gentleman" they would say, "so upright for his age, and so good looking". He couldn't be convinced that he was handsome and for good reason, as his reflection in mirrors had his face lopsided, so different to what he really was. He always wore a moustache which, surprisingly, was ginger although his hair was dark brown, changing to silver grey. The moustache was the result of a stupid party game called 'Insults' – and a girl he fancied had said that he had an ugly mouth.

He loved to play cricket and football (soccer) and followed the reports of both all his life. He liked a game of cards and very much enjoyed the company of men like himself; people with no pretensions, and no vices, who clung a bit to the old ways and manners and who just wouldn't "do anyone down". On the other hand, he was stubborn and opinionated rather sadly dismissing those who might differ from him. The Sheldon's had a habit of feeling a bit superior to the majority of humanity, but his virtues far outweighed his faults. The sight of a nice man wearing a tweed jacket with leather elbow patches always brings back the familiar heartache.

A deep faith in the magnificence of the universe sustained him over the loss of his two wives and he read many books on the Eastern and other ancient religions. Christianity seems "off on the wrong track" he once said. One Christmas morning, Bab (Jan's mother) said we must all go to church. So when 'Pa' quietly took a plug out of the big old 'overland' car we had, we were mightily pleased when the car wouldn't start. We all ran happily back inside, throwing off our hats, coats and moccasins and put the potatoes we always had to keep our hands warm, on the back of the woodstove to keep hot for dinner.

He would tell us not to complain if/when we did about something, so we laughed when he did now and then. We'd check him up with "you're complaining!" and he'd retort, "No I'm not, I'm just stating facts." April Fools Day was when he almost always had the laugh on us. If the charm of that day has been forgotten by those of you reading this, April 1st – until noon – is when people would try to trick others into believing something that was a bit funny, could be true, but wasn't. One had to be careful not to tell lies but to couch the words as a question, like: "did you hear that the sun will get up an hour later tomorrow?" Mostly, people had forgotten about the date, and had a moment of believing. It's just a laugh that the world would be better for we're all so serious and busy.

He always enjoyed smoking cigars at Christmas time – never any other time, so the smell of one immediately takes me back 80 years. Cigars and little tangerines in a wooden box straight from Japan. After he remarried, he'd always brought home a glass jar of preserved ginger as well – Bab's favourite.

Christmas cakes, mince pies, puddings were all made from scratch in every house. This was a big affair as all the raisins and dates had to be carefully picked over for stalks and other bits & pieces, washed, dried and soaked in some of the brandy which everyone kept as a safeguard before easy access to a doctor or hospital, and the advent of aspirins and antibiotics made illnesses less scary. I've never made a big thing out of Christmas or New Year. I remember it being a warm, little friendly oasis of rest, books, candles, different food, stories of Pa's growing up in Nottingham, and games. Losing both wives around that time put the damper on "Merry" Christmas.

One spring in Canada he hitched up the horses with a "come on, I want to show you something" and off we went, excited about a new discovery. It was April and a fine smell of spring in the air. I cannot remember where or how far we went, but finally he said "we'll hitch the horses here and walk the rest of the way." We came to a field gateway and there – acres of purple crocus, Manitoba's provincial flower. A little wind blew in so that suddenly the prairie was silver as the flowers were bent over. The breeze stopped, the purple flowers were back under the sun. This kept happening as we watched and the image etched into our consciousness. I remember that we were all very quiet all the way home. Such a lovely experience and such a great memory!

After we had a car, a big (green, I think) Overland that was made in Oshawa with blinds to pull down on all the windows, a pull-out table and three benches in the back, no indicators (one stuck out an arm) and no windshield washers. It had to be like every other car back in those days – started by turning a crank at the front which was a dangerous and hard job as sometimes the pistons would fire and the crank whipped around. Men had to be quick to let go or wrists were broken. It had running boards which were great for sitting on when the car stopped and had to be fiddled with, as sometimes in a rain, water would get in the carburetor and we'd have to wait until it dried out. It was great fun and enriched our lives. We'd go up to the Riding Mountains some Sundays and swim in Clear Lake or Sandy Lake and picnic in the bush, which seemed so exotic and different to our own.

When we were in Suffolk, Auntie Nell and Uncle John (Nell was Bab's sister) would come to visit sometimes and it was easy to see how much they all enjoyed 'adult talk'. John was headmaster at a local school in Nottinghamshire and a very good watercolour artist. The paintings of the barn and Norman Farm are his, painted during one of their visits. He was quietly dismayed when Nell said once "I've had more pleasure from his paintings than from anything else." She was a sweet lady who would have come to realise that that wasn't the thing to say! John used to get all embarrassed with her when she would stop to talk to work people in the most charming man-to-man way. It brightened their day – and maybe their lives – and I thought it a delightful trait.
A joke Pa always enjoyed was about her. They were all dozing in front of the fire before bedtime one night when Pa asked if they would like a snack. "No, not really, thank you," was their sleepy answer. Pa reminded them that there was some lemon pie left. "Lemon pie," Nell exclaimed sitting up, suddenly wide-awake and eager! They had two children, Betty who married a Nottingham businessman, and Bill, who was much younger. Pa and I stopped in to see Bill once and he insisted on phoning to find lodging for us. There must have been something going on in the area as he was an hour on the phone – and calls were charged then. All the while, Pa and I were sitting on chesterfields that we'd have been very happy to have slept on. Bill finally found an inn that had

rooms. The "Cross Keys" was a lucky choice, as at 7am the next morning, a Hunt was gathering in the courtyard below.

Have I said that Pa smoked a pipe? He also smoked cigarettes to keep Bab company while she was there. He had to 'ream' out his two pipes every now and then, cutting the caked tar in the bowl with the knife he always kept in whatever pocket he was wearing. It was ugly, black stuff which would also come out with the pipe cleaners that are made to push through and clean the stems of pipes. "This can't be good for your lungs," he'd muse, but thankfully he never had any trouble with his breathing. Doctors were only just beginning to link smoking with lung cancer at that time. Lung cancer wasn't nearly so common as it became later.

Pa's favourite foods were lemon pie, ice cream, Scotch broth made with lamb, barley, and carrots, and of course, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Fruitcake was special as well and he enjoyed scraping out the bowl after the cakes went into the oven. Does anyone do that anymore? Apple pie, of course – apple pie and cream is everyone's best food – no? Pancakes with sugar, butter and lemon juice were a great standby all through the war. One couldn't buy fresh oranges but sometimes a shipload of lemons, wrapped in newspaper, would come through in the convoys. Lemons keep well even if one doesn't have a fridge.

He was a great admirer of Rudyard Kipling's books and poems and of the British Empire that he thought had been a decent avuncular system giving basic law, education, business, postal service and good roads to much of the globe. He didn't think very highly of missionaries though, as he thought that people had the right to their own convictions.

Another thing that he'd always tell us was "to mind your own business" (M.Y.O.B.) and although that could sound a bit uncaring, it really is good advice. He would always remind us that there are two sides to every question and that the only intolerance one should have was of intolerance itself. I was so sorry that he seemed to be haunted by the memory of an old gentleman in Canada who was pushed to work so hard by his miserable son, that he would fall asleep over supper. We were thankful that we could give Pa a comfortable home.

He was blessed with an unquenchable interest in almost everything and would say, "If you can't find the world interesting, you might as well be dead." An experience at the livery barn in Neepawa kept him laughing all his life. It was high summer and thirsty weather when the group of old-timers who always sat outside were passing around a ceramic jug of water. It slipped and crashed. Along with the water were the remains of a mouse. One man spoke up drily, "Hi Charlie, ain't it time you changed your mouse?"

We always had newspapers in England. A small, Suffolk man would bring the Sunday papers from Finnigan Station in a little round 'trap' pulled by a cheerful pony – the same man who had given Pa a lift from the station when he arrived by train to look at the farm in 1931. It was a joke in the family, how he had talked all the way with Pa not understanding a single word of the man's broad, Suffolk dialect. Sunday mornings were an especially good time, as papers were left with us as we were on a corner, and the neighbours would come to pick them up and stay for a coffee and chat. We always had a laugh about the horoscopes because they were so often right for one or other of us.

Pa was often aggravating when he would, unconsciously I do believe, offer up our suggestions as his own and he could be so stubborn. The doctor who looked after him during the month he was in

hospital after his stroke, said, "You might as well take him home, we can't do anymore for him - he's the most stubborn man I've ever met." That was good news, about him coming home, for all of us. We had a male nurse come in every morning to take care of him and in the afternoon he would tell me things I've written in this story; things he'd never talked about before.

He never talked about death but seemed comfortable in himself about it. When it came, there was a great emptiness.

The very favourite motto of his and his Uncle's was 'When in doubt, charge!' and "always be a little bit hungry and a little bit cool if you want to live a long and healthy life". I don't know how he came by these wisdoms; he would never have margarine in the house and threw out our aluminum saucepans long before there was any scare of their danger.

In 1910 he was off to Canada.

There were other young men on the liner which took them to Halifax and they travelled together on the train to Winnipeg. Three of them stayed good friends for years and they all settled in the area around Portage la Prairie or near the Saskatchewan border.

We had many good laughs when Pa would tell the tale of the first night on the train. The black porter put all the bunks down while the passengers went to the dining car for a bedtime dram. Some of them had a hard time negotiating the narrow corridor coming back, not too steady on their feet, and the train bucketing along. There was one married couple and after climbing into their bunks, the wife sat up and whispered, "How shall I know which bunk we're in if I have to go to the loo?" "Don't worry," her husband whispered back, "I'll stick my foot out." She did have to go and when she came back, a male foot stuck out of every bed!

Pa worked for a farmer for a year to learn about a way of life of which he knew nothing. Good people, he said, and found the countryside like a fairyland, with flowers everywhere, birds all singing 'to the glory of God' and the poplars shimmering in every breeze. At the beginning of the next year, he settled on a farm in Miniota, at the bend of the Assiniboine River, the boundary between the two Prairie Provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Mother (Margaret Domleo) came out to join him against the wishes of her parents. I wonder how she felt with that burden on her and the sudden change - from a demanding job with people all about as secretary to the Fletcher Empire - to life as a housewife out on the lonely prairie. They soon had a baby daughter to keep her company. Dorothea Mary was born the following spring, March 16th and three years later, Barbara Florence arrived on the 18th of February. Two days after that, Pa was out doing the chores when he looked up to see the chimney on fire. Fortunately, there was a ladder and he was able to control the fire but it must have been a terrifying half hour as all the prairie houses are timber; I don't think that Mother ever knew about it and what danger she and the baby were in. Those were terrible years for prairie farmers who would look and pray for rain that never came; the forerunner of the 'Dirty Thirties' and the Great Depression.

Happily for them, Pa got a job driving children to school in Miniota. It paid well and he (and they) enjoyed it except for one scary afternoon when a sudden, violent storm came up. The farm was down in the valley while the village and school were up on the top. There was a sort of track that Pa used to take the team and buggy up, alongside a water course, but he always took the children around on the road. On that particular afternoon, Pa was waiting for school to be out, and wishing they would hurry

up as the horses were getting jittery. Purple clouds were building up in the northwest but it looked as if there would be time to get the children to their homes before it was overhead. The way the horses were tossing their heads and showing the whites of their eyes was alarming him, though. Finally, the children came running over and climbed into the 6-seater buggy, a light, four-wheeled vehicle with a roof and another seat for the driver up front. The black, rolling clouds frightened some, excited the older children. Pa wondered what best to do. There was a livery barn in the village but it was about the same distance away as the nearest drop-off farm, so he decided that would be the wisest route. The horses set off with a leap that threw the children off their seats and went off down the road a wild gallop. Pa did his best to control them and prayed that they would tire before they reached the first home as there was no holding them back. With dismay he remembered that the shortcut beside the creek was halfway there. The horses hadn't forgotten. They headed straight for the track and leaped down the bank without a pause while Pa thought of the winding trail and the trees beside it – a long mile down to the river flat, with danger every second. The pace they were going could cause a wheel to fly off should one strike a rock. The trees didn't bear thinking about. The children could be tossed out, a horse could stumble, and the reins could be snatched out of his hands… He didn't know how or if they could possibly get home alive. Then the storm hit. Thunder crashed continuously and lightening lit the sudden dark like day. Then the rain came, so he could barely see the stampeding horses ahead. In minutes, the creek became a raging torrent, terrifying the horses even more. The children were screaming in the back. The whole world was hurtling by, wind and water and roaring floods as well as the panicked horses with their bits in their teeth, heeding nothing but the instinct to get home. Eventually, they made it. No one was hurt beyond bruises and scratches. The horses stood ashamed, panting with their sides heaving, knowing they had behaved disgracefully. The children ran in an excited crowd to tell our Mother about it, all talking at once, while the black storm clouds rolled on to the south, the rain softened and the earth soaked up the precious water. Pa used to wonder how many times that story had been told.

They had more dry years and rust hit the wheat so that at harvest time, the prices at the elevator were rock bottom. Pa was trying to build up his pig and cattle herds so that wheat could be used at home, but it was a slow job, and the cash was badly needed. In August 1920, they saw an ad for farm help in Nova Scotia in the popular farm paper 'The Family Herald'. They wanted to go back to England to see Gilbert, due home from India in 1922/23 and Nova Scotia would be half way there, so they applied, were accepted, sold what they could and headed east. "I really missed putting a line in the river and pulling it out at noon hour, with a good fish hooked," Pa told me.

The Nova Scotia farm belonged to the Elliot family in Spa Springs, a village in the Annapolis Valley. There were one hundred acres of apple trees that needed pruning, and spraying come spring, and picking right then, in September. The house we rented was a solid, yellow brick farmhouse with a huge basement down into which 60 barrels of apples were rolled. The front, downstairs bedroom had a big bay window with a view of the mountains – a long, low line of hills cutting off the north winds. It was there that your raconteur was born the following year on August 24, 1921 – another girl. Poor Pa, he did so badly want a son, but he was still a wonderful teacher, father, mother and good friend for his three daughters.

The spring of that year was like another fairyland. Apple blossoms and busy honey bees everywhere with the scent even sweeter than that of the harvest the previous fall. Pa's job was to spray nicotine on the just-flowered trees to prevent insects spoiling the future apples. That was done with a team of oxen plodding slowly up and down the rows while he stood on the wagon with a long wand spraying

all the branches until the barrel of liquid nicotine was empty. By the end of the day, the oxen were reeling drunk from the nicotine.

Pa and Mother really enjoyed that year but her parents had been promised their return, so in March 1922, they said a regretful goodbye to the Elliots. Mary and their boys were the same age and had had a happy time playing together as well. When Mary and I went back there in 1983, the grown-up 'boys' welcomed us with hugs and kisses and hospitality and immediately remembered Pa doing cartwheels to impress the children.

There wasn't an apple tree to be seen in the Valley by then. When the Macintosh was developed in B.C., the market for older type apples of the east crashed. They couldn't compete with the bright red, flawless new variety. The Nova Scotia government paid, we were told, $5 for every apple tree destroyed so that arable farming could replace the orchards. Many sons went to university on those payments.

England was waiting so the family boarded a liner in Halifax and were back there a week later. The year was 1922 and Great Britain was in shambles after the First World War. Returned service men, expecting gratitude and work, found neither. Although the elite and upper society were living it up, for the majority of people, life was hard, without much hope. The appalling loss of life and the conditions in the trenches hung over the country. Pa had no luck in finding work, and with their money running out, he contacted Ernest Jardine, hoping he would have an opening but there was no help there. I don't know whether he found work somewhere, but we had a house to live in and we were never hungry. I remember that Mary and Barbara had pretty new dresses when Uncle Gilbert came.

Perhaps a relative had died and left us some money? However they managed it, we went back to Canada to a farm in a section called Union, a hundred miles due west of Winnipeg. It overlooked a wide muskeg and, fifty miles away, were the Riding Mountains. It was a half section, I believe, with lots of stands of bush in between ten fields. The slope down to the muskeg at the back of the barn was a great toboggan run. In one of the patches of bush a huge rock gave us all a queer feeling of it being very special at some time with the earth around it flattened by unknown dancing feet. Pa thought they danced around it. In a far-away field, a huge oak tree had been left in the centre and the little bush around it was full of wild cherry, cranberries, raspberries, hawthorn, and choke cherries.

That was where Pa once crept up and watched a crow-court in action. He had seen crows converging, so he tied up his ploughing team and went quietly to see what it was about. More than a couple hundred crows were standing in a circle in an opening in the trees, and one, looking very forlorn, stood alone in the centre. A great deal of crow talk was going on, an argument was quite obvious in their tone. Finally, one larger than most, stood out to make a pronouncement. Thereupon they all set onto the one in the centre and killed it. The question in Pa's mind was "whatever could a crow do to warrant such a punishment" and how did the word get so far around to get so many together? What other clever things can they do?

He saw cock prairie chickens drumming on fallen logs come mating time, and the babies freeze when mother would call a warning of danger. "One minute all those little chicks were scratching around – the next they were invisible," he'd tell us. Once, a meteorite soared low across the night sky. He looked for a word of it in the papers, but decided that he must have been the only one out that night.

Sadly, Mother became ill and after a winter in hospital, died in May of 1926. A sudden little storm blew up at her funeral making me think that nature was sorry about it too, but for us to know that life goes on. It must have been very hard for Pa, as he to write and tell her parents, and cancer in those days was so dreaded that no one ever spoke the word and didn't for another 50 years. He also had three little girls to bring up. Mary and Barbara would have missed her, but she had been away for months, and when one is three, other things fill the gap. And Pa was both Mother and Father to us in his own way.

By the next winter, Pa started whistling again. Nearly all men, in the country at least, used to whistle while they worked. It was good to hear him mimic the birds and have them answer back. He used to play cards with us in the winter evenings and it must been a sacrifice as he loved reading and had little time for that. Sometimes he'd say, "Bundle up and we'll go and look at the stars." Excited, we'd pull on socks, sweaters, coats, mitts and scarves and the Indian moccasins made from supple deer-hide which everyone wore in the winter. With only our eyes and noses exposed, we'd stand in awe as he would point out the different stars. We only half believed him about them being other suns, bigger than the one we knew and so many miles away. This was before scientists had discovered that our Earth was part of the Milky Way. To us, standing there in that unforgiving cold, it was a bright band of thousands of star-suns, stretching across the sky – from southeast to northwest – totally remote from us? Couldn't surely be!

I wish all of you could experience a night like those, with the eerie howling of the coyotes off in the bush, the snow crunchy, the wide white land we knew, but had suddenly become a little bit of planet Earth, whirling through the ether. How did we stay on it? He taught us by swinging a half-full pail of water over his head the following summer. The stars were so huge and bright that one felt one had only to jump a bit to reach up and touch them. Almost every night it was so silent except for a scary crackling now and then. We felt very small there in the immensity of this land from coast to coast, all the big and little creatures snug in their hibernation hideouts. Over it all, the Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis, would weave and curl, silently, eerily, green and white and pink, advancing, retreating, seeming to crackle in the intense cold.

I've read that the greatest happiness a man can have is when his and his family's lives are totally dependent on his hands and ingenuity. I hope Pa had that happiness. We wouldn't have lasted the night without him and the little, warm, bright house behind us.

Mary was twelve and looked after all of us quite wonderfully. Pa would peel potatoes and put a rice pudding in the woodstove oven at lunch time. When he and I would come in for supper she was cooking bacon (aah… the smell of it!) and mashing the potatoes while Barbara set the table, always adding a little vase of wild flowers all summer. We had this same meal of bacon, eggs, potatoes, sometimes a vegetable, and hot rice pudding day in, day out for three years. It never stopped being delicious.

As every other household did, Pa would kill a pig every fall and salt down most of the meat, rubbing pickling salt and a bit of brown sugar mixed with saltpetre into the sides and hams several times. I remember him saying that he wasn't sure saltpetre was good for people, but what to do? The fresh ribs were food to die for. He always made our bread and so delicious it was. Yeast is funny stuff. He would buy an ounce or two, now and then. It used to be sold as 'balm', a solid paste, cream-coloured, that could be broken off in angled pieces (and gave one tummy ache if eaten). Normally, he would keep some from week to week by 'nourishing' it with warm, mashed potatoes. The big lump of bread

dough had to rise overnight and sometimes would have grown in all directions to our merriment and had to be gathered together and set to rise again. In the winter, it was wrapped in Mother's fur coat and once grew down a sleeve. He would mix the yeast and flour on Saturdays so that on Sunday mornings, six loaves came hot and crusty, smelling divine from the oven. The minute one was cool enough to touch, we were allowed to tear off the crusts. Buttered, they were food for the gods.

We'd have coffee for a treat sometimes. Pa made it by heating the grounds in a saucepan, adding a teaspoonful of chicory and a pinch of salt, and boiling water from the kettle. After a few minutes for it to 'brew', he'd put in half a cup of cold water 'to settle the grounds'. With the creamy milk we had, it rivalled the bread in aroma and taste. A guilty pleasure made mine even better as I was given a half cup topped up with milk with "I shouldn't be giving you this, you know."

Mary and Barbara went to the local school a mile away. I tagged along with Pa and learned a lot about a lot of things while he did the chores, or mended fences, cut wood – there was always lots to do around a farm. The wood cutting was a very important part of life – as essential as food and water. We had lots of stands of poplar, and Pa would select the trees which grew too close together or were leaning. He must have had a lot of pleasure from tidying up the woods in that way. I did! We'd put a chain around several logs and one of the horses, usually Turk, would pull them back to the homestead. An enterprising young farmer eventually fixed up a saw to the back wheel of his new tractor and went from farm to farm sawing up the logs, which was a great help, but at this time it had to be done by hand and muscle.

Poplar wood has to dry before it is burned or creosote oozes out and runs down the stove pipes and this sometimes becomes a fire hazard. Bachelor farmers would save some of the sawing by taking long poles in the house and poking them into the fire as they burned. For us, a good neighbour, Marv Howe, would come over to be the power on the other end of the big savage-looking wood saw. Often times, we found a couple of chipmunk families living in the wood pile.

Pa's school-days sweetheart, Sarah Maria (Babs) Slater, came out to marry him (May 9, 1928) and our idyllic (to us..to me) life changed abruptly.. You can imagine! Gone were the bacon and eggs and the comfortable rut we were in. I cannot think what she must have thought of our lives, and the things prairie homemakers had to do – ironing by heating irons on a wood stove in the summer (I don't think that we had ever ironed); making jam and preserves from the abundant fruits, on the same hot wood stove; a pail under the sink for a bathroom, and no easy turning on a tap. She must have been a feisty lady who came from a comfortable home in the south of England where, although hydro had yet to be in every home, and therefore no appliances, living would have been much easier than on the prairies. She had also been in the Women's Auxiliary Service, the WACs, during the First World War and served in Egypt. People were shocked when she arrived at Winnipeg in a 'short skirt' – long ones were still in Canadian fashion. And she smoked cigarettes with a long, ivory holder!

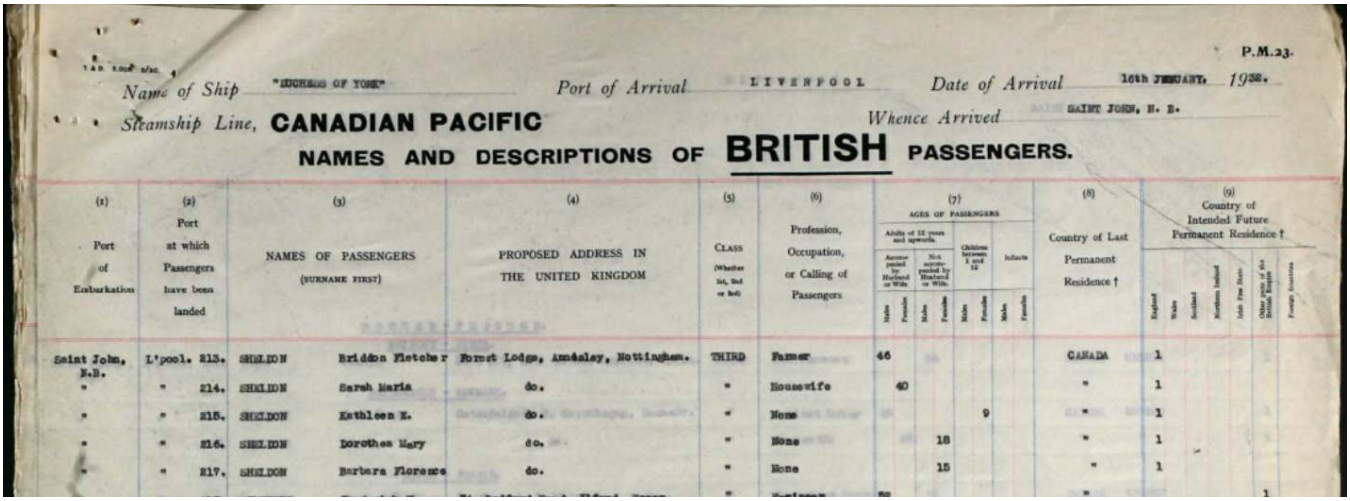
They were very happy together but the three of us naturally felt very much in the way. Good family communication was another thing away off in the future, but it would have been a big help. A baby girl was born to them the following year in April and everything – to my knowledge – was fine until she started on solid food, when she became very ill and had to go to hospital. She was diagnosed as having a rare disease known to only affect children on the prairies. Celiac perhaps? That has only been recognized since the eighties. After a year in hospital, Ruth improved and came home for a week and was to be discharged. Sadly, in that final week in hospital, a window was left open on the children's ward, a cold wind blew in and several of the children came down with pneumonia. Before

penicillin, it was usually incurable. Two other babies, along with Ruth, died. Her poor mother! Poor Pa too! It must be terrible to lose a child. She was buried in a little marble casket in our Mother's grave in Neepawa.

In the late fall of 1931, another baby was on the way, and – who can blame her – we were packing up and on our way to England. Mary badly wanted to stay but they wouldn't hear of it – she would be 19. So it would have been hard for her, but, with the Depression raging, it was the best thing that could have happened to us. I remember crying, stumbling my way to school, the morning we were told.

No one had any money – farmers were suffering after seven years of practically no rain so Pa had to leave everything to neighbours, with the promise of payment "when things got better". We had five horses. Doll and Beauty were the team for road travel. Bright and good-natured, they could pass any other horse on the road just as 'Lady go Bang' had long before. Pa really loved them and must have hated to part with them. The others were Ruby, a brood mare; Barney, an ok gelding; and big Turk, whom we rode to school. They were all family. "At least he'll take good care of them," Pa said sadly as he patted them goodbye as our good neighbour led them away.

We sailed on the SS Duchess of York out of Halifax and endured a stormy passage which the captain described later as the very worst he'd ever known.



P.M.23.

Name of Ship "DUCHESS OF YORK" Port of Arrival LIVERPOOL Date of Arrival 16th JANUARY, 1932.

Steamship Line, CANADIAN PACIFIC Whence Arrived SAINT JOHN, N. B.

NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BRITISH PASSENGERS.

(1) Port of Embarkation	(2) Port at which Passengers have been landed	(3) NAMES OF PASSENGERS (SURNAME FIRST)	(4) PROPOSED ADDRESS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM	(5) CLASS	(6) Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passengers	(7) AGES OF PASSENGERS: Adults of 12 years and upwards — Accompanied by Husband or Wife: Males	Females	Not accompanied by Husband or Wife: Males	Females	Children between 1 and 12: Males	Females	Infants: Males	Females	(8) Country of Last Permanent Residence †	(9) Country of Intended Future Permanent Residence †
Saint John, N.B.	L'pool.	213. SHELDON	Briddon Fletcher	Forest Lodge, Annesley, Nottingham.	THIRD	Farmer	46							CANADA	1
"	"	214. SHELDON	Sarah Maria	do.	"	Housewife	40							"	1
"	"	215. SHELDON	Kathleen E.	do.	"	None				9				"	1
"	"	216. SHELDON	Dorothea Mary	do.	"	None			18					"	1
"	"	217. SHELDON	Barbara Florence	do.	"	None			15					"	1

Huge seas, one couldn't believe a vessel could survive, seemed to hit us broadside, then we would be down in the trough with a mountain of water in front of us. Two days out, the hatches were battened down and no one was allowed on deck. One day, a porthole with inch-thick glass was shattered and some of that angry sea came frothing and churning down our corridor along with the pieces of glass – pieces we still have. The rush to get a new window in before the next major wave was successful fortunately. Half the passengers were kept to their bunks with sea sickness, and those of us who were mobile, had a problem eating as our plates would slide away as the ship pitched, slide back as she rolled. Finally, calmer seas and the welcome call of "Land ahoy!" let us up and out on deck. There, ahead of us was land – solid, lovely land – defying the ocean. It was a green-gold hill of Ireland.

Liverpool! - Such a crowd of ships, tugs and liners - stevedores loading and unloading - horns hooting their unforgettable sounds – sea gulls! – Families waiting on wharf. We waited with them for our trunks to be unloaded. The deck of the Duchess was high above the turmoil but a huge ramp was pushed up so the luggage could slide down. As the ramp was at 75 degrees or so the pace was alarming along with the crash as each piece landed. I'm sure everyone there had their hearts in their mouths thinking of the precious glass and china packed in their trunks.

When the storm at sea had calmed, a surviving little wind whipped around and flung a man's tweed cap on to the heaving water. We thought that very funny until we discovered it was our Dad's. He was the one lone man in the crowd on the dock, hatless.

Eventually we boarded a train for London. We thought we must be on the notorious new 'Flying Scotsman' the 'crème de la crème' of steam engines as it flew through the green English countryside with a sort of childish joy. We had never moved so fast! Swaying and singing Beethoven's 5th, so fast we could barely hear it – da da da dah! da da dah! – the coaches slipped over the cracks between the rails, as railroads used to be made, to allow for expansion in hot weather. We charged down to London, to glide gently up those iconic bumpers that mark the end of the line for all the trains coming in from across the U.K. Another train, at another station, far more composed, took us up to Nottingham.

We lived for three months with Bab's sister, Nell and her husband John (the artist) – in Nottinghamshire where the orange soil and huge rabbit warrens were a surprise. Pa went off on a motor bike to search England for some land he could afford. Eventually, he found 'Norman Farm' in the centre of Suffolk – 32 acres with a big, thatched barn and a seventeenth-century farmhouse.

He planned to raise broilers (4-month old chickens) – at least they were to be ready for the pot at that time. We bought the day old chicks from a hatchery in Yorkshire and picked them up the same day at Finningham station. It was a new concept developed from Roosevelt's promise of a 'chicken in every pot'. It took six years before we managed to rear enough to make any reasonable profit. He fixed up warm lights and different types of brooders, but there were always losses until he made smaller units and closed them in, the natural way a mother hen would rear them. After we had discovered that, it seemed so very simple – why hadn't we thought of that right at the start?

The land was rented out to our neighbours and brought in a little income and at this time, Mary and Barbara had both left home. There was enough money found to send me to High School for which I've always been so grateful, but I don't ever remember saying so to them, which saddens me a lot. Please take note, kids!

Norman Farm

Situated at the southwest corner of Wyverstone, Norman Farm was the smallest of the four farms that made up the village. It lay in a shallow valley with a stream, fed by land drains, called the 'wash dyke' that was a central area for washing medieval sheep, we were told. A delightful little 'spinney' grew along the road side, with two big oak trees, some holly trees and the usual complement of hazel bushes and blackberries. Once a year a gypsy family would camp there, cut our hazel branches and

sell us the clothes pegs made from them. The fields lay on both sides of that road which led up the hill to Bacton. They have been made into four big ones now, but when we were there, there were four arable ones, sloping gently uphill and two fields and three meadows on the other side of the road, those had a totally different soil to the others and when we arrived, they were a picture of the traditional English meadow, full of buttercups and daisies. As the land was clay under the topsoil, there were many ponds at all farms, little 'dew' ponds that were reservoirs against dry summers and provided drinking water for many cottages; we had four 'dew ponds' and a large pond dug by Pa using a horse and bucket scoop. How did we do it? We swam in that for the first years until newts and frogs took over.

Norman Farm

The Barn

The barn was cavernous, cool and useful. There were stables for horses and cows as well as a pig pen. Pa built a new pigpen and made that an opportunity to demonstrate to me how the Greeks found the level by digging a trench and filling it with water.

The house stood where the road cornered and then branched off, one way up to the church, the other to the pub, 'the Plough'. There used to be a row of English poplars on the meadow across the roadside, smelling most wonderfully after a rain. Between the road and the house, there was a little paddock which we made into a flower-edged lawn, and at the back, an old orchard with three apple trees whose green apples were good for both eating and cooking. There were also two pear trees and a great lot of weeds.

An elderly couple had owned the place for years, using only two rooms of the house. The house itself was interesting, built in the East Anglican style of timbers; plaster painted white, and a thatched roof. Brick floors were laid down directly on the earth. The foundation was huge old timbers that had blackened with age, with tell-tale roman numerals carved into them – salvaged from a shipwreck we were told. The south end was painted pink and had three windows blocked in at the time of the Great Plague of London as the 'plague travelled on the south wind'. They'd never been re-opened and we didn't either. A huge chimney separated two good-sized rooms - a fireplace in each. Pa bought a cook stove that had a back boiler that made disgustingly sudden noises when we had company. There was a dairy and large 'back' kitchen that was frigid in winter with a stable door to let sunshine in and keep 'varmints' out.

Black, oak stairs curved steeply and narrowly up to three bedrooms and a big landing. The rooms had casement windows under the eaves, and as no one had been up there for years, they were spooky. The big bedroom had a fireplace but we never lit a fire there as two beams stuck out into the chimney

and looked to be a risk. Some old houses, especially pubs, had beams like that where fugitives could hide when necessary but we couldn't see how anyone could climb up to get out, however desperate. There was also a huge 'Dutch Oven' with an iron door, big enough to hold a dozen loaves of bread. Bricks had been built up to make a curved ceiling and it was heated by pushing in a 'faggot' (a bundle of hawthorn cuttings from the hedges which enclosed every field). A match and a half an hour later, there was this lovely hot oven with only a little white ash on the floor. We only used it now and then when we had company staying, for fun.

Beside it was the Copper. This was used for boiling sheets, a custom lingering on from the days of bed bugs and a decree that all houses have one to try to eradicate them. When? … not sure. It was literally a huge copper vessel set in bricks with a fire under it. We used it all the time – it never occurred to us that our sheets didn't need boiling.

On August 13 of that first year, a son, Jim (Andrew James) was born. That son at last. It would have been so nice for them to have had a happy, healthy baby, but it wasn't to be. Not much was known 'way back when' about a baby's health. They either lived or died. Jim couldn't digest his natural milk and it took a great deal of trials of different formulas until, I think, they found that goat's milk suited him. That meant daily trips into Stowmarket, a necessity until he was old enough to take solid foods. I think (again) that Pablum came on the market about this time. Jim grew up to be a very good-looking six footer.

Being away long days at school in Stowmarket, I cannot remember much about the next four years except that Jim adored his tricycle. Once he steered it off the bridge between two lawns and landed in a patch of stinging nettles, poor lad. It took a lot of rubbing of dock leaves before we had the pain under control but afterwards he was proud of that experience.

In 1934, Bab was into another uncomfortable, but happy pregnancy, and gave birth to a little girl, Janet, on December 16th. But another tragedy and another body-blow for Pa when she became ill, was hospitalized and died. She had puerperal fever that was, sadly, common following childbirth in those days. He was very bitter about the hospital as they had given her an experimental drug, which resulted in a bad reaction but perhaps it was her last chance? The funeral was on January 1st at Wyverstone church. I'll never forget Pa's devastation.

So life for us began as a new era. Mary came home to look after the baby, Jim, me and Pa as well as the house. She was 24 and it upset all her plans. People thought that Pa wouldn't survive such a further, tragic blow, but with the help of Beethoven on the wind-up gramophone and his own strong spirit – and Mary's care of the family – he did. Eventually he was back to laughing, teasing and enjoying life again. He was always thinking up and doing new things.

One year we planted a new orchard of apples, Victoria plums and pears. Another year, he ploughed up a piece of the home field so that a farm worker he admired could have a garden. We made and fenced in a grass tennis court that gave a great deal of pleasure to us and our friends. He experimented with tomato plants, setting them over a variety of manures and fertilizers. Chicken manure won hands down, except that they came on so early, they packed up way before the rest. We had a flock of geese one winter – they'd rush down to get their food, wings outstretched, and completely beautiful.

Pa's basic work was the making of houses for the chickens. They were wooden, 10 x 8 feet huts with a door in front, high enough for him, stooped, to get in. Lots of them! We'd have several thousand broilers at different ages, out on free range in the fields. They had to be shut in at night, or the foxes would have them. I wonder if there are lots of garden huts around, 10 x 8 feet and painted with creosote in the hot sun – very much a no-no now.

Then another new era – the War! Mary was anxious to be a part of it so as I'd just turned 18, she joined up and I took over. Pa had tried to get a housekeeper but the only applicants were husband hunters.

The Air Raid Precaution Unit was set up, as invasion was the immediate scare, and Pa was nominated warden. He enjoyed that, meeting the cross-section of society who had volunteered, every week, and finding weapons. Britain was a peaceable country, there weren't many guns about, and none were issued. Looking back, it is funny to think of the Home Guards across the country armed with staves and cricket bats, and 22s. Perhaps the units near the coast received arms and training. They wouldn't have been able to halt a German invasion, but they made us all feel safer!

Instead of invasion, those first months of the war were unreal. Everything went on as usual, no bombings, no restrictions. All that came later along with the Battle of Britain in September 1940. Remember Churchill's words about "never was so much owed by so many to so few". The blitz was 90 miles away but the sky over London was a red glow night after night; we feared that the whole city would be gone. Everyone longed to own a boat and go over and help, when civilians were asked to help get the troops back from France.

We didn't have a lot of local happenings. Bombs in fields here and there – and what huge craters they made – an occasional enemy airplane sputtering bullets overhead – the tracers seemed to travel so slowly. Later, after the Americans came over, there was the nightly gathering of the Wellington bombers in the skies above us, circling until all twelve were airborne, then it was off to the east in formation. Rationing started. We were lucky in having extra farm butter and Pa would go down to Ipswich where he could buy peanut butter – all through the war – from the health food store. Funny, when he was away, we could all hear the familiar tap..tap of his hammer coming from his workshop.

We never heard Pa swear – ever. Maybe he did, but not in our hearing. There was one occasion though that Ian Lancaster still laughs about. He and Jan were living with Pa and Ian was helping him in the barn one spring day. Pa pulled a little bag of special seed from a hiding place (from mice) and opened it to show Ian, who said, "I think something's in it." On closer scrutiny, Pa agreed but only after exploding with "the damned little buggers".

The Ministry of Food maybe thought that raising chickens was a waste of land and grain so we cut back on those and grew market garden produce instead plowing up land that had been meadow for centuries and got fantastic crops of tomatoes, runner beans, peas, and lettuce which we sent to London's Covent Garden by train. I grew flowers as well and got good prices for them. I'm not sure how it happened, but Pa got a contract with the Ministry to store canned food, secretly, in our barn. Unmarked lorries would back in at any time and we would unload, or load, cardboard boxes full of peas or beans or milk or meat. That was a very nice bit of cash for no outlay, a cache between Scotland and London shops. Swapping news with the drivers was always interesting.

After the war ended, Mary and her husband, Stan, and their little boys, Dick and Peter, immigrated to Australia which left a big gap in our lives.

In spite if all the hard times Pa had had, we all upped and left him. At first, we felt someone should be with him – at sixty it is laughable now, but we all took turns to be there. But then, Stan and I went to Canada; Jan married Ian; and Jim married Georgie Dane in Ireland and they immigrated to Canada. Barbara suddenly had a stroke and died. I came back with Anne and Ian for a couple of years, then Jan and Ian lived with Pa until, at a very healthy 75, he sold Norman Farm. He bought two semi-detached cottages at the opposite corner of the village and worked away at turning them into one, very pleasant house. It had a garden with an apple tree that kept him supplied with vegetables. He would cook the apples and have them with a bit of bran and Carnation milk every day. By the time the apples were gone, the rhubarb was in.

He had two interesting experiences while he was living alone. The first occurred after surgery for prostate cancer in 1958. It may have been a usual feeling, but it completely fascinated him. He woke from the anaesthetic, feeling totally confused in his body, everything 'topsy turvey' he said. He thought that he didn't sleep for 24 hours while his body was full of separate little cubes, all working energetically to get back into their right places. After hours and hours of that, it happened, with a triumphant 'click' and he was so well he confounded his doctor. The other took place early one Sunday morning in June. He found himself floating horizontally over his garden in a state of 'unbelievable bliss'. He was conscious of everything around; birds singing and things growing. He felt changes taking place and woke up in bed with the aura still with him.

He relished buying second-hand books and having the time to sit and read. He was very good at carpentry and built a wall of bookshelves that must have held a thousand books. His neighbour, Lottie, who put out a saucer of milk for the hedgehogs every evening, used to pop in to check on him and the barometer every day. The barometer mystified her and she always hoped that she could catch it wrong, but it never was! Pa gave it to her when he left.

One winter, he went to Africa to stay with Jan and Ian and found it fascinating, especially the gold mines and the way lawns were planted, root by grassy root. Once, our son, Peter, was in England, and Ian another year, and they took him for trips to Scotland and Wales. I went over many times with Barbara loaning us her little red Renault and Pa and I would go back to Canada together. One time, our tickets were mixed up, and we were placed in First Class on British Airways, or BOAC as it was known then. There was a strike on at Pearson Airport in Toronto, so we were diverted to Detroit. Pa was the only person on board without a visa to land in the US, so the plane was held up an hour while someone hiked back into London to get one for him. The pilots were not pleased. When we landed, after a memorable flight as only the Brits would serve First Class passengers, we were the first to get out to an "uh'uh here they come" from a couple of officials who hustled us into a bus and sent us back to Canada with dispatch. No one asked for that visa! The driver agreed to let us off at the Dorchester interchange on the #401 en route to Toronto and gave me time to call home. That was before 'The Fifth Wheel' opened there. It was pitch dark. – Halloween night, 10 pm. We waited and eventually car lights appeared, stopped, and Stan's voice, "Hello? Hello?" He had seen the lights of the bus – not much traffic at night then. So we scrambled up the grassy bank and so to home. Such good timing! Pa took it in right good humour.

The September trips we had to Derbyshire and Scotland were a joy to both Pa and I. Derbyshire is the most beautiful county in the heart of industrial England. Two rivers run through it, the Dove and

the Manifold, both in lovely wooded limestone valleys. John Prince Sheldon wrote an illustrated book about them but I don't know what happened to it.

The family farmed at Heanor, and Pa was born there but we didn't go, as Pa had his memories of it as a very young child, and I think, didn't want to upset them. We went, instead, to Sheen, along the Manifold Valley where John Prince grew up. We easily found the farmhouse, nestled halfway up the valley slope and knocked on the door. I wish I could remember the surname of that dear man and the name of the farm. He was John, and he was beside himself with pleasure at meeting Pa. He had always loved the property he told us, but thought that there was no way he could ever own it, should it come on the market. In that strange way of things, if one longs for something strongly, enthusiastically enough, it happens. The Sheldon's had to move and offered him a low down-payment and an easy mortgage saying "we want the place to belong to someone who will love it as we have." That put him on a pink cloud that he had never left.

Just that morning the courtyard had been cemented, right up to the house and stable doors and to the midden on the east where 55 cows were kept, a large herd for the '70s. John, his wife and a grown son and daughter, invited us into the house. It seemed so familiar! We went down to see the basement, large and bright with a fast-flowing stream running through it on its way down to the river. A perfect refrigerator and water supply in one. Upstairs, in the 'parlour' was a huge fireplace, and above it, hung a portrait of a young man looking incredibly like Ian (my son). John Prince, we were told. "Been hanging there for nigh on eighty years, save for a week." The week was when they were moving in twenty years earlier. A neighbour who had been friends of the family asked if he might have the portrait. "Well, I wasn't very happy to hear that," John said, "because it had always hung there, part of the house, but course we had to give it to him."

The story went on, how it was hung above the fireplace in the neighbour's house; how the neighbours had gone to bed that night pleased with the day's events only to wake to a loud thud and to find the portrait on the floor. So they pounded in a larger nail, hung it again and another thud that night and the painting once again on the floor. They decided to hang it in another room, but the same thing happened. "So the next day, they and the portrait were back," John told us with a healthy note of triumph in his voice. "So he's back where he belongs I'd be thinking."

We had lots of good laughs later, remembering him telling us about plans to dam the river to create a reservoir that would cover the farm and house. That was sad, of course, but he said, "The only government fellow who tried to do something for us, was the Liberal MP – and we wouldn't vote for him anyway." We hated to leave but went with instructions to stop at the church in Sheen to see the memorial window for John Prince. Another odd coincidence – there it was, identical to the east window in our Church in Dorchester, Canada.

I should have told you about John Prince before. He was, I think, commissioned by Cambridge University to travel through Canada – this would be around 1860, before the west was opened up - to report back on conditions for farming. He found Eastern Canada already settled in many areas, farming already underway and forests cleared which provided unexpected incomes as the ash from the trees was sold in Europe for making soap. 'Black gold' it was called. He further reported back that the southern part of Upper and Lower Canada, Ontario and Quebec, had good fertile topsoil and that he didn't recommend agriculture on the Prairies as the constant wind and dry weather would lead to erosion if the prairie sod was broken. He and a colleague made the two-year trip on horseback.

We overnighted at a B&B there where the host was almost as pleased to see Pa as John had been. "Great family they were, the Sheldons, none better. Everyone here was sorry to see them leave." He had lived in Africa and his spoils lined his dining-hall – ibex and buffalo, striped zebras and the incredibly long antlers and reproachful head of a sambur.

From there we went to the 'Bluejohn' mine, named from the French 'bleu jeune' because of the translucent blue and yellow semi-precious rock which is found there. It has been mined out and had just become a tourist attraction. It was a funny experience to go through the sloping door on a green hillside to find stairs going straight down, and a ceiling where the rock had been scoured by rushing water trying to escape. At the bottom of the stairs – claustrophobia! The tunnels were just large enough to allow a man to crawl in on his stomach. The stone must have been a rich source of wealth to the area as an expat from Derbyshire told me that he had seen huge platters made from it in the Vatican. Not far from there, a long cave is claimed to have been home to stone-age hunters and gatherers. A little stream flows out of it and the remains of fire and bones strewn about make it seem very real as one goes way in, in the half dark. This is where the photograph of Pa, Anne and Ian was taken in 1951.

Another memorable trip was down south to the Vale of Evesham, the beautiful Cotswold country and Britain's 'most beautiful village', Broadway which lives up to its reputation. I remember too trips to The Malvern Hills. Malvern is England at its tidiest but just out from the town, the famous hill stretches like a smaller, greener edition of Australia's 'Ayers Rock'. We climbed up after the road ended and walked along the top – everyone should have that experience! The ghosts of Plantagenets and the Tudors and common folk must gather there at nightfall for sure. On a summer afternoon, one is 'King of the Castle', high above everyday concerns, able to see for miles in every direction. It is a highway for birds too, all flying one way, close above our heads. The grass is short, no trees and the map says '3000 feet'.

We walked in September sunshine most of the length, sat down for a rest, and returning, it seemed a different world. The sun was low enough in the sky for Malvern to cast a long shadow turning the country into contrast. On one side, England's wheat fields and tidy farms were still in golden sunshine; on the other, the land was suddenly dark tumbled hills of Herefordshire and Wales. Really dramatic! I can clearly see it as it was to us, one side all bright, harvest afternoon and the other, dark and mysterious. And yet, how could that possibly be when the sun sets in the west and all that sunny farmland was on the east of the hills? That's where the shadow should be!
I've described that experience just the way it was, and it was stunning and memorable but how could it be? Both Pa and I were light-headed by the time we reached the car – maybe that explains it! In the morning we had driven the stick-shift up another, almost perpendicular road with a sharp corner at the top and I can still hear Pa's anxious voice, "Don't stop! Crikey, don't stop!"

There was another surprise. Just happen chance, a friend had loaned me a magazine and I could so easily have missed an article about a stone circle above Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire, the 'Rollright Stones'. Stone circles, dolmans and standing stones appeal to both Pa and I so we found a B&B in the village, got up early and set off to find the circle. That was easy enough, as 'the cliff road' took us along the edge of the high land with the famous golden stone cottages of a couple of villages way below us. It was about 8 am. The autumn sun had just burned off the morning mists around the perfect circle of upright stones – 4-5 feet high. We parked the car and walked over, paced out the diameter and counted the stones – about 45 paces and 40 stones if I remember right. Immediately, a strange, eerie-feeling mist – a thick ribbon of fog – came from nowhere and weaved around us. It

swirled around us in an unfriendly manner as if saying "Git! This is our circle!" It just lasted a long minute before it whisked away as strangely as it had come. Really spooky.

Across the little road from the circle was a monolith. It stood about 15 feet high and it had an aura about it too - from one direction it was a mother cradling a child; from another, a hooded bird; another, a monk in a long habit. The fourth side, well, it looked just like a chunk of rock, but not the golden sandstone of the area. The stones weren't either. A legend goes with it – that whoever can reach a height of land, just up from the monolith, in eighteen strides will be King of England. Pa was a long-legged 6' 2" but he was six feet short of the ridge!

The day came when Pa sold and left his home to come back with me. After all our efforts to be with him earlier, he locked the door saying, "Well, I've had fifteen happy years here." I am happy that he had. We had the pleasure of his living with us for four and a half years. He had two tiny strokes and then a serious one in 1980. After a difficult month in hospital, he came home and we had three quite gentle, happy months. He died very peacefully at 1:30 on the 12th of November, just a week after blowing out the candles on his 95th birthday cake. Two days earlier, I was outside and saw a huge collection of white birds wheeling over the house, up, up until they were out of sight – lake gulls? – I couldn't tell but against the robin-egg blue of the November sky, they were magical and I thought for sure that Pa had died, it was so strange. Perhaps that is when his spirit left.

We really missed him, but were grateful for his long life and that Dharshi had come from Sri Lanka that year, and enjoyed talking about cricket with him. Also, Pete and Kathy came for Thanksgiving so she had a chance to meet him, although by that time he was winding down. Ian was still away.

The house in Dorchester was shockingly empty. People would come and say, "For a quiet man, his absence is startling." He was a lovable, interesting man and I'm so grateful to him for his two familiar quotes. The first was for times of exasperation: "These little things are sent to try you, and don't they just." And the second, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, grouch and you grouch alone, a cheerful grin will let you in, where the grouch is never known."

Dear Pa, thank you.

MY STORY

My story is of a happy life (most of the time), living through the most exciting, changing century of the world's long history. I hope it will interest some of my immediate family and give those who will join us in the future a personal glimpse of how life was for one of their own.

Your world will be so very different. We already have instant communication around the world and wonder how we ever managed without our cell phones. I hope that the two great Wars will be

remembered, the young people who were lost so that we can enjoy the good, free lives we do. What could have been is unthinkable.

There was the post-war boom in building and babies and the riotous sixties that changed the western world's thinking for the better. Computers were first science fiction, then cartoon characters then on the market by the eighties, huge cumbersome monsters at first, then desktop wonders costing $10,000. Now they are available for under $300.

Was it the general use of coal that started our modern world? It made steam power possible, it ran the grand old railway engines, and produced gas lighting and the need for it caused one William Smith, a blacksmith's son, to study the strata of rock formation of England and Wales. He published the first-ever geology maps in the late 1700s, changing mining into an industry across Wales, England and Scotland. Things had begun to change for "common people" with the start of the Industrial Revolution.

The ability to create gas from coal was discovered at that time which gave street lighting to cities and power to create electricity a little later. Henry Ford, using this new power, invented the assembly line and paid his workers handsomely so that they could afford to buy his Model As and Ts. Of course everyone else wanted a car as well which catapulted the world into consumerism.

Some people felt overwhelmed. "Stop the world! Let me get off" but instead it plunged on until, just before the WWII, people would seriously ask, "Whatever else could be invented?" What a laugh that is, considering all we have now, in 2012. The war was itself a catalyst with the urgent need to out-wit the enemy and now, people hardly bother to look up when the space station goes winking across the sky.

Against all these developments, it does seem a bit incredible that over one human life I can clearly remember the sound of the first tractor working a distant field and how it stirred the heart and mind of the little prairie kid, making the life she knew and loved, come suddenly under question. A new era was upon us.

There had been a fair bit of living before that afternoon in 1926, though, so this story should begin in a little community in the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. Spa Springs was named for magic water which surges up, in energetic little leaps from between mossy rocks and roots in a preserved stand of old growth forest where the Valley Road out of Middleton makes a right angle bend.

To the north, a blue line of hills, mountains they are called, shelter the farms which run down in long, narrow strips, so fertile is the soil. The water was piped from the spring across the road to a Spa, a popular place for wealthy Americans looking for a cure for their aches and pains. Sadly, a fire ended that in the 1930s but the delightful name on my birth certificate has always been a pleasure for me.

Our family moved there in the fall of 1920. An advertisement in the popular farm paper, "The Family Herald" was offering work and accommodation on an apple farm. As the previous seven years had been disastrously dry on the prairies, and the family was expected back in England the following year, this was a welcome opportunity. They arrived in time for the late apple harvest and the scent was all-pervading. Our big yellow brick house had a huge basement down which 60

barrels of apples were rolled. I've wondered how they were brought up again? With a horse and chain?

I arrived on the 24th of the following August, an unplanned baby, and must have been a terrible nuisance both at that harvest and on the subsequent trip to England.

They christened me "Kathleen Elisabeth" and only told me years later that the name was chosen because of a lovely girl they knew. The change came with starting High School where only surnames were used so naturally when I answered with 'Sheldon' it became Shelley within five minutes and has stayed with me ever since. The christening was done by the Bishop of Nova Scotia because, presumably, he was a good friend of our doctor who had become good friends with Pa. The doctor stood as my only Godparent.

Later, Pa would tell us about how he had to spray the apple trees early in the spring, using nicotine and a long rod and hose to reach the emerging flowers. The barrels of black liquid were pulled by a team of yoked oxen whose slow gait was perfectly timed for the spraying. By day's end, they were reeling drunk from the fumes.

He'd tell us how scary the news about the pandemic flu was, still a danger two years after the height of the illness. How he got it and was fearful for the future of the family should he, also die from it. After several days of numbing fever and weariness, he hitched up the horses and drove into Middleton to buy the oranges he had been craving. Arriving home, he shared them, then ate all the rest, one after another. Come morning, he was well.

Next March, we were off to England. Poor Mother, how did she ever manage, so many years before disposables? We were there for about two years and I have very vivid memories from that time.

The first was of being in our Mother's home garden and dropping something in her father's watering can. What to do but reach in and get it! The edge of my short sleeves got a bit wet and he made such a fuss and crossness about it that I thought, "What a silly man, what does it matter?"

Another is of being in a kitchen with four women wearing long dark skirts, their voices high above me. One was saying in a judgemental way, "My dears, she even scrapes her butter wrappers!" She may not have been talking about my Mother, but I thought she was and hated them all, wanted to kick and scratch and bite and tear their skirts! How clear that picture still is.

Best of all was the day we were all waiting for Uncle Gilbert, Pa's younger brother, to come. I can see all five of us, and feel the excitement and suddenly, there he was, greeting everyone. Finally, he swung me up in his arms, saying, "My, what a beautiful young lady we have." I was enchanted! No one had ever called me beautiful and here was this tall, tweedy, legendary Uncle with his man's smell and laughter, holding me close as he talked in his very different voice. He was back on furlough from managing a tea plantation in Kashmir, North India.

Britain was still reeling from the memory and losses of WW1. The atmosphere of grief and misery was haunting, even to a two-year old. Men had come back from the war expecting gratitude and jobs, and were heart-sick by finding neither. There was no work for Pa either so we were packing up to return to Canada in the spring of 1923.

My last clear memory is of being on the boat, waiting to leave when a doctor was giving us the smallpox inoculation everyone had to have. He was a sweet little man, "Don't worry, little one," he assured me, "it's just a little pussy scratch." Patting the scratch, he turned to Pa saying, "Take care of her, sir," which has always been a sort of benediction for me, while I was wondering what it would be like to have such a very short father.

CHAPTER 2

Back in Manitoba, we were moving out of a temporary house into one in a section called 'Union' where we lived for the next seven years. It was five miles south of Neepawa, about a hundred southwest of Winnipeg. Although we were officially on the prairies, our ½ section farm had lots of bush – mostly poplar with some much bigger hardwoods. It edged a muskeg that was a wave of yellow, marsh marigolds in the spring, and again in the fall when the poplars turned colour.

Running into the new home, I was shocked to see Mother on her knees, long skirt hitched up, and starting to scrub the kitchen floor. Pa, following me, was also shocked. He said, "No woman in my family is going to scrub floors," and lifted her up before getting down and doing it himself. You can see why I adored him.

A little later, perhaps on my third birthday as I had on a new dress which pleased me mightily, Mary and Barbara were opening a gate which had a riot of flowers growing around and through it. I was thinking how happy and pretty they all were when it struck me that they were the same colours as were on my new dress. Suddenly, I wasn't there – I was off in a world of colour, flowers and trees, music and birdsong, feet free of the bondage of earth. This was an experience I have been blessed with – no other word – now and then throughout my life.

It might have been that same day that Mary remembered something she had left in the former house, so she harnessed up one of the new horses, called to Barbara and me, and off we set in the buggy, a light vehicle with a seat across and a hatch behind. No roof, no springs! She'd be 12, maybe 13.

The house doors were locked, but that didn't faze Mary. She had Barbara bend over, climbed on her back and pushed up a window. In spite of my protests, they pushed me through with instructions to go and unlock the front door. Scary! Were there ghosts in there? ... or a dead body in the next room? … or perhaps I wouldn't be able to unlock the door and they would be cross enough to leave me and go home? *What happened?* Nothing, thank goodness.

As we were moving into the new house, the three of us found a broken mirror and went running out with the pieces, laughing at the superstition calling "seven years bad luck". We had no idea what bad luck was but the look between the parents sent a knife through our excitement. I have so bitterly regretted it. Seven years of bad luck it certainly was. The land, promised as good, fertile soil proved to be dry and sandy. This was to be expected as the local sons and nephews had first pick of the available farms, but the immigrants were not to know. A promising colt took ill and died. The well outside the back door caved in, so a new one had to be hurriedly dug, and when the trunks finally arrived, a lot of china was broken. And then, Mother became ill and died.

I just remember her funeral. A sudden wind blew up and I thought it was rushing in to join our sadness and blow away the past so that we would go home to a new beginning. A lady patted me on my head and said, "Poor little thing." Who? Me? No way was I poor.

Mother was the one who was poor. Margaret Clarissa, head of her school and admired secretary when few women worked outside the home. Beloved wife and mother. Poor darling. Cancer was such a feared thing in those days and for long after, that word was never ever spoken. She had been in the Winnipeg Hospital most of that winter.

I remember her lying on our horsehair sofa, white haired, white hands. And of helping her hang out the laundry. On one occasion, her wedding ring slipped off and although we looked and looked, we couldn't find it. Suddenly, I caught a shine in the grass, a little gold circle catching the sun. She was delighted, calling me her "little bright eyes" and gave me a big hug, the last I would have for years and years.

She had been telling me, again, what I had heard so often that I felt like shouting "I know, I know! You've told me a hundred times!" But she was so wise and caring to make sure I'd got those basic rules for life. The first, the Golden Rule – "treat others as you would like them to treat you" and "if you don't succeed, keep on trying and you'll make it". Others included "Be happy, no one likes a misery", "don't give up if you make a mistake, mistakes are for learning" and perhaps more for her than for me, "what can't be cured must be endured, with grace".

Had she told these to Mary and Barbara? I don't know and never asked. I have always been enormously grateful to her, and admiring, as it must have been so very hard, knowing that she wouldn't be there for us as we grew up. There were never any tears or complaints, ever.

Pa would make porridge for breakfast but let me have peanut butter sandwiches instead. He would pack lunches for Mary and Barbara and see them off to school – drive them on bad days – and then he and I would go out to 'farm'. At lunch time, he would peel potatoes, slice home-cured bacon and put a rice pudding in the wood stove oven, ready for Mary to make supper.

Come 'quitting time', we'd go in the heavenly aroma of frying bacon. The potatoes would be on boiling. I'd be sent out to the garden for 'whatever you'd like' vegetable and Barbara would be setting the table. She always arranged a little vase of wild flowers during the summer, while Pa mashed the potatoes with milk and butter. We had the same bacon, eggs, potatoes, veggies (either from the garden or the cellar) every day for two years along with those delicious rice puddings that we would spoon from the edges of the plate as it cooled. It was food from the gods and we never tired of it.

I must have been an utter pain in the summer after Mother died. I'd pee in bed, as if they didn't have enough to do. Such a vivid feeling of waking up, climbing out and doing my bit in the chamber pot which every bed hid in those days before indoor plumbing, climbing proudly back into bed – and then in the morning, mortification. The bed was wet and the chamber pot empty. It was quite beyond my understanding why I didn't get a spanking, or at least a good "telling off" which seemed to me would have made me wake up. Instead, I felt utterly ashamed of myself all that summer.

My last early memory was of being sent upstairs to have an afternoon rest. I'd lie on the big bed insulted, rebellious, and hating to be missing what everyone else would be doing. There was always a lone fly buzzing about, trying to find a way out. It had all my sympathies and the sound is the sound of summer to me even now.

All through my first ten years, I used to pray to be changed into a boy. I have no recollection of how this became such an urgency. Sometimes, adults talk to each other not at all realizing that little people listen to what is being said, and make their own interpretations. Somewhere I had picked up that I should have been a son and was mortified by realizing I was a girl.

CHAPTER 3

The crops were hit by rust, a fungus, which became the plague of the prairies, knocking the price of what down to rock-bottom. It wintered over on small prickly bushes called Barbary at the edges of fields. The government was encouraging farmers to destroy all they could find so Pa hitched up Turk, the big chestnut we rode to school, put a rope around the bushes, a tug or two and out they would come. Turk always looked a bit bewildered as it wasn't the sort of work he was expecting.

The bushes made great crackly fires that gave us a treat of roasted-in-the-ashes potatoes. There were always fences to mend and sometimes up in a far field, a mile from home, we'd light a little bonfire and feed it with branches of red willow which grew up there. Such a wonderful smell! We'd sit beside it to eat our sandwiches and drink the milk that I'd secured in a shady place. So I learned about the track of the sun (and that it didn't really move at all) and to make sure that lids were securely tightened as I found ants at the bottom one day and it took away our appetites away as well as teaching me a lesson.

I was so lucky, tagging along after Pa, learning about animals and fences, soil and trees, the wild creatures and how hens had so much pleasure in the potato patch when the bugs invaded. "Where do the little beggars come from?" Pa used to ask. Hens are happy creatures – they know that they are a boon to the world – you should hear them talking away about it to each other every afternoon.

I never doubted that Pa enjoyed my company, but when I would cup a few pebbles in my hands and ask, over and over, rattling them, "How many stones this time" must have desperately tried his patience except for my delight when he was wrong!

He took me with him – no option – whenever he went to see neighbouring farmers, probably when he had a cow or sow coming into heat, but I didn't know that. Most farms had 30-40 young turkeys roaming the yard, and if there was a chance of rain, there would be a great to-do about getting them under cover. Turkey 'moults' cannot stand getting wet and they were a very important part of farmer's income.

Most farm yards had a turkey gobbler ruling over his kingdom. They scared me to bits. They'd fluff up their feathers and shake their wattles while they strutted slowly and pompously up to me. We'd be about the same height and they looked totally ferocious. The farmer, thankfully, would call his dog to chase him back before he got too close.

The bush was full of wild fruits, flowers, rabbits, the odd big tree, mushrooms sometimes, birds and butterflies. Lots of other life surely looked at us but stayed hidden. There were deer about and

coyotes, feral cats and dogs, lynx, foxes, snakes - nothing really dangerous to humans and I was never stopped from exploring. Today, would any four-year-old would be allowed such freedom?

The farm overlooked the muskeg and fifty miles to the northwest was the blue ridge of the Riding Mountains. Muskegs are bogs which form in low places with a clay or rock bottom, although in common talk they are 'bottomless'. They are very dangerous as the hollow becomes filled with the decayed growth of many summers and 'quicksand' results.

One of the first things Pa did was to take us down to the brush and gravel road which crossed it, to show how the 7' pole he had brought easily pushed way down, just beside the road where we were standing. I don't know about the others, but cold prickles went up and down my back. "Never, ever step off the road," he told us. That didn't stop Mary from jumping tussock to tussock when Pa was away. Once she brought back two baby owls to rear, which she said had fallen out of the nest and later, she pointed out the tree she had climbed to get them. It was in the centre of the muskeg and I was awed by her bravery. The muskeg dried a lot in the summers. Lots of flowers grew there – just out of reach – which never grew anywhere else: gentians so blue they stopped your heart, flaming Indian Paint Brush, velvety yellow lady slipper orchids, lots of berries, and butterflies.

Twice we had a cow stuck, close enough to the edge that Pa could give them food and water. After a team of horses couldn't pull them out, he had to shoot them and it seemed to take forever for them to sink out of sight.

We had ten cows and sold cream and butter to a shop in town with some of the cream going to Mrs. Cowey's Ice Cream Parlour. Her name always gave us a laugh. It was, Pa used to say, like a Mr. Hanmer becoming a carpenter, or John Straw owning a livery stable. Our pigs were fed on the skim milk that made their bacon the best tasting in the world. In the summer, the cows were turned out into the bush and all morning we could hear the sound of the bell on their leader as they grazed. Come milking time, there was never a tinkle, and when we finally found them, they would be lying in a circle, quiet as mice. Later, seeing cows in England gather at the gate at milking time was unbelievable to us.

There were pebbles in the soil, evidence of the glaciers my beloved Book of Knowledge told me had once covered these plains. There was as well a huge rock in a patch of bush beside the granary that always seemed a bit spooky. Pa thought that it might have been a sacred place for the native people (or Indians as they were known), because nothing had grown around it as if the ground was packed hard from dancing feet.

A long slope from the barn down to the muskeg made a great toboggan run for us. On milder days, the horses would be let out to gallop around and paw the snow for the grass underneath. 'Doll' and her daughter, 'Beauty' were Pa's pride as they could pass any other team on the road, just as 'Lady go Bang' had years before. Then there was Ruby, the brood mare and Rupert, her son, who was a bit of a clown. Darby was a loner, Brandy, who was decidedly superior in his mind, as well as the good natured Turk, a big chestnut we rode to school or drove in the sleigh.

One sunny day, Mary and Barbara had gone off down on their sleds and I was just about to follow them when Turk started walking over to our track. "He'll be gone by the time you get there," Pa said, so off I went, Turk saw me coming and stopped to watch, what to do – roll off? – stay on? It

all happened so quickly. I saw the surprise in his eyes as I shot right under his belly! There was a lot of laughter and teasing for a long time after.

We'd have happy games of rummy or snap or 'donkey' on winter evenings. Pa was wonderful, giving up time which he could have had for reading. Sometimes, it would be so cold that with a loud, sharp crack, a nail would spring out of the siding and another would have to be hammered back in the next day. We had a hand-windup gramophone and lots of semi-classical 72s brought from England, lovely music – 'Morning', 'Bells across the Meadow', Peer Gynt, Beethoven, Bach and Wagner. We also had a grandson of the famous German Shepherd, Rin Tin Tin. He was a lovable dog but prone to take off for a day or two now and then. Once Pa bought home a record of Hawaiian guitars and every time we played it, Rin Tin would go off to the furthest corner of the house, lift his muzzle and howl most mournfully. Or was he joining in?

We girls loved the Eaton's catalogue, which was an indispensable part of prairie living. When they became 'last years' they spent their last days being useful in everyone's outhouse. We'd pour over the pictures for hours, finding things of that exciting world 'out there' that we never dreamed of seeing. Then we had to go through our lists to shorten them. It didn't really matter. Both Mary and Barbara were very artistic and ordered paints, beads and sparkly 'glitter wax'. I don't remember ever wanting any toys – perhaps they kept them out of sight. I'd received a teddy bear for my 3rd birthday and he was my beloved companion. On my 5th, a wagon.

Security for the three of us came in little horns of newspaper. I don't remember what Pa brought my sisters when he came back from town, but mine were always eight or nine sugared almonds – pink, blue and white. He'd always have some funny story to tell us of what he's seen as well.

There were sad times. Pa's beloved grandfather, Edward Fletcher, died and although we'd never met him, we felt we knew him well (and that we were his beloved great grandkids) from Pa's many stories about him. We were so sorry for the loss. There were Aunts and Uncles and Mother's father too who were shocked upon hearing that he died by hanging himself in his garden shed. Worst of all came the sad, sad news that Uncle Gilbert had died of malaria and was buried at sea on his way home to England and it took a long while until our spirits recovered. I don't think that they ever did, entirely. I still mourn the loss of such a lovely man.

Eventually, a big teak chest with 'Bombay' and 'Calcutta' stamped on it arrived with a few personal things rattling around. Pa was sickened by so much loss, so many family things that had been pilfered en route. However, we eventually had many happy times with the three tennis racquets and five balls which were in there. Our nearest neighbours, Marv and George Howe, often came over on Sunday afternoons and loved a 'game of tennis'. The game consisted of them whacking a ball straight up with all their strength so that it would go up way out of sight for the longest time, but would always, eventually, land down to where we were waiting, doubled up with laughter. They would replay everything over supper so that our tummies would be aching with laughter all over again. Marv and George also loved the big gong which had come in the chest. They'd pound away on it, laughing that "good job we don't have a wife – she'd know where we're at!" We heard from neighbours two miles away that they knew when the Howes were over! Jen Richardson has that chest now.

CHAPTER 4

Our prairie springs started in late March/early April when the snow softened and little rivulets fought their way through, only to get frozen solid every night. The hens would be let out to scratch around, the horses and cows were turned out to the pasture, and Rin Tin would dash about, all of them crazy with delight, like us. Springtime was wonderful. Imagine how after five months of hard frost, snow and blizzards, everyone and everything was longing for summer weather. After a few days, the sun would suddenly become really warm, the drifts would settle, their hard crusts giving up the battle. Once Mary went running over a 15' drift, disappeared, and had to be dug out! All through the winter the drifts hardened on top so that a team of horses could go safely over them which is difficult to imagine. The sun stayed up longer, a bird or two would whistle a bit, chevrons of ducks would fly over on their way north and then – such a thrill that was - a little ridge of black garden earth would show through the snow.

At the beginning of April, a flock of blackbirds would stop by for a day or two. Pa threw them hands full of wheat and swore that the same ones came back each spring. Their 'song' was the exact copy of the one the rusty metal discs made when they were brought out to work the fields! By the end of April or early May, everywhere was green grass and flowers, wild plum and cherry trees were heaven for the bees and the air was full of their scent. While one watched (if you were patient), the buds on the poplar trees would swell and swell and out would tumble the most wondrous little green leaves, quivering with gladness and excitement, or so it seemed to me. Spring was rollicking over the land.

Planting the garden with peas, cabbage, onions, carrots and beets as soon as the soil warmed up was an utter joy. I'd marvel at the way they grew, each seed knowing what it was to be. I wondered where all the red in the fat beetroots came from, the fire in the onions? Potatoes were my absolute favourites. We'd cut the special seed so that there was a strong eye in each piece and plant them, six of my little moccasins apart, two of Pa's big ones between the rows "to give them space to grow". After they had grown a bit, the plants have to be 'earthed up' or the potatoes will be green and useless. We'd put fertilizer, aka manure, along the rows where the tomatoes and beans would go as soon as the soil was warm enough. Chemical fertilizers had yet to be discovered.

I loved those days, the friendly earth ready to produce our food, the crisp light evenings with a moon sometimes, and going in for Mary's bacon and egg supper, tired and happy. I'd marvel at the largess of the soil, giving us beautiful food wrapped in skins that kept them good for weeks or months. "We're so lucky," I would think. "Where would we be if nothing kept?"

Eventually, a day would come that threatened frost and we would go out to the garden to gather up the bits and pieces which always get left behind – the last of the beans, some late-sown carrots, potatoes that had been hiding. Sometimes there would be a surprise –mushrooms! Pa's favourite. He'd take them in and simmer them in a little milk in a bacony fry pan and we'd all relish that extra treat. There was always an urgency about those days knowing that winter was out there, waiting to pounce. I still get that feeling, every late October, and try to have something I must go out and gather up.

I feel so lucky, and felt it then that I had such an interesting childhood and learned so much that has been useful ever since. But I never learned what I ached to know – where we came from, why were we here doing this, why not different people in a different place and why did my insides ache for

wanting to fly like the birds? Did a baby's spirit come, perhaps from some place where flying was natural and a lot more fun than walking was to us?

I'll try to describe the thunderstorms we would get in July or August, only two or three a summer. While they lasted, they consumed heaven and earth and really have to be experienced to be believed. Old timers' records of the very early days of settlements were all the same, that "the storms are nothing to what they used to be." They must have been ferocious because ours were humdingers.

They were fun and exciting, those summer deluges. Pa would come in and say, "might be a storm coming up, the animals are all acting strangely" and sure enough, next day purple clouds would pile up over the low line of the mountains, up and up, until everything went still with not a sound from bird or animal. Leaves hung quietly and everything seemed to hold its breath. Perhaps for an hour the clouds would tumble closer and then, just before they were overhead, there would be an almighty crash of thunder, lightning split the world, another crash, another vast bolt of lightning, then continuous flashes so that the world was awash in elemental light and noise. All the while, huge raindrops came down in a methodical sort of casual way which was such a contrast to the upheaval in everything else. Then they joined in the tumult, falling faster and faster until it was just a wall of water turning the yard, so recently dusty and dry, into a churning lake. Our entire world was caught up in an orgy of ancient violence.

Half an hour of chaos and the storm moved on. Our world shook itself, hardly believing it could still be living and we kids would rush out in our swim suits to revel in the last of the rain, splash in the puddles, and breathe the fresh ion-charged air. I don't know how my sisters felt but those storms supercharged me and I would go leaping about, up and off the water troughs like a primeval Pan back in his element.

In 1926, Canada and all its cities and little towns celebrated the half century of being a nation. Neepawa held a bash of bands and parades and speeches which I enjoyed from a neighbour's shoulders while Barbara was perched on Pa's. Mary was off somewhere on her own business. After all the speeches and clapping, everyone drifted off to a big hall for dinner and much later to a huge bonfire and corn roast. We kids all competed to see how far we could spit the watermelon seeds. Watermelon was shipped in from the States and was a huge treat.

We went the back road home, past the homes of the 'Galatians' from Central Europe. Pa rather sniffed at them but we kids envied them. There were always lots of children and dogs and always a heavenly smell of roasting garlic which the Brit immigrants – and those at home – knew nothing of. The back road led across the muskeg and it was an enormous comfort to have Pa there driving, as just as we expected, luminous will' o wisps (balls of methane gas) were hovering about four or five feet above the swamp. Creepy!

I think that was the year Mary put on a pageant in a natural amphitheatre just outside of town. I have no idea what the action was, but there were crowds of people there all cheering and clapping. At the end, Mary drove Doll and Beauty across the area at a gallop, her long hair streaming out behind her. We were so proud of her.

Mary was tremendous, picking and bottling lots of the wild fruit (she bottled some chicken once but it blew up), helping with the chores, doing crafts, helping me learn to read. She must have done our laundry and housework but 4 year olds don't waste any time thinking about that. There was a patch

of hazelnuts a few miles down the road which she watched like a hawk, only to find them all gone overnight on the chosen day we took baskets and pails to pick them. It happened every year.

One spring, Pa delighted us by saying, "Too nice a day to work, how about going for a drive?" We headed off into unknown country west with the two horses as happy to be out as we were. Pa finally hitched them to a gatepost saying "we'll have to walk from here." "Shut your eyes," he demanded after a walk past chokecherry bushes with the scent of their flowers stinging our noses a bit. "OK. Open up," he said, and there before us was an immense stretch of purple crocus, Manitoba's flower. It was a never-to-be-forgotten picture. A small wind was blowing them so the flowers bent before it, then it calmed and their silver leaves were replaced again with purple. It's odd the way in which ground breezes do that, blow intermittently and it certainly adds to the charm of nature. If Wordsworth's daffodils had been standing straight, we might never have had his well-known verse:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vale and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Another day when it was "too nice to work" we went upstream of the White Mud River – a little river that eventually flows around the foot of Neepawa. This was into the deep woods and we were so excited to find an actual birch bark tree, the ones the native people had used to make their lodges and canoes. I thought again how there is always something useful to people wherever one goes. This tree was shagging its bark and we could peel great pieces off it which we took home and made into a toboggan.

The river was shallow with minnows outnumbering the stones. Great to play in until Barbara suddenly screamed. She had a leech on her leg – two of them. Leeches cling tight and the only way to get them off is to hold a match under them – in our case, Pa's lighter. The river suddenly lost is magic! I don't remember any mosquitoes and we had never heard of black flies. I remember feeling blissfully happy until I went to sleep, curled up on our buffalo robe in the back of the buggy,

In the winter we were always given two roasted potatoes so they would keep both our hands and feet warm. If necessary, Pa insisted, they would be food if we were stuck somewhere. We never were but winter drives in the sleigh had their own problems. Snow would ball up under the horses' hooves and every now and then would loosen, and come flying back, making us do some fast manoeuvring to avoid being hit. The team always went at a fast clip.

We used to sell bags of potatoes to the store in town and strangely, Pa said that they never froze if they were kept on the move. In -30 weather, that's surprising. He also sold straw to the livery stable (where people left their teams while they went shopping) and a great place for old-timers to hang out. It was a heavenly ride for us kids, warmly cushioned against the bumps.

Pa liked to tell a funny story which happened while he was unloading the straw there one summer. Half-a-dozen old-timers were sitting around "chewing the fat" as the expression goes and passing round the earthen jar of water that the owner kept filled for them. Suddenly it slipped out of one

man's hands and crashed to the ground. Water spilled everywhere and amongst it, the remains of a mouse. Silence! Then a dry voice spoke up, "Ain't it time y' changed y' mouse, Sandy?" Must have been hilarious at the time for Pa had a thousand laughs over it.

He'd laugh about five-year old Mary who was disgusted when the newspaper stopped the cartoon 'Tom Sawyer' as a saving during the war. "Oh dear," she wept, "I love Tom Sawyer! What a horrid war!"

CHAPTER 5

Christmas concerts were the best part of school. Parents would fill the room which quickly became a haze of tobacco smoke. Someone would shout "open a window – can't breathe in here" and there would be a great struggling and muffled swearing until a frozen window could be pushed open to let in a blast of ice wind, setting everyone shivering. Eventually, our 'pieces' could start again – singing and recitations, little comedies and dances. One year I had to do an Irish jig and felt nifty in a green crepe paper skirt and black slippers on loan from the teacher. I loved it and heard from the parents later that the man behind them said, "My, ain't she just enjoying that!" She was. Mary was going to High School in town but Barbara was in Grade 7 or 8 and had loud applause for her poem "I wish I was a princess and lived in sunny lands." I thought she looked like one, with her shiny dark hair and big dark eyes, so different from the other girls.

We used to put our peanut-butter pail lunches behind the huge wood stove all winter, but never thought to turn them around at recess so our sandwiches were warm on one side and still frozen on the other. The schoolroom was a bit bleak with a monotone of poor Henry Hudson deserted on an ice-flow while his ship sailed off without him. Did they really do that? Beside it, the only other picture was of King Edward VII, all gold and haughty although George V was really King at the time. I expect the school board hadn't got around to changing it.

One day a new teacher brought in and unrolled a map of the world. That was an exciting day for all of us kids. We couldn't believe that we were such a small part of the earth and I felt greatly superior because of knowing the maps in my beloved 'Books of Knowledge' Pa had bought me. It was a fun day, all of us finding, with the Teacher's help, where our parents had come from. How little and far away New Zealand was! How minute the British Isles were! The west coast of Africa and the Eastern shoreline of America looked so similar I suggested that maybe they had broken away from each other. Such scorn at such an outlandish idea!

One of the very earliest signs of spring was the return of the crows and on a magical day each year we'd hear that wild 'Caw Caw'. We'd tumble out of the school to see them, not stopping to ask if we may. We'd go back in, happy in the knowledge that we'd soon have bare legs, of hiding the peanut straw hats parents insisted on us wearing, of playing baseball, and of warmth. Union School was a one-roomer, with one teacher, usually straight out of college and about 20 students. Two boys were chosen each day to take the 'water tank' down to the nearest farm, and bring it back. This was our only source of water so we couldn't have done any hand washing. One teacher, Miss Switzer, took me home with her on a couple of weekends, probably because of my motherlessness. That was a revelation – a mother and a father, carpets on the floors, ironed sheets, and different suppers. I loved their hospitality and kindness and the grove of cedars of Lebanon out beside the garden fence. The branches swept the ground, wonderful to jump on, and the trees were an easy climb right up high where I felt a very small me, halfway to the sky.

As well, there were two pictures in their kitchen, all in tones of blue, of wild horses with a summer storm coming up. They were so real – one could almost hear their anxious snorts, see the whites of their eyes, and in the second one, truly hear and feel the thundering of their hooves, galloping away over a hill. I loved them.

In early spring, we kids would run across the road to a huge carpet of 'ground cedar'. After the boys had jumped on it to scare away any garter snakes, we'd sit on its warm branches and play 'house' or when the boys insisted, 'farm'. All we knew, poor little sods.

CHAPTER 6

Sometimes, on a clear winter night when there was no wind, Pa would say, "Let's go out and see what the stars are doing." We'd scramble into sweaters and coats, leggings and mitts and the soft leather deerskin moccasins everyone wore all winter, muffled up with only our eyes and noses free. We'd crunch across the snow to a place where we could see a wide piece of sky, full of glittering stars and Pa would tell us about the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in Africa who thought the stars were gods and spirits looking down, and how the Greeks studied them and gave names to the constellations. We'd marvel at the thousands and thousands of stars in the Milky Way (is it still called that?) arching overhead from Southeast to Northwest, not knowing until years later that we, Earth and Sun, are a part of that.

We wouldn't have really believed that, any more than we could believe Pa when he told us that the stars were actually suns, some much bigger than ours with planets moving around them too, probably. We'd ask, "Are there people living on them?" He would answer, "Don't know. Someday we'll find out."

Most nights in the winter, the Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis, would come weaving overhead as if jealous of our admiration for the stars. Green and pink and white, it would steal silently out of the North and dance its eerie dance for us, sink back, and then decide to do it again… and again. I wish you could all do that, stand in the middle of the country with the cold crackling around you, the stars winking as if they were alive, the coyotes howling their eerie complaints back in the bush while the Lights weave and dance and send shivers up and down your backs. It was scary but wonderful.

We felt so very alone in a vast and icy land, helpless. We were totally dependent on Pa for our well-being – our lives – for the bright, warm house behind us. We wouldn't have lasted the night on our own, but I never ever thanked him.

It was an odd feeling when the coyotes stopped their laments, standing there in that eternal silence – although the Northern Lights seemed to crackle sometimes - knowing that one was human and thinking, back in the twenties, that we were different to all the other lives which populated the country, all the wild things snug and safe in their hibernation, not at all interested in stars and creepy lights in the sky. Did any of them ever wonder 'why' and 'how come'?

Sometimes, often, we would get a blizzard which was so different to those exciting summer storms. There was a vengeful, alien howl in the wind as though an angry spirit was hurling, "Get out of here. Go back where you came from!" They could last for days whipping the snow into sculptured drifts

10-15 feet high. Snow would spatter against the windows so that we had to light the paraffin lamps and were so enormously reassured every time Pa came back from doing chores, the necessary feeding and watering of the stock. Farmers strung a rope from stable to back doors for safety.

Like all families in the country, we'd butcher a pig and a steer every fall, as soon as it turned cool. We kids were made to stay indoors away from the action but we'd have ribs for supper that night – and for several nights after, and they even surpassed the bacon and fresh bread crusts in deliciousness. The hams and sides of the pork had to be preserved by rubbing in salt, brown sugar and saltpetre for several days, then wrapped in old sheets and hung up in the cellar. We lived well! I can hear Pa saying, as he rubbed the mixture in, "this is saltpetre, have to use it or the meat won't keep, but I wonder if it's really good for people." The dictionary's take on it is 'a salty white powder (potassium nitrate) used in gunpowder, medicines and preserving meat.'

The beef waited until frost as it was wrapped in sheets and hung up on the north side of the barn, high enough that hungry visitors couldn't reach it. All winter long their footprints danced in the snow below as they jumped and jumped in vain.

Now and then we'd have roast chicken, hens which didn't seem to be laying eggs. Once though, we got fooled as when one was being cleaned, she was full of eggs. One was ready to be laid and many, many more in diminishing sizes, right down to a mere pinhead of white. The hard shells are the very last development. Hens have to be given crushed oyster shell so they have the calcium they need to make shells, unless they are out on free range. They lay an egg a day in the spring months and then gradually slacken off, so all those surplus ones were saved in a bucket of isinglass, a mica-like preservative jelly which seemed to work very well and kept us supplied until the new pullets came into production in the fall.

Saskatoon berries were the ultimate treat. Around the middle of July we'd go searching for them, Pa and I, and would find small bushes here and there laden with fat purple fruit that I'd gather in my 'pinny'. All girls wore pinafores (pinnies) to keep their dresses clean for a week or more, and very useful they were. If held up by the bottom hem, they served as a ready-made basket whenever needed. They were perfect for holding mushrooms, flowers, nuts and Saskatoon berries for the long walk home. With thick cream and a bit of sugar, those sun-soaked fruits were a dessert fit for royalty, which, come to think of it, we felt we were.

CHAPTER 7

In the summer of 1926, Pa's childhood sweetheart came out to marry him. Pa met her in Winnipeg and was a bit taken aback at all the attention she received. It must have been very hard for her coming from a comfortable home in England to be suddenly transplanted in a little, frame house in the centre of Canada, as behind the times as the women's clothes were, with three step-daughters as well.

She adored Pa and told us that she had since she was nine when they were at school in Burton Joyce. They were happy together but we felt very much in the way, and it was hard to realise that we weren't first in Pa's affections any more. Some comfortable discussion would have helped a lot but people didn't do that until many years later.

They had a baby on April 2, 1928, a little girl, Ruth Elinore who became ill and died in hospital.

She was buried in a little white marble casket in our Mother's grave in Neepawa's cemetery. When Mary and I went out in 1983, we were able to find the unmarked grave and have a stone installed with their names, and a memorial words for Pa, who had passed on three years earlier.

At that time, Neepawa's cemetery had pride as being 'the most beautiful in all of Canada'. Between the bushes, the trees and the paths, thousands of petunias were flowering, and we thought the honour was well deserved.

CHAPTER 8

Every spring the brush and clay road across the muskeg – maybe a hundred yards – would be level with the snow melt flood. One awful afternoon as I was walking home from school, one half of the road was washed out where the main stream went through. A whirlpool was roaring down the culvert on one side and on the other, a great surge of free water. Floodwater creates a panic in me even now. It was either take a big breath and run over what was left of the track or go four miles back and around by the other road. I held my breath and leapt!

That path to school was scary with feral dogs I thought were wolves, leaping over the track as I crushed under a bank…. there were scary noises in the bush…. snakes sometimes…. and the ever present terror of the muskeg, but Pollock's field had a bull. Sometimes Pa would tell me to go that way, assuming that I would know that the bull wouldn't be there. But I didn't, and felt so very small, climbing up the little hills in that huge section of field and expecting to meet the bull on the other side. What could I do if he was there? Hold onto his horns and pray? Pretend to be dead and hope he wouldn't see me?

I was ashamed of being so scared and never told anyone about it, it was only when our grandchildren grew to be 6 and 7 that the shame left. Of course a little kid that size would be scared.

There was one adventure on the way home that made me feel a bit proud and excited. Right at the gate of Pollock's field close to home, was a lynx, really close before I saw him. We stared at each other, eyeball to eyeball. His eyes were bright and wild, his ears up straight, and he sat on his butt and stared at me. I had a wild hope that someone would come to my rescue. How long we stared at each other was 2 or 3 ages, but after a while he seemed to grow a bit friendly and a look in his eyes invited me just a little way into the world of wild things that lived by tooth and claw. We developed a sort of empathy, him and me. Eventually, he stood up, after giving me a funny look that said "OK, another day, maybe?" stretched his long legs and ambled off. I ran home all excited to Pa's consternation and my sisters' ridicule.

At the beginning of 3rd Grade, we had the teacher 'to tea' as was the custom. She surprised us by suggesting that I skip Grade 3 and start Grade 4 right now. I was so proud and happy I thought I'd burst! I'd had special permission to start school at five (instead of six) so was away ahead of my classmates (all five of them!) and it was so boring, waiting for them to learn. The Grade 4s sat on the other side of the room with the big kids who had such interesting lessons and did long division. I was elated! Exhilarated! Of course, I should be in Grade 4! Life was going to be wonderful.

However, without consulting me at all, it was decided that I shouldn't. This was partly my darling, supportive Dad! Devastation! Fury! Humiliation! I was crushed by their insistence that they were

right. I knew they were wrong! Why wouldn't they have talked about it? Told me why? That ended the joy I had in school. I didn't work, didn't care, hated the parents, and sulked all that year.

The following year, in December, we were told that we were going back to England. Mary was furious and wanted to stay and I went weeping, stumbling across 'Dead Dog Field' on the way to school. I'd never see my beloved private eyrie over the muskeg again, the flowers and leaves would come out without me to love them, but actually it was the very best thing we could have done. It must have been much worse for the parents, having to leave their baby.

Canada – the world - was into the second year of the Great Depression. The next nine years were cruel and unforgiving for people, especially on the prairies and families were already packing up and leaving their farms to the dust and the wind. I've told you in the story about Pa, how Marv and George were happy to take the horses, pigs, cows and hens with the promise of payment 'when things got better'. The implements were given away too. Times did get very much better with the start of World War II, but we never saw a dime from anyone.

Anne and Bruce took Peter and Robin when they were 13 and 11 with them on a trip to see the farm in 1969 and the boys phoned back to say that everything was covered with tall prairie grass with thoroughbred horses grazing. There was a hollow that must have been the cellar, and rhubarb still growing close by. They said it was 'Mummy country' which pleased me very much.

CHAPTER 9

The Cunard liner, SS Duchess of York, left from Halifax. In Montreal, en route, we stayed in a hotel overlooking the St. Lawrence River for a night and what a shock it was to find people speaking French! I had no idea! When we woke next morning and looked out the windows, a bridge over the river had collapsed. This was late December, 1931.

It was a bad time to be crossing the Atlantic. Two days out to sea, we were into the grandfather of all ocean storms. Mountainous waves in front and behind which the liner slid down, everyone expecting to go under, but miraculously, it surged to the top of the next mountain of water, on and on for days. The hatches were all battened down and almost everyone was seasick. 'Fiddles', inch high strips of wood edged the tables or everyone's food would have been on the floor. As it was, every plate would slide down the length of the table, pause a couple of moments, and then slide back as the ship rolled. We had to grab the one we thought was ours as they went by! It was years before ships' balance bars were added.

One day we were even more alarmed as a wave hit the boat broadside. The ship shuddered at the blow and leaned over, but it righted itself. If another similar wave had followed, it would have been overwhelmed for sure. The porthole at the end of our passage was smashed and I can still see the foaming sea come surging down, pushing little pieces of inch-thick glass, that passengers waded out to secure for special keepsakes.

Eventually the storm eased, or perhaps we managed to sail out of it, and early the next morning there was a shout "Land Ahoy!" All of us who could walk went rushing up to find the hatches open and sky above! And there, jutting up from that still furious sea was land, solid, reassuring land – a brown-green rocky hill of Ireland. While we were leaning over the rail, blown up against it, a man's tweed cap went flying down to the sea. So funny until we discovered that it was Pa's!

The next night, in pitch blackness, a lady we had got to know had to disembark for Scotland. I don't know what port she had to go to but I can see her gathering up her long skirts and climbing down a rope ladder with her six little Scots, into a row boat which was waiting to take them away. It took only a minute for the boat to pull out beyond the light of the one lantern and I hoped and prayed that a kind husband was waiting to hug them.

When we finally arrived at Liverpool harbour, the Captain told Pa that it was the worst storm he'd ever experienced by far, in 34 years, and that he never expected to make land fall. We waited on the dock with Pa the only man in the crowd without a cap. Eventually, the trunks came crashing down the chute and we shuddered to think of family china and glass being smashed. We went down to London on the 'Flying Scotsman' I believe, and fly it did, rattling us from side to side, hardly time to exclaim over all the green roofs below us. "Not roofs," Pa said, "green lawns." Green lawns in January??? London was like a mother hen, welcoming all the trains from the country to those bumpers that silently say, 'end of track, buddy.' We went up to Nottingham on another line as Bab's sister, Nell, had invited us to stay with them until we found a place to live.

CHAPTER 10

That first night in England was a mind-stretcher for me, innocent little Canuck. 'Soda' drinks had just come on the market so we were given one for a treat. The first mouthful came down my nose, hurting abominably, but worse was to come. The clock struck nine, time for me to go to bed and Auntie Nell said, "Switch on the hall light to see your way upstairs, it's just beside the door." So I felt up beside the door – English dark is very, very dark – and horrors! this living thing leapt through my hand and down through my body. I swear my heart stopped beating! Everyone came running, remembering that the socket next to the light switch was naked. "Oh, I've meant to cover that so many times!" and "Oh, you poor thing, your hand is burned!" UK hydro, or electric as it is called, is 220 volts – twice the strength of North American power. When I was finally bandaged and hugged and taken up to bed, that's when the terror began.

Of course, I'd read lots about haunted houses in England and here I was, alone with the ghosts. There were creaking's and sighs and footsteps! It was awful. People started coming up to bed after a bit and saved my life for sure. It was three months of nightly terror, but nothing to compare with the spooky upstairs when we moved to Norman Farm. There it would sound as if a drawer in Barbara's room was being pulled open, things rifled through, and the drawer pushed shut again. There were steps, sighs, rustles and a noise like a sad ghost moaning. It was awful. Children wouldn't stand for it nowadays, but we were brought up to 'just get on with it'.

One night was unbearable so I crept downstairs to find Pa and Bab sitting in front of the fire. When I peeked through the door – so comfortable and at ease – Bab motioned for me to come in and when I sat down beside her she put her arm around me. It was heaven. I must have gone to sleep for I woke up in my bed next morning, and after that a little paraffin lamp was lit on my dressing table every night. Both the light and kindness scared the hauntings away.

Pa bought a motorbike and toured middle England to find a place for us. We moved to Wyverstone at the beginning of April and it rained and rained, straight down brown rain which filled the ditches to overflowing and created 'washes' at the low parts of the roads where culverts couldn't take all the water. No sun for the entire month but when it finally came out, almost overnight primroses were

flowering like crazy along every dyke while the birds, quiet all through the rain, sang all day, every day, never stopping to take a breath.

Jim was born on August 13th that year and had problems digesting milk. I don't know what finally suited him but he grew up into a handsome 6'2" eighteen year-old when he was photographed as a graduate from his agricultural college, Chadacre.

As a little guy, he loved his green trike but once when he wasn't watching, he pedalled off the edge of the wooden bridge Pa had made to cross over to a little paddock we made into a lawn. There was only a little water in the ditch but a lot of stinging nettles. It took a great many dock leaves and rubbing their juices on him to lessen the pain and the bumps to disappear.

When he was older, he enjoyed the countryside and like all boys in those days, had his pockets full of 'stuff' – a clasp knife of course, pieces of string, a nail or two. I cannot remember except that once he emptied both his short's pockets and we counted 19 precious possessions.

Very sadly when he was two, his mother died after giving birth to a little girl. I have written about this in other chapters. Poor Pa – such a tragedy. People told us later that they didn't think he would survive, but he did, with help from Mary who came back to care for the baby, and his listening to Beethoven records night after night on that well- travelled wind-up gramophone.

Her funeral was at Wyverstone Church on January 1, 1935 and poor Pa had nightmares for months. However, he was so fortunate in Mary's willingness and cleverness in mothering little Janet Leila who thrived, with none of the problems they had had with Jim. Mary was 22, Barbara was working in London and I was 13, at school in Stowmarket, which is in almost the exact centre of the county of Suffolk on the east coast of England. I have told you about Norman Farm in the part about Pa's life.

Did I describe the interesting things about its construction? How the windows on the south end had been filled in to keep out the wind which spread London's terrible plague in 1665-6 and how the foundations were 12"x12" oak, black with old tar and age, simply laid on gravel, as were the brick floors. The heavy beams had Roman numerals carved into them, proof, we were told, that they had come from a wrecked ship probably on the dangerous coast, thirty miles to the east. The house was built in the Elizabethan way, upright beams separated by 'lath and plaster' which was, in our case, hedge slashing's from long ago, covered with clay mixed with horse hair and washed with lime – the way how black and white timbered houses were created.

In September, the parents sent me to High School. Bless them, as I'm sure they could have made good use of the fees. I'd had to go to the local school where the kids made fun of me being from Canada. "Is your mother a red Indian?" "Where are your snowshoes, kid?" High school was a lot better but they were long days – catching a train at 7:40 am and home on the 6:20 train with a half hour bike ride each way. You would laugh if you saw the lights we had on our bikes. At first, they were 'acetylene', smelly contraptions one had to light with a match and sometimes blew up. Battery lights came on the market, but gave such a small amount of light that twice I bumped into someone on the road and heard my first swear words. There were no sidewalks or reflective tape – or street lights – or light-coloured clothes in the country winters then. You wouldn't believe how incredibly dark English nights are. It is as though the earth soaks up every smidgen of light and holds on tight.

The high school was on the other side of Stowmarket to the train station, 2/3 of a mile, I guess. We had to wear black, knitted stockings from September to June, gym slips, white shirts and ugly little cloche hats that pressed all the curl out of one's hair. I've always wondered how it is that teachers, paid to teach everyone, could completely ignore, if they didn't humiliate – someone who obviously didn't know the subject. The very first lesson on the first day there, we were given lined sheets and told to write 'The Bluebells of Scotland'. Well, I had never heard the song and was fascinated by the little symbols my desk mate was drawing so confidently. We had heard a lot of music but never seen it written. There was not the slightest bit of help or interest from the teacher. Ever.

The same thing happened the following year, when we started algebra and geometry. I'd caught red measles in August and had to miss the first two weeks of school so the class had had four lessons of both during that time. I stumbled along with geometry after a bit but could never make any sense of algebra. Mr. Phillips was a young, handsome teacher, but he never offered the slightest help and the moment the bell went, he'd slap his book shut and go striding out of the doors, gown swirling out behind him. I tried going into the room early when possible, but he would come in at the last minute. So I never got to understand how x and y could possibly equal anything sensible.

My crushed ego got a boost when, to my astonishment, I was voted to the Junior Sports committee. I learned more Latin and French when I helped Jim and Jan learn their verbs and declensions than I did at school and it has always been a pleasure to know a bit of both. The Latin text books were very put-offing – heavy, coated paper with wood cuts (I think) of Romulus and Remus suckling a mother wolf – you can guess the giggling - and of stern Centurions beating slaves.

A real pleasure was when the Principal (Headmaster) came sweeping into the class, mortar board and gown, holding a huge Bible from which he read, in his wonderful Welsh voice, some of those enchanting stories from the Old Testament. I would have loved to have had a discussion about them afterwards, but no, he swept out as abruptly as he came in. In those days the King James Bible was the only one used, and although some of it is hard to understand, and some of it hilarious to a class of adolescents, its poetry is a great miss in later versions.

The best thing about those school years was tennis. Because of the train schedule, I had about an hour in the morning and more time than that in the afternoon to wait and was lucky in having other kids stay and play. After a couple of years and a darling coach who encouraged and complimented us on our strokes, our play naturally became much better and a teacher or two would come early and we'd have super matches until the bell rang for school.

There were two other good things about school. On the last Friday afternoon of each month, we could try out a range of arts and crafts – woodworking, cooking, debates and discussions. The other was our English teacher, Miss Buck. I had a crush on her. She loved poetry and made sure that we did too. Now and then, we had to start a story at one end of the classroom and everyone in turn had to continue it, about a minute each, the ending was always surprising, and sometimes she would add a final piece which made it even more so.

Missing the train home was not a good idea, but it happened once, and I went back to the school to wait out the two hours until the next one. Miss Buck was still there and suggested I go home with her and she would take me down to the station. Well! What a short-lived joy that was! Her landlady gave us boiled eggs and mine had only seen about 2 minutes of hot water. It was horrible

but I'd been brought up to eat what was given. I've never been able to face any egg but a hard-boiled one since.

I'd guess that the very worst part of those school winters was my perpetually wet black oxfords and the resulting chilblains. Probably no one knows what chilblains are any more - they are blisters which come up on one's feet if one wears damp shoes, and they drive one crazy with the itching. You can't scratch when your feet are inside leather. I'd prop my shoes up by the fire when I got home only to be told that the heat would ruin them. So they never, ever, got dry all winter.

On one of those dark nights going home, a fellow train passenger was reading a newspaper with huge, black headlines 'THE KING IS DEAD'. Well! We thought that the world couldn't possibly go on, - King George V had been up there in his palaces in London, managing the British Empire all our lives. "But go on it did and suddenly everyone was interested in the new King and his goings on with an American divorcee, Wallis Simpson. Divorce was very rare then and the country, mainly, was outraged. King George and Queen Mary were models of decorum (as far as anyone knew) and their eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales, was the world's most eligible bachelor. The country was in an uproar when he said that he couldn't be King without Wallis as the Queen. Protocol said "No! You can't" so he abdicated, shocking the older generation. It was that excitement, and the rise in popularity of Hollywood that the tremendous interest in high society and movie stars erupted. Up until that time, there wasn't the word 'teenager'. Kids were just children on the way to being grown-up.

Suddenly, we were a race apart. We'd giggle together about the latest reports of Greta Garbo or Charlie Chaplin, pour over magazines that quickly came on the market, and tried out lipstick and mascara. But we were never lippy to our parents, if we had, it would be a fast, hard 'clip to the head' for most kids. This was in the years just before the Second World War.

CHAPTER 11

Pa was in need of help at home and as I saw my future as caring for a widowed father and looking after his children, probably marrying a farmer's son, I couldn't see much point in going through another year or two of algebra, so I didn't go back to school in September 1938. I loved drawing and painting, and could do both moderately well so I had dreams of going to Art College in London or Ipswich. It was a wild dream because we couldn't afford the fees, and Pa had this peculiar idea that his daughters shouldn't work. Designing lovely fabrics seemed to be a joyful thing, not work, to me. Maybe, I thought, maybe sometime in the future.

Market gardening and landscaping was the other life I'd like to have trained for, having a sort of empathy with Mother Earth and things growing. Before either of these, though, I would have loved to go travelling, pack on my back as so many lucky people did after the war. When I suggested it when Mary was still at home, Pa hit the roof. People didn't do that in his life and my Brownie points dropped considerably because I'd even thought of such a thing. Not to worry, I've had a good life and am everlastingly grateful to Stan for stretching my horizons.

Someone gave me a springer spaniel called Spider as she had a way of twisting the back of her body around when she was glad to see you. She soon came into heat. I knew nothing about that and didn't keep her in, but a neighbour's dog was delighted she was out. They had a long, delirious mating to the intense amusement of passersby. The result was a litter of eleven puppies, all of which

she and I raised together. There was no problem in finding homes for them all and one was given First Prize in a class of 'Mixed Breed' in the local dog show the following year.

There were always lots of things to do. We had several thousand broilers (chickens) out on free range which had to be shut up in little houses Pa made, at dusk, or the foxes would get them. They needed their feed topped up and the water troughs filled. The water came from a pond in the far field that Pa had dug out with our one horse and a big two handled shovel, eight feet deep with straight sides. I don't know how they did it. The water came from a land drain, always clean water flowing from underground pipes into a ditch. Pa piped it over to the pond and we were never short of water so we swam in there until the newts and frogs claimed it.

I don't think powered pumps were available at this time, so we filled the 100-gallon tank with a hand pump, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. What a boring job that was until I remembered poetry and Miss Buck and pumped to the rhythm of words.

I enjoyed all of that, going out in the early morning to open the shed doors, letting out a flock of happy, hungry chickens. English summers were something else. People said that everything in England has changed but it was hard to believe that early summer mornings with the dewy grass, bird song, flowers in the meadows, and the strange feeling that God had walked the land through the night, untouched hopefully by the other forces that have transformed urban, even village life.

When the moon was bright, and it was always there in a clear sky – when it was full or waxing full in the winter – I would go out with the '22' and shoot the rats which would be stealing the chicken's food. The bodies were always gone by morning and we'd wonder who took them. One morning, a body lay there and to my horror I found it was a hedgehog, which are the most English of creatures in the countryside – gentle, humble, friendly – and killing one was unthinkable. That ended my shooting forays.

Life was always interesting and fun. People used to drop by for a chat or two or three of us would bike into Stowmarket to go to the movies. I played lots of tennis, often in the grounds of the old abbey in Bury St. Edmunds (a perfectly sensible name to us but it amused anyone hearing it for the first time). The West Suffolk Women's Field Hockey group met every Saturday afternoon, nice people from across the western section of the county and the exercise was great. Sometimes we'd play against a team from Norfolk or Essex, who seemed surprisingly different people.

For two summers Pa rented a cottage on the Norfolk coast where we had to put flower pots upside down on a post with a bit of grass in them, come morning, we'd go around to empty out the earwigs which would otherwise find their way inside. Jan was 3 and was tagging along behind Jim and me on the beach one morning. I turned to see if she was keeping up – and horrors – there she was, face down in one of the little pools the tide had left. Life was never dull!

Pa was always doing new, interesting things. One year, we planted an orchard – apples, pears, and Victoria plums, made a tennis court, next put wire netting around it and we had many happy get-togethers with friends, and friends of friends. One of these was from Australia and shocked us by grinding pepper over his raspberries and cream. I now do it all the time.

CHAPTER 12

On Sunday, the third of September 1939, at 2 pm, war with Germany was declared. Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister told the nation over the radio, which fortunately most people had by then. He had been scoffed at a year earlier when he had met Hitler and brought home a signed paper. 'Peace in our time' he proclaimed as he stepped off the plane. The press ridiculed him for his naivety, but I always thought that it was him fooling Hitler and giving the UK a year to get munitions factories underway and fighter planes built, the country was incredibly unprepared in spite of all Churchill's warnings. At 6 that evening, the new King's famous message was broadcast, his first after his stuttering was cured. Everyone was scared, not knowing what would happen and fearing invasion, but nothing happened for months and life went on just the same – no rationing, all the petrol we needed, tennis and concerts. It was unreal until September 1940 and the heart-stopping Battle of Britain filled the southern skies.

Mary joined the A.T.S. (Women's Territorial Service) and left. She had taken good care of us all – Pa, Jim, 6 and Jan, almost 4, and me – since Bab passed away, so she deserved her freedom. I was 18, plenty old enough to take over, but woefully ignorant as to how to bring up children. Pa really tried to get a housekeeper but the three who answered his advertisement were unabashed husband-seekers and didn't last long. As well, I didn't know how to cook and of course everything was made 'from scratch'. Each time I've made a pie, I remember Pa watching while I mixed the first dough and started to roll it out. Rolling pins seemed to work as well backwards as forward but Pa leapt from his chair shouting, "No! No! You don't do that!" and showed me how pastry must be rolled forward, NEVER back.

I've written a bit about the war as we experienced it so just a few things could be added here. One became a horribly scary thing. Everyone was urged to make a home shelter, a 'dugout', so we dug one in the side of a ditch, which never had any water in it. I'd go out to check on the children every hour or so and once found the ditch full of soldiers crawling, rifles on their backs. Thinking that they must be Germans in UK uniforms, I turned to go back to phone when a couple of young faces looked up, grinned and winked! All in silence.

The other could have been utterly awful. It was the first really cold night and we had put a small paraffin heater in the dug out to ward away the damp. When I went to go to bed – horrors! The ditch that had been dry since those early rains eight years earlier was full of water and had flooded into the dug-out. The children were asleep in their bunk beds, well above the water level but the wooden floor had tipped up, tumbling the heater, which was still burning, up against one of the bed posts. The room was thick with smoke, and the thought of what might have happened was sickening. We never slept there again, thinking bombs were a better choice.

At the start of the war, my friend Maud and I were designated to be 'First Aid Personnel', the fact that neither of us knew anything about it didn't seem to matter. "You'll learn," we were told. We were expected to take care of any accidents in the two villages, Bacton and Wyverstone for the duration.

A few weeks later while the uneasy quiet was still on, an info class was set up six miles away at the uncivilized time of 6 pm. There were about 20 of us from the surrounding areas all arriving on bikes, all out of breath and hungry as we'd not had time for any supper. I never hear of it now, but then, if young people were really hungry, their tummies would 'rumble' loudly. As we sat there

waiting to begin, one tummy started, then another and then another until we were all laughing so hard it couldn't be heard anyway. That was where we, poor innocents, discovered that bodies don't have simple flesh, just muscle. After six sessions we were told to report to the main hospital in Ipswich, the county capital.

For Maud and I that meant a six-mile bike ride, a half hour in a crowded bus, and an uphill fifteen-minute walk to the hospital, for 8 am. It was late October, time of 'mists and mellow fruitfulness' according to the poet. One morning, the fog was so thick we spent a precious ten minutes waiting for each other – just a few yards apart, as fog muffles sound as well as sight. When we discovered each other, we had to pedal frantically so as not to miss the bus, worried all the way that we'd bump into someone.

On the first day in the hospital we were told to go and watch an operation although we didn't see how that would help us in any way. The surgical team were removing a huge growth from a young woman's stomach, took it out and dropped it into a bucket. We both fainted! I can't remember what Maud had to do when we were revived, but I was taken to the recovery room, given a pair of pliers with a needle in the jaws, and told to watch the patient as she came out of anaesthetic. If she started swallowing her tongue, I was to reach in, secure it with the needle and hold on until help came! Thank God she didn't. There had been no mention of washing our hands.

Matron was a 'generalissimo' and everyone was on guard when she came around. I had to answer the phone that hung by the nurses' station. In those days, hospital food was prepared and cooked by the nurses on the ward. They had served lunch and were doing the dishes, clanging and banging the saucepans. The telephone rang. There was no way I could hear with all that noise. "Listen," ordered the Sister. Still couldn't begin to hear. Matron happened along. "Listen," she bellowed. And I could!

That's all I remember of those two weeks except having to stand in the overcrowded bus every night all the way to Stowmarket and get home somehow – Maud and I were both so tired we could barely pedal our bikes. It seems unbelievable, but only twice during the five and a half years of the war, were our services needed. Once for a farm accident and once when an American airman bailed out and his parachute didn't have time to fully open. All we could do was put a blanket over him and call for help.

CHAPTER 13

During those first unreal months when nothing happened, several of us went down to London, by train, to see shows. Everything was so normal except for the barrage balloons up above to stop any low flying planes, huge, blue monsters tugging at their restraining wires. I have no recollections of what we saw, but it was fun and daring, and also tremendously interesting to me to walk around the block from the theatres to the enormous Covent Garden Market where produce arrived from our fields and the country – the world – in vast amounts of everything needed to feed the 7 million people living in London at that time. Police walked around in those old, high hats designed to make them look larger than regular folk, later, they had to go on foot patrols in pairs, but at the time I'm remembering, they were benign, lone figures in the crowd, a truncheon in case of need but no guns – friendly, ready to help.

Twice, I went down to London alone. Once was to visit my mother's sister, Aunt Connie, who had been a teacher and lived in a flat looking out over the Thames, my first experience of that way of living. I felt sorry for her as she seemed to have such a lonely time but her attitude didn't invite either friends or laughter so she clinched my decision to get over my shyness and enjoy life. The second time I went was magic. I stayed again at a little, Edwardian hotel, the 'Lime Tree' that was just around from Hyde Park corner, and surprising to me, was the permanent home to several retired gentlemen. In the front hall a barometer had a sign below it – 'Please! I'm doing my best!' As it was the custom everywhere then, to tap every barometer which would jump into action and tell you what the weather was going to do.

The purpose of the visit was to see if there was a record of our ancestor, Joseph Sheldon, who was the Lord Mayor of London the 1600s. I walked up to see Buckingham Palace and the famous guards, the family flag was flying meaning that the King, George VI, was home, but there was no sign of any royal. I remember so clearly walking down across the soft, green grass of Green Park towards Westminster Abbey. Then a magical moment – I was already thrilled with the thought of me, a descendant of Joe's, walking the streets and parks where he had walked as boss of the city. I put my foot on the pavement (sidewalk) and all the bells of London rang out. They knew I was there – for sure!

The enormity of Westminster Abbey has to be seen to be believed. It is full of tombs and statues, ancient oak pews polished by generations of hands and butts. I watched two swallows darting about almost out of sight so high up they were, and tried not to step on the graves and was glad to see a black gown coming toward me. "Can I be of help?" he asked very formally, but changed to an interested, even excited human being when he heard why I was there. "Of course we do. I will be delighted, please follow me," and off we went to a hidden staircase, down, and down again to a cavern of a room full of more tombs and statues. One wouldn't do that nowadays! Eventually, we came to a polished chest of drawers whereupon the Dean/Verger found a key on the busy ring which hung from the rope around his waist, unlocked the second drawer and reverently drew out a little, brown leather book. "This is the record of all the Lord Mayors of London since 1168," he said, turning the pages carefully. All the names were in a beautiful copper plate hand, and there it was, 'Joseph Sheldon, 1675 to 1676'. The year 1666 was the year of the Great Fire of London and I wonder if that was where the superstition began. Those two years would have seen the plans started for the rebuilding of London as we know it now and the young architect, Christopher Wren, got the job because of the reputation gained through his first major work, the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford.

That night, I was walking along the Embankment after admiring Cleopatra's needle – a lovely obelisk from Egypt – and quite by chance I turned to come back along Fleet Street which was at that time, the home of practically all the national newspapers. The presses were running! Well, I can hardly describe what a thrill that was to stand shaking along with the sidewalk, buildings and river as the pounding and the roaring went on and on. One could visualize paper being fed into the hungry jaws of the presses and coming out as newspapers to be available on every corner in Great Britain by morning. It was an experience no one can have again as a new method of printing was coming, off-set, done by using photographed plates. It was much easier, less costly and scared the typesetters with their incredibly complicated job of setting old metal letters, one by one, upside down just as the first printers did when Guttenberg's press revolutionized the world. They went on strike. I don't know how the owners did it but papers still got printed and boys still stood at street corners calling out the news. Miraculously, an overnight move was made secretly, from Fleet Street

to the new, industrial 'Canary Wharf', down the river where carpet bombing had flattened all the buildings. The typesetters were left with their presses and galleys, astonished and furious. I wonder if the presses still stand forlorn.

Pa used to tell us about the dozens of people who would wait in line for each new magazine to come out in the early 1900s. I remember 'Tatler' and 'Punch' but not the others. Each would serialize the immensely popular novels of Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, Chesterton, Waugh, the Sherlock Holmes tales, Kipling and others. There were a host of modern writers and people hungered for the weekly episodes. The story went about one of the writers that he never posted a letter. Instead, he'd put on the stamp (a penny back then) and dropped it from the window of his 5th floor flat. Some passer-by would always pick it up and mail it.

CHAPTER 14

Fifteen months into the war, I met Stan and we had to say goodbye six weeks later. Life became a matter of letter writing and worrying when one was overdue and of suddenly feeling discontent with my own company. North Africa seemed so very far away and the news from there, so slim.

However, an unexpected pleasure was about to happen as we had a benevolent government during the war. A project was started to find an educated person in every community who was willing to invite local girls, like us – Cicely who was a teacher, Maud a secretary at a large farm, and Vivienne and I who were surrogate mothers – to their homes once a month to partially replace the social life we would have had in normal times. Whether they were paid, or were volunteers, we never knew, but Mary Church and Kathleen Wiltshire really enlivened our lives and made staying at home, missing out on the war effort far more liveable. At Mrs. Church's home, we had a chat about things generally, played games and enjoyed her unvaried treat of milk jello with in-season fruit on top and whipped carnation milk. We'd all take turns in bringing a bit of our tightly rationed sugar and there was always in-season fruit – apples when the raspberries and cherries were over, and rhubarb in May.

Mrs. Wiltshire was a charming, cultivated lady who invited talented friends from London – musicians, authors, actors – to meet and speak to us. These were far more interesting people than we would have logically met in normal times. Once an actor brought lamb chops with him and while we went out for garden mint and lettuce, he grilled them and we came back to a table set with white linen, polished silver cutlery, and wine glasses and I learned from the two of them how to bring quiet guests into the conversation. One violinist in particular, became so absorbed in the lovely music she was creating that she became, to me anyway, a sensuous Mother Earth, raptured in singing praises to an appreciative Creator,

It is a comfort to me that I did, in later years, tell them both how very much we appreciated those evenings. Maud and I would bike home together and she would stop in for a drink and that's when we invented those cheese snacks which everyone enjoys. They are simple to make – a slice of buttered toast spread with softened (with milk) left-over mashed potatoes, grated cheese, salt and pepper and then placed upside down in a hot fry pan until the cheese is golden brown. Try them!

One night on the way home, out of the dark came, "Halt! Who goes there?" We both fell off our bikes in surprise. "Oh! Do you really mean it?" They did, but wished us well and we all had a good laugh about it. The country was blacked out for the duration of the war – black cloth over every

door and window and bike lights so dim one could barely see the way. Most cars were up on bricks as there was no petrol.

Vivienne had a horse, Polly. She and her father lived at the west end of Bacton in an interesting house with a four-acre paddock. I was so lucky. A man in the village, uncle of Jean who was our maid for years, bought a riding horse on impulse only to realize that he didn't have the time to exercise her. So he asked if I would take her out a couple of times a week. Talk about luck! Sweeney and I would go for a gallop down one of the lanes which led out of Wyverstone every Wednesday, and on Sunday mornings we'd walk up to Vivienne's (men on the road would touch their caps as was the custom then) and race and learn to jump which is a marvellously great thing to do. Mr. Nock was an expert and showed us the right way to ride and how to sit for different actions. Our horses really enjoyed it as well.

One Sunday morning, Sweeny didn't want to go out. I should have known – sympathized – and let her be, but I cajoled her and off we went. She skittered a bit on the road. On reaching Vivienne's place, we did our usual trot around the perimeter and then went into a gallop. Forty yards or so and Sweeny abruptly made a left turn while I went straight on. Funny how people can get thrown from a horse and pick themselves up, none the worse. I told her that it wasn't a ladylike thing to do, climbed on and we set off again. Again, she made the same sudden swerve to the left, same heap of me on the ground. So we tied them up and went in for coffee. It's a good way an intelligent animal can tell you that it's a bad hair day for them.

At the end of April 1943 – or was it 1944? – Maud married Wat Rutherford from Northumberland in our church in Wyverstone. Yellow tulips were promised for the decorations which she'd asked me to do and that gave me one of my most memorable experiences. On the morning of the wedding, I got up around 4 am to cut come branches of the wild cherry tree across our 'little field' as flowers last longer if they are cut very early. Carrying a ladder and secateurs, I crossed the road with the world all sanctified and loud with the morning chorus of English song birds. Dew was on the grass. The gate was partly open, enough to squeeze through, and there – a sight not many people have been fortunate to see – song birds everywhere. Many were on the ground, others on every branch and bank, one on every post, and more on the gate itself. At the very least, a hundred birds, all heads back, pouring out their wonderful songs to the sky, to the glory and praise of God, it seemed to me. How could it be territorial when they were all there together? It was difficult to find any space between them to put my feet. I hesitated to put up the ladder, fearing it would frighten them, but not a bit, their songs went on while I climbed, cut and climbed down with the branches. I took them home to put them in water and went back for the ladder and to listen in joy and humility, feeling totally blessed.

The church looked lovely with the wild blossoms and yellow tulips but later that afternoon, a huge cross was in the sky – trails of airplanes? They rarely crossed and a gentle wind was moving other clouds. It stayed motionless for hours, very peculiar, the superstitious among us wondered if it were an omen and remembered it when Maud developed MS in her forties.

Sometime during the summer, I had a great urge to take my worries about Stan's safety, and age and lack of career out to the wonderful, peaceful gloaming which follows good weather in English summer days and lay on my back among the grass and flowers of one of our hay fields under a great mass of stars. Suddenly, one of those transformations - I was there, feeling the earth damp on my back, and yet I was flying free and voices were saying, "Marry this man. Your children or your

children's children will be great benefit to the world." And we all swept about the sky, the voices and unseen persons and me until with a swoosh, I was back among the meadow growth, confident of the future. Part of me, the little crescent moon, stars in their thousands and the flattened grass are still there for sure.

We didn't have any bombing, living as we did on the eastern land which juts out to the North Sea and is mostly agricultural. After the U.S. joined the war, our flat land was very quickly taken over for their camps and airfields but they were rarely bombed as far as we heard. An occasional bomb was jettisoned on the way home and the craters they made were unbelievably huge. I don't know how they ever got filled in. The nearest to us must have been 7 or 8 miles away but the whistle of it coming down and the earth shaking impact sent shivers down our backs. We thought it was half a mile away! "Cold night tonight," shivered our neighbour, Harold Baker.

We watched the red skies over London when the blitz hit. It went on week after week until we thought that the entire city must be demolished. How could the country survive if Churchill and the war room had been hit? But that strong, confident voice came over the radios of the country telling us that we would prevail, no matter what pounding we were given. I cannot tell you how Churchill's speeches inspired everyone. They were growly speeches and must have been hard to give when the war was going so badly, but no one doubted the outcome after listening to him. Earlier, there had been Dunkirk, when everyone longed to have a boat to join in the evacuation of our troops from Europe. Inspiring in a totally different way was 'everyone's sweetheart', Vera Lynn singing hope and happiness into every fearful heart – "There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover" and "Someday, you'll be home again."

Someone decreed that chickens weren't the best use of scarce grains when imports dropped with the losses at sea during the Battle of the Atlantic so we started growing grain crops, vegetables and potatoes instead. One unforgettable September afternoon, we were cutting lettuces and crating them to be sent down to London's Covent Garden by train. Suddenly, there was the roar of low-flying planes, and slow, fat Dakotas, the workhorses of the combined forces, began coming over, working hard to gain altitude. Each was pulling a glider we knew was filled with young paratrooper volunteers. It was unbearable, disaster was in the sound – we somehow knew that everything would go wrong. It all went very wrong and I weep in remembering it.

It was the parachute attack on Holland's two main bridges over their great rivers that flow so close together, the Rhine and the Iyssel, close to Arnhem and Apeldoorn. We heard later that the plan was to loosen the gliders so they silently followed the Dakotas in the dark while the paratroopers jumped with explosives for the bridges. Naturally, the enemy were waiting for them. Did our generals think they were dumb? It was one of the worst mistakes of the war and the sound of those planes will haunt me all my life.

Very late in the war, we heard, with shock, of German and Japanese atrocities and were bewitched by a German spy who broadcast from Southern England, but couldn't seem to be caught. No one knew of the misery the Jews were suffering in Germany. We heard how the 1st Army in Africa had pushed the enemy into the sea and were reorganizing to begin an assault on Italy. When that happened, the Italian army capitulated and the German army put up a fierce defence. Where was Stan and was he OK?

Then the relief and joy when our troops surged across Europe, liberating Paris and France, earning huge love and gratitude for the Canadians when their tanks rolled in to free beleaguered Holland. The war in Europe ended, in such disarray. We heard that Hitler had been killed, then that was not so. Then, that he had escaped to South America, and then that he was found in a dug-out, having taken his own life. If we had known then that he had been building Berlin as the shining capital of his conquered world, the army base housing the troops who would keep the peace forever, we would have shuddered and been even more thankful for the victory. Maybe we might have had a little pang of sympathy for his shattered dreams!

We wondered how long the tragic war against Japan would continue. As well as the shocking reports of atrocities and the vast area of conflict, the radio played tapes of the jungles at night. It was such an unspeakable chorus of screams and roars, growls and terrified cries, appalling, unforgettable and letting us know, a little, what our guys were living through. And then, shattering our joy and exuberance over the victory in Europe, the atomic bombs were loosed on Japan. It was afternoon, August 6th, when we heard. There had been no rumour of such a bomb although it had been in the making for years – urgently, as Hitler was developing one also and we had to get there first. It was horrible, somehow fouling the entire world, sky and nature. However, it very soon seemed to be well worth it when Japan capitulated.

A strange thing happened to a group of us who were standing out at the end of the driveway for some reason. Suddenly, a malevolent little wind swirled up out of the west. It was different altogether to the ones we knew in August. This was foreign, laced with evil and spiteful so we huddled together instinctively and when it left, we went back indoors very soberly and alarmed. We looked at the clock. It had happened exactly 24 hours after the first bomb had been dropped. And the same thing happened again, five days later and 24 hours after the second bomb had landed. If it had been once, we would have thought it odd but twice – incredibly strange.

Stan was due back in October. The lucky ones came back in ones or twos all that late summer. It was a chilly, overcast October and I felt so sorry fearing how it must feel after two years in Italy's sunshine and sea. Sometimes, one gets a glimpse of life and surroundings through other people's eyes and I was shocked at our suddenly dull lives, both in action and weather. But when we met on Finningham station, everything was alright, and the sun came out for us.

But he was scared. No longer Sgt. Chips, here he was suddenly having to make unusual decisions with no back-up men to support him and a strange family who might not be so welcoming. As well, both of us were almost five years older than when we had met. He was 35 and had spent almost all his life with men friends, but with no one he was entirely responsible for. I hope he knew how sympathetic I was. I've written about this time in the chapters about him.

We were lucky in living where the road branches - one going straight east to Wyverstone's pub, 'The Plough', which is next to a pond where the farm workers had gotten together one night to throw in the new-fangled binder which threatened their jobs of mowing the harvest with scythes. The other road went up a little hill to the Church and the Church school, and then to the right to Westhorpe where Mary, Queen of Scots, had sheltered for a few nights. To the left it went by the rectory, hidden by trees and laurel bushes and then a row of Council houses and some farm-tied cottages, each with a 'dew pond' in front. Except for rain, that was the only source of water until the mains were put in, a year after electricity, about 1934-5. It's hard to believe how primitive things were.

Norman Farm was in an enviable location because before the war, all through it and after, the Sunday papers were delivered there so friends and neighbours would come by to pick theirs up, staying for coffee and a chat. Very pleasant that was. When everyone was there, we would read our respective horoscopes and have good laughs about what was promised for us. Sometimes, the papers had totally different forecasts but we would laugh as well, at the way they very often came right in one or another of our lives.

The papers came on the first train out of London and were driven out by a jovial, little man in a 'trap', a little round vehicle pulled by a pony, the same trio who had given Pa a ride from the station when he had come out to look at the property in 1932. Pa often laughed about that experience, telling us how the man - we never did know his name -talked all the way in his thick Suffolk dialect, of which Pa couldn't understand a word.

Every April there would be 'April showers' when dark, purple clouds would well up in a spring-blue sky. The sun would be hidden while a quick, little shower washed everything clean. When the sun emerged again, the golden light on the yellow seeds of the elm trees against the dark clouds with every twig shining from the rain, made one's heart and spirit lift and then ache for the beauty of the world.

Pa's nephew, Bill Kirk, was serving on a merchant ship during the war and if his ship was docked somewhere along the east coast, he would come and stay over with us. I remember him mainly because he enjoyed home-cooked food so much that we were in short supply for the rest of the week. Mostly though, I remember the time he brought a set of infrared binoculars which he had taken from the officer when they had captured an enemy u-boat. We took them out as soon as it was dark, looked up in the tree which stood by the driveway and there - four baby owls lined up on a high-up branch! We had no idea that owls were housekeeping up there.

Another wartime excitement I had forgotten to mention was when, several times, a German plane came over. The engines had a very different sound to our planes so we'd all keep under cover. Sometimes a Spitfire came and an aerial battle developed but not for long. The enemy plane always took off East in a hurry, but it was so interesting to see tracer bullets, glowing red and searching for the target. We were amazed at how slowly they travelled. There was a special comradery all through the war, we were all in this together, all of us fearful for a beloved country, none of us knowing what 'tomorrow' would bring, and all of us seeing our familiar surroundings with new and appreciatively open eyes.

I didn't mention the terror of the 'Doodle Bugs' either. They were rocket explosives that rained on London in the later months of the war. They seemed a far worse danger because they were unmanned and came over with a sound all of their own. Everyone held their breaths because if that scary sound stopped, it meant that the rocket was heading earthward.

I don't know how, but I had several interesting holidays – one down to Dungeness on the south coast (don't remember who I was with) but there was a boat in which we went fishing after dark. This was a new experience and as the host put the worms on the hook, a very pleasant one – gently up and down in the Channel swell. I felt I was back eons ago fishing for food for the tribe - an elemental thrill with each tug of the line - a hurried reel in and the invisible fish landed in the boat, sleek and shiny from the sea.

Anne Ryder, whom I had met at Viviennes – a cousin, I think – and whose father was Post Master on St. Lucia in the Caribbean, and I went youth hosteling in Sussex one May, perhaps during that first, unreal year of the war. I cannot remember. We stayed at a hostel at the source of a river that was a green ribbon of watercress. It was so cold - cold and primitive as it was an old coach house from Georgian days.

Auntie Nell invited me to go back with them to Nottingham after one of their visits and astonished me by starting to bicker the moment they got down the driveway! I felt sorry for her too as when we were invited to her daughter's (Betty) for her birthday, immediately after dinner we were told that that was the evening as she had to do the business accounts and so, goodbye!

Pa and I went to Manchester in August of 1943, I think, to visit a friend of Stan's who was a glass blower. Mark and Pa took a shine to each other especially when he showed us the glass factory and in a very few minutes had blown four delicate glasses for Pa and three tiny pink elephants for me. I remember being woken the next morning by the factory horn at 5:45 am and the strange sound of hundreds of clogs hurrying to work down the cobbled street. Several years after the war ended, as we both had families, Mark drove over to stay with us, they had four little ones and we had Anne and Ian. Mark had to get back to work while his family stayed on for a week, and once as we drove around the countryside in Pa's big, green Ford, we stopped and Mark Jr., six years old, opened the car door and characteristically leapt out, down into a six-foot ditch.

The drive back to Manchester was an ordeal with six little kids in the back of the car. There were no seat belts then so you can imagine all the bumping into the back of the front seats. Worst of all, we left Wyverstone too late so that we were driving into the sun all the way – it never set! It was impressive that we only came to a 'STOP' sign twice – across the breadth of England. Hundreds of road crossings were either under or over passes, or on regular roads had 'YIELD' signs, making all Canada's 'STOP' signs seem very juvenile. Back home, I was flat out but Pa called the doctor who came and gave me two little brown pills – heroin – one for that night and one for the next. I had the sleep of the Gods and was well again.

The years chugged along. Jim and Jan were at school and it was me making the raisin buns. One night we went out and a moon rainbow was arched over the northern horizon. How could that be?

In April 1948, Anne was born. I loved her as I never knew anyone could love so completely and fiercely. I worried when we were expecting Ian seventeen months later. Not to worry – suddenly there was double that astounding mother love, plenty to wrap him in and more. More again when Peter and Robin were welcomed a few years later. I would be interested to know if the youngest fared as well in the big families of ten or eleven, two generations before.

The children were so sweet – sweet natured and physically lovely. Anne was all asymmetrical – 5 inches round her wrists, 11 from wrist to elbow, and 22 from wrist to shoulder. We had a portrait done in Bury St. Edmonds and the photographer had an almost life-size copy in his gallery window for months. Ian was a sturdy, independent little guy who walked at 10 months and loved to jump off things. We once found him standing on top of the sewing machine and he was in heaven when the hay was brought in. He could jump in it all day long. He must have been 18 months old when we stopped Anne from doing something – forget what it was – but he was really indignant. "If her wants to, let her," he said, stamping his foot.

When Anne was 3 and Ian 18 months old, we went to Canada to join their Dad who had gone out a year before. People in the village told me that they were sorry that we were leaving, but they were glad that Stan hadn't disappeared as too many men had. Leaving Pa was only possible because he showed little affection for the children and although we didn't understand it, we had to accept it. Long afterwards, I learned from Jan that it was the same with her children. We wondered if it was self-protection in case we all left. She said that he would talk about our children with pride and affection so that she and Ian were rather jealous and it was like that when he talked with us about their children - Jerry, Greg and Alison.

Sister Barbara, who had no interest in leaving England and whom we relied on to take care of Pa should he need that, bought first-class tickets for the children and me on 'The Ascania'. It was a very nice thing for her to do and gave us a happy and memorable trip across the Atlantic except for the ache of leaving Pa. It was possibly quite unnecessary as when he finally left to come to live with us in Canada after years on his own, he closed his front door saying, "Well, I've had fifteen happy years here."

The three of us were treated royally on the boat. The passengers loved the children and wrote the nicest things on our menu, on the last day on board. "Your beautiful children will be loved wherever they go" and "I see a life time of happiness for all four of you". We had sailed up the St. Lawrence to Montreal – a truly beautiful trip with the wide valley covered with trees showing here and there little communities of white houses guarded by the white steeples of Catholic churches and the great river sweeping down to the sea. Sometimes, it was so narrow that one could almost (it seemed) touch the cows that were grazing, unconcerned, incredibly close to the edge. Where the water widened, a gaggle of boys in little motorboats would appear to joyfully bounce up and down in the huge wake we were leaving behind us.

We were in London, Ontario, for almost a year during which time Stan's mother died and Jan had the opportunity to live in France for a year. So, in what seemed then a sensible move, the children and I went back to England so Pa wouldn't be alone - at 65! The liner 'America' was brand new and all aluminum which made it light in the water and prone to roll as well as to pitch in the waves. We left from New York, travelling there by train from St. Thomas as Amtrak had a line across south-western Ontario at that time, a fantastically smooth ride as it was the year that the new 'ribbon' tracks had been put down and the train moved so smoothly one could hardly tell when it was leaving a station. There were not many stops but Buffalo was one of them and the cathedral, floodlit on top of a hill, was a sight to remember. Further east in dark countryside, we were lucky to catch sight of a rider pulling his horse to turn after watching the train go by. Silhouetted against the sky, he was something out of a novel and I would swear that he was wearing a cloak that caught the wind as they turned. It's still in my personal image gallery.

At Poughkeepsie, I woke to realize we were stopped and the train was filling up with New York bound businessmen with furled umbrellas, bowler hats and all reading the New York Times which had a huge headline "Queen Mary Dead". As soon as we had pulled out, a porter came through with breakfast – a ham sandwich with no butter or mustard – just bread and a slice of ham. It was 50 cents which I thought was a scandalous price.

We left New York owing money. We had a little time to have a proper breakfast but when we came to pay, I had no American money, the currencies were at par right then but no way would they take Canadian dollars. As we had eaten their food, what to do? I suggested that we go to find a bank

and come back which was alright with the manager. However, the banks didn't open for another hour – 10 am in those days (10 am – 3 pm). When we changed our Canadian money and went back, I couldn't find the restaurant and hadn't taken its name so couldn't ask. It wasn't where I expected it to be or down any side road so we sadly left, thinking that the kindly owner would have good reason to cuss, "Those --- Brits, come in here and cheat you out of breakfast!"

We crossed an ocean with six-foot waves all the four and a half days it took to cross and Pa was at the Southampton dock to meet us. We arrived April 1, 1951. We'd left behind a frigid London and here daffodils and green grass greeted us although the hotel was chilly with no central heating. Ian was 2 and a bit and woke up with "What's the matter wiv me? What's the matter wiv mine toes?"

When they turned five, Anne and Ian went to school up the hill in Wyverstone. The teacher, Mrs. Chivers, left a lot to be desired. She infuriated Pa by giving Anne 100% on everything on her report card. "What has she got to aim for?" he questioned. The children would go home with bloody knees from falling on the slippery gravel playground telling their parents that she had laughed and said, "I'm glad it's you and not me." She did nothing to clean the wounds at all so that the blood would be dried, holding in bits of stone and dust by the time parents could see to it. There were around sixteen children, aged 5-11, but there was no option.

In the sudden time that their going to school gave me, I started drawing and painting again. Making a canvas come alive with trees and water while a house is quite around one is one of life's serene experiences. I loved it. I loved getting back to playing tennis again too. It's a game which should be mandatory in schools. It needs a fenced-in court, of course, but other than that the equipment is simple and its "quick you're losing, quick you're winning" makes it a fun game with lots of exercise. My tennis partner and I were kindred spirits and enjoyed a charmed relationship for the next fifty years. Some of the old estates held tournaments through the summer where we would meet players from a wide area, enjoy the wafer-thin cucumber sandwiches and champagne between matches and drive home, most times, with one of the family's old silver spoons as a prize. The roads home were empty, little country roads, curling and climbing, edged by green banks white with 'Queen Anne's lace', trees meeting overhead, sometimes a silver moon rose over stubble fields, and over it all that sweetness that is English summer time. Is it still as enchanting?

Combines had not come to England so the harvest was done by making the grain into sheaves. In a good harvest, one would be quite a weight and had to be pitched up onto a wagon. As the wagon filled, the throw grew higher and higher until, loaded as high as possible, off it would go to be unloaded and built into a huge stack, maybe 18-20 yards/ metres at the base. Only skilled men built them as the sheaves had to be placed carefully with butts out and the precious grains safe inside and as the stack grew to about 18 feet, they had to be built solidly to stand well. If it was planned not to have the threshing machine in for a while, another skilled man would thatch the pyramid top of the stack to keep the rain out.

In the early days, the grain was 'scythed' with a hand-held 4 foot blade which was kept razor sharp and then the sheaves had to be made from the cut grain and tied by hand with a fast rope made of straw as twine was not yet available. How did they ever do it? As you can imagine, binders that cut and bind the grain were a tremendous improvement, but farm workers thought their work was in jeopardy and hated them at first. There is a fundamental joy in gathering in the harvest the way that my generation was privileged to know. We would think, "Oh, gosh, all that hard work, dust and prickly heat, no time for anything else, spiders and blisters, thirst and bone-tiredness at day's end."

But when it began, one forgot all that in the age-long satisfaction of storing away ones' food supply, often marvelling at the earth's abundance – gratitude… appreciation!

Even nature got into the timing. Most houses had hollyhocks around them growing tall. Invariably, on the first day of harvest, the bottom-most flowers would open, followed by a new one day after day until the end of harvest when we would see the very last, not quite perfect flower at the tip of the plant. That would be at four, five or six weeks, depending on the weather.

Right after harvest, a family of gypsies came to camp in the little spinney we had beside the road that led to Bacton. We thought they moved north, following the harvest when people's hearts were full of warmth and generosity. They cut our hazel bushes and then came around to the house to sell the clothes pegs they had made from them but that will have been long gone. They were warm, colourful people and I am sad that they are rejected throughout Britain now.

The months chugged along until Stan was writing, "When are you coming back?" Having been on five liners, I thought it would be interesting to book on a freighter. The 'Cairness' was leaving Grangemouth, on the Firth of Forth in Scotland, on July 9, but some of the cargo – china, linoleum, carpets and whisky – was late so Anne, Ian and I went for a day climbing nearby hills and crossing a hair-raising chasm to what turned out to be the Hamilton estate – home of Lord Nelson's famous mistress. There's a lovely statue of her in the gardens that a kindly gentleman showed us. We were greeted with laughter when we got back to the ship as we were black all over. The hills were grass-covered coal tailings.

The crew took to Ian the minute they head his name. "Ye're a grran li'le Scottish laddie, come wi' we" and off they went down to where the engines roared and two men fed the great furnace nonstop, as soon as we'd 'shipped anchor' and were away. It boggled the mind to think of all those steam ships plying the oceans, being fed coal unceasingly. Two men with huge shovels would fling food at the monster while two more pushed the coal within their reach. At the end of two hours, new men would take the shovels without a moment's pause and carry on, day and night, except in our case when we 'trod water' they called it, to let a colony of icebergs move south.

We hardly saw Ian except for bedtime when he'd come up, tired but full of all the new things he'd learned – how he'd painted and pulled levers, and drunk man-size mugs of tea. After two days of warm mist – the Gulf Stream – the Captain called him up and gave both of them field glasses and asked them to "scan the horizon for icebergs". Well! So proud they were and prouder still when, seeing the first one, he showed them how to sound the alarm even though it was a speck in the distance! "There'll be bits and pieces for sure," he said and within minutes there were! It got suddenly cold, so cold that our eyebrows and nostrils hurt. Some of the bergs were the typical mountain shape, but the majority were flat-topped which is natural when you think about the frozen sea breaking up. "There's five times the size down under," the Captain told them and when the first one came closer he had them ring the bell as an immediate warning. It was great stuff for two little land-lubbers and a great thrill when the Captain let them steer the boat.

Nine big-bellied, wide-winged gulls joined us as we headed out to sea after coming through "Scapa Flow" between the coast of Scotland and the Orkney Islands. We had to 'tread water' there too as the tide was flowing in at the 9 knots that our ship was making. It was a magical night, out at the prow, watching the dark close in around 1 am. The spirits of the sea and the old, valiant Scots, it seemed to me, went flying overhead and when we touched a patch of calm water sea birds would

wake in terror and go screaming into the night. Less than an hour later, a lemon streak came in the eastern sky, the new day was beginning. The gulls stayed alongside the boat all the way across, floating I think, in the aerodynamics of our movement. They never seemed to eat and no one knew if they slept on board, or on wing. They left us as we approached land to pick up a boat returning to Europe.

It was a good thing that the Atlantic was as calm as the proverbial mill pond for it was a very little ship. I cannot imagine it in the fury of our passage twenty years earlier. A long, black plume of smoke followed us, never blown out of course and one day the shout went up "whale" and there it was – no spouting, no large tail, but a long, long grey back just level with the water. It is hard to believe any mammal could be so colossal. "All one??" Anne asked incredible.

When we tied up in Quebec harbour, the coal shovelling ceased, of course, but the black smoke still came from the chimney. As we weren't moving and there was no wind, the soot came down like huge, black snowflakes! We had a day to wait while the longshoremen unloaded, so the children and I walked up to the city and were surprised by how old it was. We went up a residential street, row housing as in Europe, with women standing at their doors, looking at us with hatred in their eyes. I don't know if the children saw it, but I wanted to get back on board ship and go home. Since then I have been to Montreal – not Quebec City – and found everyone friendly and courteous.

Two young Americans were among the eleven passengers. They were good fun and showed us, on the quiet, the layers of five pound notes they had packed behind the linings of their leather jackets. They vowed it was 'honest money' but got a bit antsy when the Captain started asking questions. We had barely tied up at the dock in Quebec City when they had their motorbikes off the deck, revved them up and with a roar charged out of the shed and away.

We went from Montreal to Toronto by train after our goodbyes to the crew and fellow passengers with whom I'd joyfully played Solo Whist until one or two o'clock every morning. The CP track follows the river and edge of the lake all the way and I thought I'd never seen anything as lovely as the early morning mist over the evergreens and the pale blue lake, so still, mirroring the trees in the glow from the rising sun.

Stan, with Jim and Georgie, met us and we drove down to Dorchester, near London, where Stan had bought a house. We approached the village from the north and when we saw a lone apple tree in apparently open land, we all tumbled out of the car, and ran to pick some. Georgie, especially, was happy to be in the country again, but in less than two minutes an angry voice was shouting, "You're trespassing!" while a raggedly-looking bloke came running down the hill, waving a gun! That was our welcome to Dorchester!

Like most immigrants, we had come with high hopes but very little money. The job Stan had secured was fifteen miles away and he couldn't find a suitable house in Lambeth which was much closer and thank goodness he hadn't looked at any isolated properties.
The little house he had bought in Dorchester was in the "downtown". We had driven through the village two years earlier and thought it would be a good place to live, small enough with 760 residents, to get to know most people. The South Thames ran through it, the Mill Pond and the sand hills back of it would be a good playground for the children, it was conveniently close to London. And we all loved the way the big trees arched across the roads.

The morning after we arrived on August 2nd, 1955, Anne seven, Ian five and I went for a walk along the River Road, Catherine Street East. The name on a mailbox caught my attention – Dromgole. So like our mother's name of Domleo. I forget how we got to know Mildred so quickly, but having her for a good friend made the move incredibly better for all of us, and later we started a little community paper together.

Her family were Irish and "old roots' in Dorchester. Her handsome husband looked like a Spanish Count. That was an idea she laughed at until their daughter's dentist said, "This child has Spanish blood in her. Her teeth are square." With my sister's dark eyes and hair making her look so very Mediterranean, it reinforced our family's legend about my mother being descended from a Spaniard shipwrecked on Ireland's south coast.

Ian made a friend right away as well. Mike Cyrulinski was the same age, not long from Poland. They were buddies from day one and would go off with a sandwich in their pockets exploring the bush and hills for the entire day. Coming back for supper, they had exciting things to tell, 'Holy Moly, Mrs. Lacey, you should have seen it," they would both exclaim!

People had warned us about rattlesnakes (long gone people around us said) and snapping turtles in the wild sides of the river, so they knew that was out of bounds but otherwise we hardly worried about them. Life was so blessedly innocent then.

One afternoon Mike came rushing in. "Mrs. Lacey! Mrs. Lacey! Ian's stuck!" "Oh my God, quicksand" was my immediate reaction searching my mind for rope. But not that, he was high up a tree.

They had three happy years together until Mike's Dad had the chance to take over a garage in North Carolina. It seemed our happy world had split open! Poor Ian – we were so desperately sorry for him and I learned the truth about hearts "bleeding". That was how mine felt – wet and broken.

During August, I'd enquired about registering the children at the one school, Northdale, a quarter mile west of us. The answer was, I thought, a bit casual, "Oh, just bring them in on the first day." When the time came, the teachers were surprised how much advanced they were for their age, which resulted in them both being a year younger than their classmates all through their school years.

Anne joined a square dance group which went on to win a provincial award and also joined a marching majorette group with was popular at that time. Baseball was the only organized sport taught through the school system. I was appalled at the reading books "Dick and Jane". They became ridiculed in later years, and no wonder, such uninspiring food for young minds. "See Dick. See Dick jump." I had been hoping for something equivalent to the 'Prairie Readers' that were full of life reality stories and poems. When I phoned the Board to ask if there was a choice he - there were no women on boards in those days - was stunned, speechless and on recovering, asserted that "Ontario had the best education in the world."

We went to the Anglican Church, St. Peter's, and found the service a replica of those in England. The Minister, Rev. Lawrence Harrison, and his housekeeper, Ethel Carnochan, who had lost her husband a few years earlier when he had fallen from a ladder, became good friends and adopted our children as "grandchildren". They made a huge addition to our lives as did the couple who welcomed us on the church steps on our first time there. They were another huge bonus, Harold

and Dorothy Dundas, old roots in Dorchester and the nicest people one could wish for friends. There was a little lady, as neat and pretty in mauve and white as a picture card who looked way up at me, "Do you tat?" I had never heard of tatting but wished that all the people in the U.K. who thought we had come to a rough and primitive country could see her.

Organized religion leaves a great deal of space for criticism and scepticism but attending services creates a welcome social gathering, one that is being missed now in the 21st century. We made friends with members then, who are still friends now, those who are left. That may be because the Anglican Churches attract people who come from the U.K. or have a contact with people there. Most immigrant families find friends within their own backgrounds, a fact which is a little sad, but true. I cannot think of a single friend of ours who doesn't have a U.K. or European background. A somewhat shocking discovery.

Our first Thanksgiving Day was wonderful. It is a celebration unknown in Europe, but is a great family day in North America. As it was a public holiday, Stan was home and we drove up Adelaide Street to explore the North branch of the Thames. We found a shallow stretch of water where Anne and Ian had a great day making dams and things kids do while Stan and I made a fire and cooked a special lunch-hot dogs!. He was away so much that it sometimes seemed we hardly saw each other.

The sun stayed with us all day, lighting the scarlets and oranges of the trees and it must have been an unusual season as the river was warm enough to enjoy. The sunlight danced on the rapids, minnows played around the rocks and birds sang, it was a great day and which we hoped the bairns would remember (they don't). It was the first time I had had a glimmer of happiness since leaving Pa.

That day was, surprisingly, the 100th anniversary of the Dorchester, or Donnybrook Fair. The village gained that name through the shenanigans of the young bloods years before.
We were told that wheels would be taken off buggies or wagons, outhouses hoisted on the roofs of houses, cattle and horses let out, as well as road racing, first with horses, then later with motor bikes.

Our little house was warmed by a 'Quebec Heater', an upright iron cylinder that worked very well when fed twice a day with coal or coke and the dampers understood. Efficient, but not very pretty. Luckily, as the days grew cooler we thought it a good idea to change the electric cook stove for one using gas. We spent the first Christmas with Jim and Georgie who had moved from Toronto to a farm near Puslinch Lake, closer to us.
Puslinch is a huge lake and was frozen so solid we walked over to an island with the ice, under our weight, 'whooping from shore to shore'. That is the best description of the eerie sound that sent shivers up and down our backs. Ice that thickness in December became a thing of the past thirty or so years ago.

It was during the drive home from that visit that the four of us agreed that the baby who was on the way would be a boy and that we could name him Peter Alan. Arriving home was a shocker. Everything was frozen solid, tea in the teapot, plants, jam, we should have known. Fortunately, we had left the tap running a little or there would have been no water. However, one turn of the knob on our new stove and wonderful heat flooded through the house. Will we ever forget that??

The 401, Ontario's first major highway, was being built through the township, linking eventually, Windsor with Montreal. Its route lay through the swamp, the largest one in southern Ontario, and

was said to be costing a million dollars a mile, an astronomical sum back then. Gravel trucks went by the house all day feeding the foundations of the highway. Owners along the 3rd concession were happy to sell what had been poor land along their 'back fifties' The highway must have been well made to stand up to all the rush of traffic that uses it now. The 'Clover Leafs', exits and entrances, have been modified and a concrete median built down the centre. That median was imperative as there were constant accidents, particularly in the Woodstock area, before it was added.

The rebuilt Hamilton Road was a great benefit as well as it went through the edge of another swamp and was impassable every spring. It had begun as a 'corduroy road' built of logs laid on the earth with gravel on top, we were told. The willow trees which grow along the river bank just out of the village are the result of posts being hammered in there to block the ice washing up onto the road, great chunks which would take a month to melt. Most of the sand for that road came directly from the hill across the road, now the toboggan run (Tiner's Hill).

CHAPTER 15

Living conditions were a bit primitive. The house looked tiny from the street but had a surprising amount of space. Two walnut trees gave us shade from the sun and the road and at the back, three big "gosh darned Manitoba maples" as Jim Morris called them, kicking at upstart young ones. We had bought the house from Jim.

We were glad of the shade, it was so hot. The weeds along the road were familiar, but the sun never had that overpowering heat in Manitoba, that I could remember. It was just before refrigerators came on the market so everyone had an ice box (in the prairies a basket slung down the well worked fine). A 15"x15"x15" block of ice lasted five days with a 'weep' tray that had to be emptied every morning. Dorchester's ice came from the Mill Pond. Our neighbour, Charlie White, spent all winter cutting them out with a handsaw and driving sleigh loads of them to Nilestown, five miles west of the village. A shed attached to the store had been converted to a straw-insulated storage place, holding all the ice blocks and meat all summer and well into the fall. Charlie enjoyed his one man, one horse business and delighted in every drive home, his horse often galloped in sheer pleasure of the empty sleigh, and the waiting bag of oats.

The CNR track between Montreal and Windsor ran through the village and backed many properties, including ours. Twenty trains each twenty-four hours, blowing their whistles at every crossing. Whistles weren't enough safety though. There were multiple accidents all along the line and six at our four crossings before gates and 'wig wags' on small roads were installed. Many reasons were given for the accidents – not hearing the whistle, forgetfulness, trying to beat the train, sun blindness. So sad they were and must have made for nerve wracking careers for the engineers. Sometimes at night a deer would be standing on the tracks, mesmerized by the headlights until the drivers learned to switch off the lights for a moment or two. When put on again, the way was clear.

This was transition time for the trains. Those grand old locomotives went flying across the country, running away from the head of smoke and steam they created, but their days were numbered. Much more powerful diesels were coming on line, much cleaner, much less maintenance, but so unromantic. The characteristic whistles with their long, lonely cries changed a little too, losing the haunting, wild sound which had so defined the country.

Years later, my Dad and I were driving to Ingersoll and decided to take a different road home, a little country road that had beckoned us. It was a bright, sunny January day and when we came to an unprotected rail crossing we looked both ways, both of us, and slowly crossed to see, with sheer horror, a passenger train emerge, silver from the shining ice and snow of the fields and almost upon us. There was a blast from its horn and the car rocked from the air rush of its passing. Wow! Later I had a sort of laugh at my first thought – horrors; the loco would hit Pa first!

We arrived on the cusp of change in Dorchester too. When we moved in, there was a shock – water from the well was had a bad smell of sulphur. Horrible! It was undrinkable without having stood in the icebox all night. We got somewhat used to it but were very thankful when the village installed a tower and piped water to every house the following year. As that gave hydrants to the community as well, a flashy red fire truck was bought. Impressive! It must have been a radical change for the old-timers as the former fire defence was a trailer behind the chief's car, a dozen buckets and a coil of rope with volunteers arriving from every direction we were told.

CHAPTER 16

By that summer, our family had grown to five. Peter Alan was born at 5 am on June 18, 1956. We had been a bit embarrassed to write home about him as all our friends had only one or two children, saying that the world was getting too well populated. But that didn't shadow the joy he gave us when he arrived and thrived.

There was a worrisome week at first when he fussed around instead of having breakfast, or lunch or supper. Personally, I thought that he was bothered by the constant playing of the radio by the occupant of the other hospital bed, as I was. However, a bevy of doctors and students kept coming to examine him and to repeatedly ask me, "Was I sure I had another son?" They had come to the conclusion that he had a problem with a valve in his tummy, "Pyloric Stenosis," they explained, "but it should only happen with first-born boys." It was decided to give him a new drug from the Amazon, a nerve relaxant, Atropine, which is used, they told me, by natives as a lethal tip on their arrows. "Three drops on his tongue, four times a day before feeding."

So we came home with a new baby and a tiny phial of that deadly new potion – it scared me to death. No need to worry though, he settled down happily as soon as we were home, so he only had two doses. Perhaps that was enough. There was no follow-up whatsoever which gave us a bleak impression of Canadian baby care.

Every morning at 9, US war planes left vapour trails across the sky on their way to the DEW line. They had atomic warheads and they gave us all the shivers. Hiroshima was such a recent shock with heartbreaking reports of death and misery that life was clouded with fear. The future felt sickenly bleak and grim. What crazy world had we brought these darling children into?

Mike's Mum, Monica, stopped in most mornings, bringing Mike to meet up with Ian and off they'd go to school together. We were all lucky, very lucky, to have each other because they were mundane things to talk about to put the scare a bit back in our minds. I don't think the children were concerned as we had tried to shelter them from the worst of the news of those days that thankfully shortened the war in the east. It was already a decade back but still raw in our minds.

Monica and I would talk about the latest inventions on the market. Were the new-fangled vacuum cleaners really worth buying? How silly the detergent ads sounded with their 'whiter than white' ads on television. As everyone had to hang washing out on garden lines, it was a fertile field for comparing laundry. The way jeans came in off the line so stiff with frost that they would stand by themselves was always a laugh.

At school's end, in June, parents from the three churches were asked to think of programmes to keep children happy during the long, summer holidays. The two months of summer had been set in early days when children's help with the harvest was needed. By 1957, however, agriculture had changed, with combines making swift work of what used to be weeks of hard labour by everyone available. Although most mothers were at home, apparently children got bored easily. When no one brought any ideas, I suggested that we put on a pageant of the Old Testament stories and naturally, got the job of producing it.

Stan and I sat up late, night after night, becoming more and more fascinated with those old moral stories and the history of the Jewish people. Our script started with the exit out of Egypt – that called for lots of happy little actors – our Moses was a riot. It progressed with Job and the prodigal son and then Noah's Ark that was fun too. The final scene was of John the Baptist, standing dressed in a sack with a rope around her middle, in the river Jordan, prophesizing. That fourteen-year old was a star and went on to be a good actress.

By the following summer, Peter was running around. Those first steps of every little person are so incredibly precious to parents, and such a joy to them. As soon as he was mobile, he had to be outside which was a bit of a problem. Stan came home around five, needed a shower and his dinner on time so he could leave again for rehearsals, and here was this little person who needed to be out. Following what seemed a good idea, I fashioned a little leather harness with a long line for him, gave him toys and the suggestion that he look out for Daddy while I cooked supper. Well! You never saw such a commotion one small child could make. He screamed in insulted fury. He kicked – he stamped! He yelled and finally threw himself on the ground and banged his forehead on the cement path. What else could one do but untether him, hug him tight, tell him I loved him and wouldn't ever, ever do that again. I've read of other people doing this with no problem. We ate casseroles made while he had a morning nap for the rest of that summer.

The family was to become six. Rob was expected around Christmas and as the time came closer, all sorts of things started to happen. Stan brought a Christmas tree home – a huge one, but he wouldn't saw a couple of feet off the trunk but insisted we take it indoors to check. As we were carrying it out again, I said, "This is the sort of thing superstitions are about, taking a Christmas tree in and out on the 12th of December." Sure enough, the expected happened. A knock on the door the next morning. "Had you thought of selling your house?" I could hardly speak for astonishment and relief. Of course we had. The elderly gentleman with the realtor was a Bishop in a group named 'The Ecclesiastes', I believe, and was looking for a quiet house where he could translate parts of the Old Testament from the Greek. Quiet? I'd never have given it that description but he seemed happy with it and wanted to move in right away.

So we went house hunting. We still didn't have much money but we'd learned a bit but not enough in those two and a half years. I really liked the south side of the river and Stan didn't have an opinion so that's where we started, only to meet a huge, huge disappointment. The house I'd liked

above all others had a big 'SOLD' on the real estate sign. If only we'd known a few days earlier! If only some lucky person hadn't gone and bought it! If only! If only!

There was another house for sale but it went down to the river that would have been an asset but not with two little people about. All of us must have fallen in love with 95 Hamilton Road, with its height, the highest roof in the village, its trees and extra lot, its locally made yellow bricks, a verandah, because I remember a very subdued supper that night. My faith was shaken also as ever since we'd first seen it, I'd been telling myself that one day we would live there. My faith in positive thinking bounced back two days later when the 'SOLD' sign was gone – the deal had fallen through.

All my life there have been examples of this in our family and others, where if someone want something strongly enough, thinks and thinks about it, it happens. Very strange but greatly empowering. How we blessed that Bishop and the benevolent finger that seems sometimes to push coincidences together.

Thank goodness we had, long before all this turmoil began, family conversations about the new baby. Lots of names were suggested, boy's names, no one even considered a girl. We would have decided on 'Brin', after Pa, but hesitated in case it would bring up old sadnesses when he came to live with us. Jeremy? Graham? Ian said, "How about Robin?" It was perfect. We all admired Robin of Sherwood Forest and his fight against injustice. 'Robin Lacey' had a good ring to it.

In the middle of getting ready to welcome him, prepare for Christmas and start packing up, Stan had an accident at work that broke two toes on his right foot. What timing that was! There were other problems that I've forgotten. I just remember that whole month as chaotic.

So on December 19, 1957, another little miracle joined the family. Ten perfect fingers and toes, a head with a look of nobility, all 7 ½ lbs of him healthy and beautiful, so the nurses at the hospital said. What to do but agree with them? The name we had chosen suited him and his apparently happy acceptance of being awake in the world and part of a family matched our pleasure in having him. We put him in his bassinet under the tree and agreed that Christmas was a great time to have a baby.

Dear Rev. Harrison and "Gram'ma" as we called her, came bearing gifts and good wishes to share our celebration. You should have seen the slightly portly sixty-year old cleric sitting on the floor playing with the kids. It was a fun; memorable time I've loved to have in my box of experiences.

The week after is lost to memory entirely, but begins again on December 29th when we moved to 95 Hamilton Road. A great day, not cold, nor rainy or snowy. 'Gram'ma' came and cleaned the windows. Peter found a little stool and thought he was helping by sitting on it in the path of the movers. Harold Dundas brought lunch while Anne found places for everything, all a big excitement, of course.

Ian, Mike and some friends discovered that if they climbed the big lilac tree at the back, they could run over the garage roof, climb onto the balcony, in through the south bedroom window, come head long downstairs through the house to do to all over again. They were having such fun we turned a blind eye. Stan was astonished at how much furniture we had and Rob, our perfect little two-week old slept through all the commotion.

We had been surprised at the look on the real estate man's face when I'd said, "it's so nice, it hardly needs anything doing to it," and it took a while for us to jump off our pink cloud to see that it needed a great deal done to make it a home.

The kitchen walls were painted avocado green while the rest of the house was pink. A strange choice we thought, as the lady we bought it from, Mrs. Mulder, had the brightest, red hair we'd ever seen. She wasn't very well and it was because of that they were moving. Her husband told us that sometimes, when he came home, the metal handrail to the basement would be so hot he couldn't touch it. She had opened up the drafts to the furnace and then forgotten to close them.

Ah! That furnace! That's why we bought the house! When we went in for the first time, its door was wide open showing a three-foot wide – alive, glowing, honest to goodness fire! When one has one, it isn't thought about much, but without, a house never really feels like a home, a sort of camping out between four walls. New houses were being built 'all electric' but the older ones were just changing from coal to gas.

It took us a few years before we could do that and when we did, a new chimney had to be built against the east side of the house. Ugly cement blocks, but we found some ivy that took a couple of years to get established; however, a generous dose of nitrogen set it off. Two more years and it was up to the eves which made a grand nesting place for sparrows. We had to resort to the hose to get them to move on as their chirping, insistent chirping drove us crazy.

CHAPTER 17

The north room in the basement was where the coal was kept. Stan disappeared when the truck came each fall as the sound of it pouring in through a chute in the window sounded too much like the war. Coal was picked up in Port Stanley having been shipped from Pennsylvania.

The house needed a lot of work. Although Stan had an affinity with metal, he hadn't much knowledge of carpentry but he soldiered on, building closets and bookshelves and after the furnace was reluctantly chucked, cementing over the basement's earthen floors.

After growing vegetables there for a couple of years, we grassed all the main back lot, keeping the extra land for a garden. It took a couple of years or more for the sod to get established and then, bad timing, the septic tank had to be replaced. It was under the driveway and had been there, maybe since the house was built in 1907, all unknown to us.

Weeping tiles went six feet down in those unenlightened days so our beautiful new lawn looked like a war zone. Many years later, our grandchildren had happy times planting their own special trees. Jennifer and Tisha, a cherry each and I so clearly remember three-year old Tisha standing under the little tree, stamping her foot, "I don't want to go to Japan. I want to stay here!"

At six months, Rob, who had been a perfect, happy baby suddenly had a problem when he sat up and saw Peter running about. He was inconsolable. He'd cry, outraged, furious and refused to be put to bed. Sleep? No way! Our doctor checked him over, found nothing amiss and laughed at our concern, but it wasn't any fun having a little son so unhappy. He was obviously envious of Peter running about and we suddenly realized how much we needed relatives to help out. I think that a child would be given a sedative now and that a teaspoon of sherry might have helped. The doctor

said no to that. Being scared of doing the wrong thing, as parents are, we didn't. I've wondered since if a spank would have made him realize he was being ridiculous, but in the state he was, it was unthinkable.

I don't know how we got through those months. Stan would take him out in the car in the evening and he'd be OK and sometimes fall asleep. However gently we brought him in, he'd wake and start over again but as soon as he could pull himself up to his feet and realize that he too could run, he was fine. We worried though, at him missing vital steps of babyhood as he never took time to crawl and crawling is said to be the dinosaur period in infant evolution. He developed into a warm and loving little guy with a vivid imagination, no fear of danger and a determination to do whatever Pete was doing. He could carry a heavy armload of wood and climb to the very top of the apple tree at four, always kind and helpful as all of them were/are. We have been totally blessed.

Ian began writing poems, thoughtful concise lines and said he wanted to write a book. He was very, very good at carpentry and made a flat-bottomed boat when he was sixteen giving his kid brothers happy summers up and down the river.

Moving across the river meant quite a walk for him and Anne to get to Northdale School, but even when the winters became wicked, they never complained. They had an hour for lunch and would tumble in, all snowy, watch 'Zorro' on our black and white TV while they ate their lunches, jumped up at 12:40, bundled up again and off happily back to school for 1 pm.

Some sensible person must have scheduled those twenty minute kids' shows to fit in with school hours across the continent. A less thoughtful official decreed that Cubs should wear shorts. In Canadian winters?? Of course, nobody wore jeans and changed and we wondered how Ian and his buddies stood those walks over the bridge on Thursday evenings. After the legendary Portage and Main corner in Winnipeg, I'd swear that our bridge was the coldest place in Canada.

In the middle of celebrating Peter's second birthday, he fell down the stairs. Bump..bump..bump…down all of our thirteen steps. We ran, horrified and fearing all sorts of hurts but he was fine, gathered himself together and asked "Birthday cake?" One knew about concussions, but no one thought of going to emergency unless there was a wound which needed stitching up. Chiropractors? Well, that was some strange treatment one heard about, but never expected to meet. So, luckily for all of us, Peter got off lightly.

We were lucky in so many ways. Ray and Mary Ross were farmers who lived on the 3rd Concession north and kindly let us use their 50-acre pasture as a playground. It was no ordinary 50 acres. There were hills to climb and to toboggan down, one was the highest point in the area and had a meteorological sensor. It was a super place that we and the kids' friends were so tremendously grateful to have. The remnants of an old stone building on the south face of one hill were exciting and a bit creepy. A trout stream ran down from the north to disappear under the 4th concession road and stones were scattered around which in themselves were exciting as rocks were a rarity. We talked about ice ages and Indian encampments. I got the car stuck on a rock once and even when all the kids climbed out, it was still fast tight. I think that Ian hitched a ride home to find his Dad, who came and lifted the car free, to our amazement. He was a great problem solver, always.

I'd saved up enough to buy an old and a bit rusty Ford for $500 so that gave us glorious freedom to go places during the holidays. As well, we'd all go down to Lake Erie taking a picnic supper as soon

as Stan got home, so he could teach Anne and Ian to swim. In August, the area farmers had roadside stands of bushel baskets of glowing peaches for just two or three dollars.

The lake gave everyone a bounty in those early Aprils. Suddenly, word went round that the smelt were in! People took washtubs and sacks, using baskets to scoop up the little fish as they swarmed at the water's edge and in about two weeks they were gone as suddenly as they came. One year they didn't come, nor in the years after. They were greatly missed and we never heard what had happened to them. Perhaps we were all too greedy? Carp came up the river to spawn in those days, too, and April evenings were full of the song of the little frogs people call 'peepers' as they celebrated spring in the streams and swamps.

Anne was a special hero one summer. The farmer who had pioneered growing tobacco in the area had a huge pond excavated to make a reservoir for irrigation and he invited friends and neighbours to swim there. This was the late summer, after Anne and Ian had learned to swim. A group of us were sitting on the side, admiring the water when Ian said, "I can swim across," and jumped in. It was probably fifty or sixty yards across and naturally I was shocked, and scared. He wasn't that good of a swimmer. It had happened so quickly; we were all – what's the word – transfixed! He began to falter. What to do? But Anne had been watching him and flew around the end of the pond, jumped in and helped him to shore. Bless her a million times.

By the time Peter and Robin were in school, every child had swimming lessons at a London pool. In June it is expected to be summer, but the days they went were frigid! I remember the row of fifth graders sitting on the edge of the pool shivering under their towels, grey with cold.

The year Rob was in 2nd grade he came home to tell us that he was in love with a classmate, Cindy Tillotson and that she was his girlfriend. When I suggested, casually, wasn't he a bit young to have a girlfriend, he got all upset and said that I'd ruined his life. What would a wiser Mum have said? The trouble with words is that once said, there's no taking them back. We hoped so desperately that we were being good parents and that the four of them were happy, taking into account the downs and ups of every life.

Before he started school, Rob was at the High School which Anne and Ian attended. The secretary phoned that he had fallen off the bleachers and had broken his arm. Driving up, I wondered how she would know that it was broken but it was totally obvious. The lower bone was step shaped which Rob found most interesting. The doctor in Emergency kept him overnight after straightening it and putting splints on, and when we picked him up the following morning, he was full of excitement, "that's the best thing that ever happened to me," he said.

That reminded me of a verse which Pa would quote at the right occasion:

In August was the jackal born
The rains came in September
Now such a fearful flood as this
He said, 'I really can't remember.'

Anne had started High School with the first grade nine class at the new, later-named, Lord Dorchester Secondary School, just up the road. She was in the top three girls in every grade although being a year and bit younger than they were. It helped them all, having that competition between them.

Years and years earlier, when my friends Mildred and Dorothy were students, the High School was in the second story of the old Northdale School, on Catherine Street West. Their first high school year was held in the room above the funeral 'parlour' and their last in Woodstock. Trains stopped at the Dorchester station then taking them to Woodstock.

Construction of Dorchester's new high school was difficult as that winter, 1960-61, was especially cold. Dynamite had to be used to get down six feet for the foundations and a lot of the new water pipes were frozen. The river was clamped in three feet of ice. That was the first year that Pa came to stay with us.

The radio announcer was warning people to stay at home, one blizzardy January morning. The conditions were 'treacherous'. Stan insisted on going to work in spite of that and my begging him not to. A little later a neighbour knocked at the door to say that Stan and another car were stuck in the snow at the Dorchester Road corner close to the 401. He suggested driving Ian and I, Ian was 14 or so by then, with hot coffee and shovels and so off we went. The snow was whirling into drifts, almost burying the cars, and it was viciously cold. We had to give up any idea of moving them after an hour of shovelling and finding more cars stuck behind us. It's a good thing that we stopped when we did, and that our kind neighbour had room for everyone in his car. When we stopped working, we realized that our cheeks were frozen. They really hurt thawing out.

We had another scare that same winter. Ian was into a carpentry project that called for boiled linseed oil. Not knowing that linseed oil was marketed already boiled, he put some in a tin can and set it on the gas burner. Luckily, we were there as it took all of thirty seconds for the can to explode, flinging burning oil in every direction. You cannot imagine how immediately fires take hold and how energetically they burn. What a scramble that was to get them all smothered with towels. The house could have gone so easily, if we hadn't all been there

CHAPTER 18

I don't know what it is with teachers. Both Ian and Rob suffered from being asked, "Why can't you be like your brother?" (Or sister in Ian's case) inferring that they were second class. They weren't at all, just very different. School in those days seemed to be geared exclusively to academia that my dictionary describes as 'of theoretical interest only, with no practical application'.

We ached to send them to a more enlightened system but the fees were away above our means, and we didn't know if they would be more empathetic in any case. Ian's teacher in the early grades was fixated on the way he wrote a capital 'S', as if it mattered. He wrote them from the bottom up and put her in a tizzy. We asked him if he couldn't change, just to please her, but he, I think, felt that that would be giving in to a bully. He spent most of the spring term up our apple tree, unbeknownst to us until his report came home full of 0s for 'Absent'. If you were his teacher, wouldn't you have lifted the phone to ask where he was?

Rob rebelled early. As soon as the class had learned to write, they had to fill in a questionnaire about home life. Rob filled in the questions with quite outlandish answers. When we were called to the school to explain, he said, "Why does school have to know all that about us?" His teacher took great exception when we asked, "Well, why does it?"

Both Anne and Pete fitted into the system with far more comfort.

Most of Pete's school days were happy, I think. He was very lucky in the teachers he had and went through both grade school and high school in leadership roles, winning all the most coveted honours. His Principal told us that he was the best Student Council President he'd ever worked with. It was one of the best experiences for him as the Student Council handled thousands of dollars each year and the business education he received in Grade 13 must have been an enormous help in his early entrepreneurial projects.

When Anne was in Grade 11 and Ian in Grade 10, a phone call came from the school asking, "Would we go up?" A group of teachers were with the Principal, all in some state of excitement. Students had taken their IQ test the day before and apparently Anne and Ian's scores were much higher than average – 139 and 141 (I forgotten which was which but it doesn't matter). We were so proud of them. We were told that students are better not told the scores so this has been a secret all these years. By the time the younger boys were in High School, IQ tests had been discontinued.

I am ahead of myself. Lots of interesting things had happened between our early years in Dorchester and High School days. Where would I start? With Rob getting the job of paper carrier for the Globe and Mail, the youngest boy (never any girls doing paper routes at that time) carrier in Canada? Or with Pete discovering that the new plastic bags were great for keeping feet warm when they went tobogganing down Tiners Hill? Or Ian wading out in the river to rescue a neighbour's precious 'baby bonus' cheque which was bobbing along downstream? Or Anne drawing models of new houses and towns she hoped to plan? Or their Dad winning Best Supporting Actor in the National Amateur Theatre Competition?

The final for actors across the country was held in Vancouver in 1966 and he was awarded the trophy we have on the mantelpiece for his part in "Mother Courage". We were watching the event on TV on the following Sunday when the door opened. He was home just in time to see himself almost drop the heavy award.

Life for two-thirds of the year was a bit of a roller coaster for us. Stan had found his calling in the theatre and was a very good actor and director. He was Chairman of his Association, of the local Parents Association and became the area rep for 'public safety' during the Cold War years. Meetings! We went to see the dress rehearsals at the theatre and sometimes his casting evenings. These were mind-stretchers, seeing a group of wanabe actors milling around, unsure whether they really wanted to do this, and then, six weeks later, the disciplined committed group they had become, excited and ready to go on stage. In one play in which he was acting, Stan had to be front and centre, shooting the villain. The pistol wouldn't fire so he substituted a loud "Bang! Bang!" The surprised audience gave him a standing ovation.

The plays were mainly comedies and very popular with the theatre's supporters who weren't at all impressed when the London Little Theatre was upgraded to become "The Grand" and the shows changed to dark or sophisticated performances by Equity groups. Many of us thought that his group of volunteer actors, backstage people and other directors weren't given the credit they deserved for keeping the Grand alive all the years between the original operas and the transition. The plays were such an investment of time and energy that nearly all the volunteers were down with an anti-climactic flu after each three month stint. By the time they recovered, it was into learning lines of the next performance.

Stan was right in thinking that it was helping us. It was a big thrill when Stan was invited to take part at the Stratford Festival, and a great disappointment when he couldn't get the month off work. We were proud of his popularity, it widened all our lives and we made good friends. One of these was an Englishman, Harry Ronson.

Harry lived in an interesting, rambling house by the Dorchester Pond which he had made by enlarging a summer shanty owned by Arpad DaRosi, a Hungarian immigrant farmer. Arpad was famous for the way he would wait for a fresh March wind to burn off last year's 'sweet brown debris'. Of course, the fire whipped out of control and the Brigade had to be summoned year after year. Arpad loved Harry like a son and dismissed with a wave of his hand the many offers to buy the land his house was on. "It's yours as long as ye want it." But that caused a great problem when he suddenly died and the farm was sold to a developer. Harry had no deed and had to watch his home being demolished, including sheets of 4x8 siding being carried across the fields by hand to build another home.

Harry was a role model to our boys. Ian identified with his laid-back cultured lifestyle and admired his war-time service teaching radar to air crews training at Centralia, north of London. They all loved his unconventional home with its smoky fireplace, crickets on the hearth, going fishing in the pond with a later fry-up over an open fire. He had wonderful grownup parties too. After he lost his house, he lived for a time in his shop in town, 'Radio Labs', but then sold that business, bought a camper and moved to Bayfield. In July 2004 he was found, fallen off a ladder, beside his last purchase, a low red sports car. Sadly, we scattered his ashes over his beloved Mill Pond.

A small plane had come down in the pond earlier one summer and we heard that a couple of men had swum to shore. Nothing was done about the plane and as it was at the height of drug trafficking, we all presumed that they were leaving a cache where it was.

I should tell you about the Trail, a great scenic half hour's walk circling the Pond. The Pond itself was created in the early 1800s by damming the creek which drains the Dorchester swamp to provide power for the first flour mill in the area. It became a popular place for Londoners to picnic and dance at the old dance hall, which had a rare chestnut plank floor, the best ever for dancing we are told.

Ian came home from Australia just at the time the developer was surveying the lots on the east bank of the Pond and having them go down to the water's edge. Ian was shocked and went to the council to argue that everyone would benefit if the public had ownership of the Pond. Council members took some convincing but that's how we have the Trail.

We had a scary incident when Rob was 8 or 9. He, Peter and some friends were out with me delivering 'SignPosts' to outlying farms in the southeast corner of the Township one Saturday morning. Rob asked if he could sit on the hood of the car as we went to the next house, a hundred yards away. As it was a quiet road and having been brought up riding on the front of wagons and tractors, I agreed. As soon as I gently started the car, he slipped off. Stopping was, I thought, immediate, but the front wheel must have pushed him along the gravel road for a foot or so as he had a bump on his head and a bloody, gravelly right leg. As it was Saturday morning and the doctor wouldn't be in his surgery, we hightailed into Emergency, dropping the other boys off on the way.

When he hobbled into the hospital, the doctor was concerned about his head but decided that it was "nothing to worry about". A nurse bandaged up his leg after washing out as much gravel as she could, telling us to keep the bandage moist as the rest of the gravel would take a few days to work out. They were wonderfully non-judgemental, no questions of how or why, just a friendly clean-up, a tetanus shot and "good-bye". I was feeling like a criminal and have been everlastingly grateful to them.

Quite early on, we had a very scary hurricane. We watched through the east window as the big, old elm tree bent over so that the top branches toughed the ground. Quite unbelievable. It straightened up as the storm passed through and lived a good life until we left it in 2004. The maples along the west edge of the property weren't nearly as lucky as four of them blew down, ruining the lawn again. Many trees came down across the village but miraculously, none fell on cars or houses.

When Rob was two and a half, he discovered a walnut, split open, with roots and a shoot. It was a revelation to him and fun to watch it grow beside the fire pit year after year. We also planted a catalpa nearby and loved its tropically huge leaves and beautiful flowers. In the fall, we'd watch for the first frost being touched by the rising sun. The huge leaves would come floating down together, enveloping the boys who loved to rush out and be part of the annual event.

When we first arrived, no one had any flowers to speak of, a row of petunias across the front of the houses was about all. We, I think, pioneered having flower beds and brought stones back from trips up North to enhance them. Also, people laughed at us having meals outdoors but by the 90s, patios were all the rage and garden stone a thriving industry.

CHAPTER 19

The children and I went to St. Peter's Anglican Church most Sundays and the two little guys were christened there. Nowadays young people go to Church in everyday clothes, when they go, which is rarely, but until twenty or thirty years ago, the thing to do was to have Sunday clothes and women had to wear hats. Imagine. It was a problem for a lot of families to afford all that but going to Church was worth it. It was a chance to teach children to sit still and be quiet, perhaps think a bit? Wonder how churches came to be in every community? Even to sing? I remember one elderly farmer complaining after an Easter Sunday service, "'Nough alleluias t'last a twelve month."

Back in the early years, most country churches were in threes, served by one minister, which meant his clip clopping from one to another in a pony trap each Sunday. It must have made for a long, tiring and lonely days and I thought of them every time I drove in comfort along those same roads. The minister was often the only educated person in many communities and that must have been very hard, and of course, the idea of a woman being a priest was unthinkable at that time.

The 'SignPost' I mentioned was a little newspaper which Mildred and I and another friend started in February of 1959. I had had the idea when parents were asked to suggest ways of making enough money to get a Cub pack started in the village. While the VIPs turned the idea down, it seemed to me far too good a project to drop.

It was an interest to the others but meant far more to me. I really, really wanted the children to grow up knowing they could become whatever they dreamed of; I really wanted to do something interesting and worthwhile and at the same time be home with the family; I really, really wanted to

be friends with the business and farming families; and I really, really wanted to make some money to help out. 'SignPost' answered all those.

A huge curiosity went with my pleasure in writing and having read many books. I thought that grammar would come naturally, having missed out on grammar lessons at school. Mildred was an 'old root' as she called it and knew everyone. It was perfect. The only drawback was that Peter and Robin were so very young, but I would be at home and it was only a very little newssheet. It scared me to think that if we didn't do it, someone else would, which is exactly what would have happened the month we started. We had arranged with a printer who had just moved into Dorchester to do the printing. When we had the first news ready, we dropped in to make sure he was expecting the copy the next day only to find that he expected to own and publish it while we supplied the news. What to do? Dear Rev. Harrison happened by. He had been interested and helpful with the idea all along and now offered to drive me and our copy to a man he knew in town who had a mimeograph and whom he was sure would print it.

That afternoon we arrived back with our first 300 copies still warm from the press and the 10 carriers to whom we had promised a job waiting at the house. Excitement! We'd promised them 1 cent per copy delivered which was riches to 10-year olds back in '59. It was the coldest day of the winter but no one bothered about that; off they went with their new bags and thirty papers each. Everyone sold at five cents a copy and the community was hooked. 'Our little green paper' quickly became the topic of conversation and affection. We changed the original buff paper to green the first summer.

However, the night before this momentous beginning, it still hadn't a name. We had been thinking and thinking with no bright idea for weeks so that night I was sitting, desperate, at the dining room table knowing that I had to think of something. You know how hard it is to come up with the best name for a baby? Much harder for an infant new sheet! Two a.m. and nothing. Then my mind went to a bookshelf in the next room and something came from there, and wandered across to me – "SignPost". It was perfect! I went over and randomly chose a book and the first words on the opened page were "the Signpost showed me the way".

It seemed such an unbelievable thing that I didn't tell anyone until friend, Harry Ronson, loaned me a book which I think was called "The Secret of Perfect Living" where the author wrote of a similar experience. He had other words as well, like 'reach' if something is lost – think of it, say 'reach' a few times and somehow you'll find what was missing. 'Change' is another one for helping sudden small problems, such as something in one's eye, a chafing shoe or cramp. 'Off' said a number of times puts most people to sleep. You are probably laughing at me, but it works and a paper named 'SignPost' is still thriving.

Mildred wrote a paragraph under the title of 'History'. I remember her first one began "Burning hooves! I can smell them yet! The blacksmith's shop was where the TD Bank stands now." The Hardware store used to be an ice cream 'parlour' and she wrote of what a treat ice cream was and how she and her sisters would try to make a 2-cent cone last all the two mile walk home. She wrote of long ago winters when the snow was so deep and so hard on top that one could drive a sleigh over the field fences and how many children couldn't go to school. There were two hitching posts in front of the local store, Crocketts. They were three feet high and the snow had to be dug out so horses could be tied up. Mildred and I both thought it 'peculiar funny' when she backed into one and later, I the other, knocking them both into history.

Most of the '60s turmoil seemed to pass Dorchester by until news came that the Beatles were coming to Toronto! Everyone was in love with them from that Sunday evening TV show when Ed Sullivan introduced them to North America. Every teen adored the thought of them coming to Canada. For us, their songs became the background to life as Ian had inherited his Dad's talent and was very good on his guitar. We felt so badly when he said, "I wish you or Dad would say something about my playing" and for not having the gumption to tell him how we loved and admired how well he could play. Sometimes kids have a hard time with their parents. One day Stan came home with tickets for that Toronto concert. Anne and Ian went ballistic! Actually being a part of the screaming, historic crowd, seeing and hearing the Beatles was, and maybe still is, a highlight of their lives.

The next excitement was when Anne was chosen to be the High School's representative at an international conference at the UN in New York. As she had an itchy foot even then, she was delighted. We had to take her to Toronto's new airport and as the boys had been complaining about not being out of Ontario, we decided to go on to Montreal – Ian, Pete, Robin and I. It was a great experience for all of us, a mind-stretcher and a good memory. The boys had the same shock that I'd had years before finding people speaking a different language. Hardly anyone had any English so it was fun ordering meals and finding a place to stay. Can you believe there were no traffic lights? 'Gendarmes' in smart uniforms and white gloves directed traffic at every main intersection and when they saw our Ontario licence plates, they stopped all traffic, bowed, and waved us through!

We admired the huge Jacques Cartier Bridge which had replaced the one I had seen collapsed in 1931, marvelled at the great river, admired the iron staircases on the older houses and the little playgrounds in subdivision corners, fenced in and well used. And baguettes! - After the soft white loaves in Ontario, they were incredible. I wish I had known then that they originated in Napoleon's wars so that his armies could take their food with them, stuffed down a trouser leg. Those three days had cost more than we had planned, leaving us one choice: gas to get home. We started driving. The 401 highway was newly paved west of Montreal and we were the only car on the road. When it was quite dark, it felt we were at the end of the earth and suddenly the back-seaters were really excited about something. "Oh! Look! Mum! Stop!" We all climbed out to see seven glowing lights above us, not very high, seeming to be playing together. While we watched, fascinated, the lights turned and twisted, almost touched each other than darted away, dancing in the sky. We felt a great empathy and joy with them but suddenly they all stayed motionless for a second, as if they had realized they were being watched, then fast as light they streaked off across the western sky. We felt like weeping at their going.

Ian stayed awake to keep me company all that long drive home, both of us marvelling at what we had seen. We were every glad of each other's company when eventually we reached that long stretch of dark country east of Woodstock. The 401 takes the height of land where it can, and down in that dark valley was a huge orange glow, pulsating, unlikely to be a barn fire with no other lights around it. It really scared us, seemingly evil where the dancing lights had been totally good and it was a relief to eventually leave it behind. There was no mention of fires in any paper that next week.

The two younger boys, when they were 15 and 13, had an invitation to drive out to Alberta with friends of Stan's to stay with their uncle Edgar. Off they went with summer sleeping bags, not much money, but a promise of more in the mail. Things didn't work out the way we had expected as their cousin, Doug, dropped in to Red Deer and suggested that he take them to Banff on his way

to Vancouver. Doug drove down to Crowsnest Pass and the three of them climbed Turtle Mountain for a view of the Frank Slide from atop the mountain. The next day, Doug drove to Banff and dropped Peter and Robin off, thinking they could just sleep in the park, and the boys had no problems with that adventure. Edgar called to tell us about it and we asked about food, and money? No, they'd gone off before he'd thought about it. Well! What a nightmare the next days and particularly nights were. For them, and for us, helpless, three thousand miles away. We thought of the bears in the park smelling them. Did they have enough money to stay in a motel, if there was one? Those thin sleeping bags would be almost useless in the mountains. It really was gosh awful. They told us afterwards how it was a bit scary during the night, about how they made a sort of shelter with a picnic table and some tarp that they had bought. They were camping at Tunnel Mountain campground which didn't have a store for food, so they did get hungry, cold and then the wolves started to howl. They didn't know if they would be alive come morning. It was a wild experience for them. I guess it's good to know hunger and learn first-hand an appreciation of safety and warmth, but they were so young, so precious. We felt like criminals for letting them get into such a risky situation and it took a long, long time to forgive Doug.

CHAPTER 20

Just after her 17th birthday in April 1965, Anne enrolled in a new three-semester Humanities course at Guelph University that had been an Agricultural College, Veterinary School and Home Economics School until that time. She thought it would be challenging to be part of a new venture which shouldn't be missed, giving one of the teachers in Dorchester cause to give me a good telling off for her "letting the school down. We get credit for each Ontario Scholar." We didn't know. It was not only the school that missed her. We felt we had lost an arm and a leg both. I wept all the way back with the empty car and our dear No. 95 never seemed the same without her. She wanted to become a city planner but was told that that was a man's job. Then she met Bruce and after graduating, they married in 1969. Her B.A. didn't help her find work until she took a typing course but she never wished she had joined the 98% of her classmates who went into teaching as there was a cyclical shortage that year.

By 1972, Ian was working in London and with a take-out one night, won a trip for two to the U.K. It was summer so he invited Rob to go with him which was a great experience for them both, especially seeing the actual buildings written about in English text books. They had some time in London and went up to Suffolk to stay with Grampa. Rob had to come back for school but Ian stayed, having fallen in love with England and a girl! He enjoyed working with a small, young company, Virgin, a group of young enthusiasts under founder, Richard Branson, cutting records of popular songs.

He knew I would be working late on the nights before press day, so that is when he called. Once, thinking of the five hours' time difference I asked "What's it like there this morning?" He had a flat at the edge of one of London's parks and it was early May. "Wonderful," he said, "hold on, I'll open the door" and there, across three thousand miles came the morning chorus of English song birds. One of completely lovely gifts I have been given – this one extra special as I really missed him badly.

Ian considered himself an Agnostic which seemed a bit odd when he told me of a thought he had, that the regular occurrences of eclipses where the shadow of the Earth exactly covers the moon seems more like a clear statement from some creative force than by happen chance. "It's really the

only way a message could be given to humanity," he said. I find that arresting and wonder why it's not in Greek philosophy or in the Bible. Perhaps it is.

After a couple of years in England, he went to Australia where he worked in a print shop and then at a boat yard in Melbourne as he had had some experience in making a fibreglass yacht in Dorchester. All of us are so lucky, tremendously blessed, as when a boat was being launched, a plank flew up. "Duck" came the shout. Ian did but the plank grazed his scalp. While his head was healing he went to stay with his cousin, Peter Peploe, in Ryde, near Sydney, who told me that they were surprised that he was never, ever without a cap. He didn't tell them about the accident but was grateful for their hospitality. All we knew about it was from a letter saying, "I had a bit of an accident."

1967 was a truly special year for Canada. It saw the country's first Centennial an epic event, imaginatively celebrated with a world exhibition on Montreal Island, 'Expo'. Pavilions from dozens of countries offered their own ethnic food and crafts with dancing and music, you can imagine what a mind-stretcher they were to the majority of 'Canuks'. The Israeli tent was charming-- a desert at the door and slowly, to music, water flooded the sand and flowers bloomed! A fascinating backdrop to all these novelties was the great river flowing along below.

We were there on a SignPost invitation, over the first weekend of July. Stan, Pete, Rob and I boarded with a French family in a totally black and white house. Thousands of people were in a lighthearted burst of patriotism, excitement – such happy crowds. As well as Expo, the country was on the cusp of change. A handsome, urbane Montrealer, Pierre Trudeau, was about to take the Liberals in to a successful election. He was an intelligent, world traveller, friend to the famous and wealthy, and a breath of fresh air to almost everyone. Canada, we thought, was going to own the 20th Century after all.

During the evening of the 1st, everyone was dancing, laughing and waiting for the Centennial fireworks to make a grand finale. Then word flickered through the crowds that the fireworks weren't here but in Ottawa. Why? Everyone was taken aback – hurt and unbelieving! Then another word went round that the last underground train was leaving in a half hour! English soccer crowds are nothing to the great wave of humanity which quickly solidified in a panicky press of people - scared of being marooned on the island, no fireworks, no trains, no money! We were lucky to be near the exit gate in the animal-named parking area, letting us out to the highway. No dancing lights along the 401 this time.

In the seventies, Pete, Rob and their friends, now with their licences, went off to town on Friday and Saturday nights and the little bits they told me were funny, but alarming. They were lucky not to get arrested when Pete rented a gorilla suit and went jumping about downtown. It would be interesting to know if his life would be the same had that happened. They'd come home full of high spirits but the liquid sort didn't seem to affect either of them as it did their friends. My memories of those late nights is of the kids hastily cleaning up vomit and I wondered, when their friends seemed prepared to sleep over, if their parents were worrying where they were. My offered phone was rejected!

Grade 13 ended with Pete saying that he had learned more in that year than he had in all the other years at school. It was 1975, oil was booming in Alberta, and he wanted to part of the opportunity that was out west. He asked me to type letters to companies in Edmonton that he'd just graduated with honours and did they have a job available? All of me was praying "No! No! No! – stay home

and go to university". Two of the kids away was too much already. The letters got mailed and the first company Pete visited had him start on a rig the next morning. It was hard, dangerous work, but interesting and it paid well. A few months later, he happened chanced to meet up with a classmate, Gord Bontje, which resulted in them starting a construction business together. 'Laebon' is now one of Red Deer's leading house construction companies and Pete has a growing empire of John Deere and related dealerships.

The next two years passed in a hurry and there was Rob itching to get out west where the action was. Who could blame him? He got his Grade 12 certificate after realizing that an education was a good thing to have and we have summer school teacher, Mr. Dool, to thank for that. Rob came home after the first day, a changed young man, all lit up and happy. "There's a great teacher there. He talked to me as if I was a person. He's the first teacher who ever asked me what I thought." As Pete was away for commencement, Rob was asked to accept the many awards he had won, in his place. I think that that was when he realised the satisfaction of doing well, which had escaped him all through his school years. Not surprising when teacher after teacher ridiculed his hope of being a pilot, and complained about him not being like his brother. By July of 1976, he too was making money on an oil rig, boarding with Pete and Gord. The image of him walking up the street, away, beloved last child, is with me forever. Too young, far too young, but what can one do when his father came, alone, to Canada at fifteen? Over all the sadness of their leaving and worry for them, we were full of pride for their courage and ambition.

They both came home every now and then, either sharing a car or taking a 'Red Eye' flight getting into Toronto around 5:30 am. All too soon, they'd be off again with a care package and the wheels of whosever car turning, turning all those miles back to Alberta. We couldn't sleep until we knew they were safely back. Once, a deer crashed into the friend's car and we heard later about them being stranded in Winnipeg – with no money. This was Rob and Wayne Danis. I guess it's beneath a young man's dignity to ask parents for a loan or perhaps they had money which was unattainable there at night in the middle of Canada.

That August, Rob worked for a hard skipper on the salmon harvest. The next year, he stopped to ask a man who was fixing up his boat if he needed a hand. Rob found a kindred spirit in Lindy and became a beloved, adopted son. They had two happy years together pulling in the same amount of salmon as the other skippers who mocked them for not working on Sundays. Lindy and his wife were so kind to him, including nursing him through a severe bout of 'mono'. We admired him so much when he did what he had always wanted, got his pilot's licence, staying with Pete and Gord while he went to Red Deer College. He once told me that having Pete for a brother was the best thing that ever happened to him. Later, he fell in love with the wild BC coastline with its tangle of washed-up logs. Once, at Vancouver Harbour in the dark, he saw what he was sure was a Russian sub, lurking just below the water line.

Early in his flying career, an engine gave up over dense bush in BC. He was commended for the way he handled the crash and took care of his passengers but he hurt his back which has been a problem ever since. That is a lesson – always see a doctor after any accident. He and the plane were licensed in Alberta, the accident happened in BC, along with no doctor's report made his securing disability compensation a marathon struggle.

After that, he flew for a Lakehead business, putting in hundreds of unpaid, overtime hours with the promise of having first chance to buy when the time came. When it did, the owner gave him a

weekend to come up with a million dollars. So Rob found, via the internet, that a pilot was needed at a remote lodge in Northern BC. A gruff voice answered his call, "Turn up on Monday morning". That was five days away! He and Jennifer had bought a used motorbike for Ryan so to save the airfare and have his own wheels, he set off on that – stopping at Red Deer on the way. A thousand miles lay ahead of him. At the end of the next day, the bike broke down, a problem which Rob didn't have the tools to fix. He sat on the side of the road, utterly despairing at ever getting to the job when along came another biker. The rider was a master mechanic with all the right tools. The bike was fixed and he was on his way. The way wound through the mountains and as he turned a corner on one of those perilous tracks – the road was full of wild sheep. What to do but charge! He gunned the gas and "the herd opened up like the Red Sea," he said. When he eventually reached the Lodge, he was asked to demonstrate landings. It was a perfect day, "a piece of cake" he said and after the third easy touchdown, the Swiss owner, Urs, gave him a huge bear hug, saying that he'd been looking for him all his life!

CHAPTER 21

During all these years, our young people met and married beautiful partners, had babies and two of them, Anne and Bruce's daughters, have given the family the beginnings of the next generation. Jennifer and Gord have two sons, Callum 11 and Matthew 9, now in 2011 while Tish and Brad have Jeremy who is 4 and a blue-eyed two-year old, Sydney.

Robert is Pete and Kathy's first son, born in 1983, then Mark in 1985 and in 1989 we were blessed with our three youngest grandchildren, Diane, Ryan and Sajni. Jessica had arrived the previous year and became a very bright student taking the IB programme and graduating at 22 as a Chartered Accountant. Ryan and Jess' parents are Robin and Jennifer who live in Thunder Bay where Ryan is very good at doing renovations to the family's properties. Diane is teaching Grade one at the Red Deer School which she had attended and says "It's a funny feeling, going into the staff room at recess." She is an Honours Grad from Edmonton U. Sajni, who is a Master's Program at UWO, is about to start her first internship at the library at Guelph University. Rob and Mark have started an ambitious 'extreme sports' website, Komunity, based in Kelowna. They are all grown up, way too fast, but bless them, and their parents, all wonderful adults. As we disembarked from that little freighter, the Cairness, I vowed to make Canada better than it was without us and wow, I think we are on the way to doing that.

After the children had scattered, SignPost grew to a subscription total of 3500 by August of 1988. We had six employees including Ian who has come home, in 1980, the very best Christmas gift. I thought it the most interesting job in the world, after rearing children. We'd had an addition built on to No. 95 after months of Council deliberations, so that the office could expand and I could be close to Pa. We used both levels which worked out well and when we first moved, a small miracle happened. Those coincidences! We all have them and so often they are helpful to the point of astonishment and wonder. Is there a benevolent finger giving our lives a little push here and there? This particular miracle happened one Saturday, a couple of weeks after we moved into the new addition. A friend called from Toronto that he was at a sale and a commercial camera was there. "Just what you need," he said. "Thousand bucks would get it." It was what we needed so two hours later, it was deposited on the doorstep, well not quite, and it was enormous. The sky looked like rain but how in the world could we get it upstairs on a Saturday afternoon? At that moment, a car pulled up and out leapt four young men who had just had a big idea and wanted to put an ad in the paper. They had a free advertisement and that 500 lb. camera went up to its new home amid a

lot of laughter and good fellowship. We had changed from the original well-used duplicator turning out one sheet at a time to having the paper printed by the new offset method in town. This decision was made while sitting in the sun at Canada's Centennial bash, Expo, and the camera would save us money. The change was approved by our male readers, but most women mourned the loss of 'our little green paper".

Then we had the sad loss of my father. Without the need to be at home with Grampa, the lure of a large, sunny living room with a fireplace grew stronger so when a property on the stub of Dorchester Road came on the market, SignPost moved there after Ian had done some renovations. We had a print shop at the back, which Ian ran, helped by a boy just up from Peru, Rickardo, who I had happen chance met at the bus depot in Toronto. After having my head stretched by Peter excitedly explaining the wonders of computers, in 1987 we bought a Mac for $10,000 which was a great help. Soon we were wondering how we ever did all the typing and headlines, waxing and cutting. How I wish I knew then what I do now about running a business, time and people management. For one, I'd have had the editorial written earlier. It was always a strange thing how on the rare occasions I managed the editorial ahead of the deadline, something far more important invariably happened insisting that it be changed.

In 1988, Stan had a second stroke, leaving him needing constant care and oversight so we struggled along for a few months until Providence walked in the door. It was the editor of the Tillsonburg paper wanting to know if SignPost might be for sale. Later, it was obvious that he was making a shrewd deal as word got around that a Newfoundland conglomerate was in the market for Southwestern Ontario community papers. However, it was a relief for me, although I have felt very badly ever since as a Dorchester man had, years earlier, said he'd like to buy it. I had completely forgotten about him.

After the sale was complete, I felt like a squeezed-out sponge and woke to a world of emptiness. Gone were the 5 am drives taking the papers to the country stores. It was a weekly trip I always enjoyed with the earth in darkness, everything grey until gradually colour came creeping back into the world. Gone were the happy contacts with people. Gone were the 16+ hour days. For the first four years after selling the paper, I wrote a weekly column for Signpost including experiences of two trips which provided a lot to talk about. I'd like to include the copies faxed home from there, but this story has grown too long already. Generously, Ian and Dharshi offered to look after Stan for a month in 1990 and again in 1991 so I could go to Germany and then to Dharshi's home country, Sri Lanka.

I went with a concert tour by London's German Club and found the country had altogether unexpected strength, in the rolling hills, the rebuilt towns, the autobahns, in the rails that go straight from A to B, across valleys and through mountains. One can see how Beethoven came by his heroic symphonies. The famous Munich to Hamburg express rail was being built that year so we had the opportunity to see innovative tunnels, grassed and shrubs for wild things to use instead of finding their routes barred by the track. Trains running on older rails came and went on perfect time. One town square had a bronze woman, arms outstretched, to welcome home comers as well as to measure yards of fabric for the town's merchants years ago.

Do go to see Sri Lanka. It is unbelievably hot but beautiful, where the original habitants, the Singhalese, and Tamils more recently from India, lively comfortably together. The war, now over, was in the northern tip of the island. Pat Pritchard, Dharshi's adopted parent, and I had a week long

drive through the interior to Kandy, the ancient capital where 4,500 year-old ruins are left from former civilizations. A mountain-sized rock invites climbers to see the swim pools and the throne of a fugitive monarch and his court of long ago. Under an overhanging ledge up there, are rock paintings of beautiful young women who look so real that one expects them to come to life.

Everyone grows red peppers and in September the paved roads were lined with them drying in the sun. People knew about Canada. "Aah! You have tanks" meaning the Great Lakes which they compared to their 'tanks', which are huge man-made reservoirs one can barely see across, built a thousand years ago. There were shelters high up in the trees for safety when elephants come through, and innovative farming under the young teak trees which have gown up since the original were harvested. It's a lovely country, self-governing since 1947 with its new capital, Columbo, reaching out over the former rubber plantations, very cosmopolitan and luckily, untouched by the 2004 tsunami which devastated much of the eastern and southern coastlines.

Another year, English friends came over and we drove down to Key West. The Everglades at the southern part of Florida are fantastic with miles and miles of silent-standing water reflecting trees and bushes with low islands or 'hammocks' where indigenous people live. It's as though the whole continent has drained there and is silently waiting. We felt like interlopers and were glad to leave them behind. The road to Key West is a series of bridges joining low islands which curl out into the Gulf with gas stations manned by laid-back attendants, here and there. The only other signs of life were the buzzards nesting on top of the utility poles. The little town still had a few hippies living up in trees or in shacks on the beach and the air of lassitude was overwhelming. We went for a swim and had another surprise. At waist deep water – such wonderfully soft warm water – we found that the Gulf floor is a lawn. As we were pulling up some grass to make sure, shouts from the beach came "Shark! Shark!" with gestures to get back fast. Funny feeling that, splashing, crashing through resisting water which had suddenly become menacing and watching a shore line which was so reluctant to come closer.

Pete and some friends had driven down a couple of years earlier when hippies were the predominant species. He had come back shocked at the violence they had seen along the way and shocked us by recounting how they had all sold blood to buy the gas to get home. When he was seventeen or thereabouts, he took scuba diving lessons and also learned how to parachute jump. He went off to a small airfield near Simcoe where people could go for jumps and came home elated to have made his first. Of course, Rob wanted to do it too. The next week they both went off early saying "We'll be OK. Don't worry about us!" We wouldn't have been so sick with dread if they had thought to tell us that people are attached to the plane for their first three jumps. It may have been one of their best experiences, in hindsight for Rob who said he was terrified to jump but did, but it was one of the worst for us. Stan insisted on going to work, but me, I went back to bed and pulled the blankets over my head in total misery. When they got back home, well satisfied with themselves, we were so proud of them and still are. They brought home a portable barbeque as a peace offering!

Every year we had interesting visitors from overseas. One Christmas, we found beds for a truly international group – Roger from New Zealand, Gregg from South Africa, a teacher from the U.K., Judith from Vancouver and Dharshi from Sri Lanka. It was a bitterly cold spell while they were with us and somehow the chimney became lined with ice which killed the water heater. You can imagine the chaos! As I cannot remember Pa being there, it must have been the year that he went to stay with Jan and her family in Johannesburg. They had left England in 1973 when Alison, their daughter, was three or four and had her own passport.

Several times the sons of friends came from England during the school holidays to work in the tobacco harvest. The farmers always needed help and it paid well. One year, four chiropractic graduates, one the daughter of my friend, Anne Ryder, came out for a celebratory holiday. Charlie Whipp, who had called about the camera, took them off to see the oil jerkers at Petrolia and over the river into Michigan. Being in the fabled USA was a big thrill for them. They didn't have US visas so I think that Charlie was probably the only person who could have gotten them ashore and back again without trouble.

All three of our boys were eager to work during school holidays. There was always work with the hay harvest until the adoption of those tiny implements that throw out such huge, round bales. There were always jobs available in the tobacco harvest and a variety of other things they did. There was nothing more than babysitting for girls before Tim Hortons arrived.

CHAPTER 21

We had a good friend in Vicky Wignall. She was a friend of 'Gram'ma Carnochan and the Mundy family from Wingham who so kindly loaned us their cottage on Lake Huron every summer. Sajni loved her dearly. "Micky! Micky! Micky", she'd exclaim, jumping up and down in excitement whenever she saw her. Vicki had had some interesting experiences coming out from war-time England to join her husband who was her training pilots in radio communication. She had been given the OK to leave the UK but was told to be ready to go at an hour's notice. When the telegram arrived, months later, she was told that a military car would be there to pick her up 'after dark' that night. She could take one small trunk and a carry-on. Leaving a mother weeping, "Who's going to look after me? She arrived at an unknown port and was hurried on board what she thought was a mine sweeper. It left immediately, part of a convoy of ships making the perilous voyage back across the North Atlantic. The voyage took almost two weeks.

When the war ended, she and Trev went back to England to apply for immigration, telling Vicki's mother that there would be a home for her when she needed it. She came out to live with them as soon as she turned 60! Trev died from a massive heart attack before they had time to get established and Vicki, with two dependent children and her mother, had to find a job. She found one in a local law office but the owner, knowing how desperately she needed an income, took advantage and left her trying to get by on the minimum pay allowable. When she retired, she found that her headaches were caused by a brain tumour – which is where I met her, in hospital following the surgery. In spite of all these problems and I didn't know till much later, that she had taken in and cared for a lady who had been kind to them during the war. She was, like Mildred, full of laughter and good humour and also a bit naughty. At a right moment she would come out with:

There was a young lady from Hodd
Who was sure she'd been blessed by God
But t'was not the Almighty
Who lifted her nighty
But Roger, the lodger, the sod.

And another time:

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife
Nor lead his ox to slaughter.
But nowhere does the Good Book say
We cannot covet our neighbour's daughter.

We used to go for Sunday drives around the sandy hills of Lake Erie's north shore, taking a picnic – Vicki, Sajni, Pepper (Ian's border collie) and I. Picnic places with a view are hard to find, but a dirt road between two fields of potatoes above the lake looked inviting. So we unfolded table and chairs, put out the thermos and snacks thinking that no farmer would mind loaning his trail, when along came a huge John Deere tractor and two enormous wagons! Potato harvest time! There were laughs all round as we gathered up. I wish you could have seen how, within minutes, steady lines of big, white potatoes jostled each other to be the first to fall into the wagons. It was obvious that people had helped themselves but the farmer laughed. " The joke is on them" he said. "These are special spuds for the chip factory. They go into mush when you cook them." All the time we were there, crows were meeting in the field across the road, just over a ridge. Hundreds of them came in one after the other. I wished there had been a gate so we might have been able to see them all, but now I'm glad we didn't disturb them.

Interesting and intelligent birds are crows. One hears of them getting together for a spell of silence when one of their own perishes. It is one of the things one reads about and keeps an open mind about, however, last fall when the tree-trimmers came to keep the big maple which grows through the deck at 183 Belgrade, in check, they collected the remains of a crow from the roof. I found that enormously interesting as back in April, crows had come winging in, roosting on a middle-sized tree just down the road until there were more crows than tree. They stayed, unmoving, for maybe ten minutes, maybe a bit longer, and then, all together, took wing and each went off in different directions.

Remember the line at the front of this book?

Mildred's sudden passing in 1984 meant that her sister Helen came to live with Jack, her brother, who, ever sadly, had never married He should have had sons like himself, one of the world's kindest men. Helen had taught Grade 1 in North York, Toronto, for years and had a fund of delightful stories about her little students. She became a local celebrity after she had been asked to speak at an area meeting and had her audiences in gales of laughter, as she had the gift of telling stories in a self-depreciating way, the hallmark of every good humorist. She laughed about being out on playground duty one summer when a ten-year old came up, slipping her hand in hers. "Miss Calvert, don't you think Miss Wilson is sexy?" Miss Wilson was a new teacher also out on playground duty. When Helen answered, "Don't you think Miss Calvert is sexy?" the child went into such peals of unbelieving laughter so that she had to lean against the school fence to stay on her feet.

Another one is about 6 year-old Matthew. As many of the pupils were Jewish, they had to attend special Holy days, some for all day, some for just the morning. Matthew was at one of these so at noon break he came skipping down to Helen's room. "Hello, Miss Calvert. I'm back." Helen said, "Well, I'm pleased to see you." "What did you do while I was away," he asked, anxiously. "There weren't many children left," she said, "so we just did finger painting." "Ooh!" Matthew's little face puckered up. "Ooh! I just love finger painting. I wish I was a Christian."

I am doing my best, but I could never compete with Helen telling these stories.

Helen's brother Jack and her four sisters grew up as a hilarious family. Father was Reeve of the Township and took life a bit seriously, Mildred had told me, but their mother had a wacky sense of humour that she had passed on to her children. She liked to tell me about the special Christmas ritual all the farm families observed. During the week before, and the one after Christmas Day, each family visited around with the aim of tasting twelve different Christmas cakes. As this was well before cars and telephones, it meant getting the sleigh and two horses ready as well as all the children into their 'Sunday best'. Mother would put on her new outfit and off they would go, five or six miles to some of their outlying farming friends. It was the coming home by starlight that Mildred most loved to talk about The children were snuggled together under blankets, holding tight to the heated bricks which they all took as an insurance against getting stranded in the deep snows and perishing cold of those way-back years. They would peek out to see the moon rising over the tree tops and realise with awe how much there was to learn about things and how very much they loved their family.

Jack and Helen enjoyed each other's company and good humour, sharing the family farmhouse on the Town Line, Concession 4, and north of the Thames River. Sadly, that ended abruptly during a thunderstorm one March night in 1989. Helen was woken by a 'thump' to find the lights were out but by the flashes of lightening she found Jack on the floor of his bedroom. During that week of mourning by the entire neighbourhood, hoarfrost remained on every twig and branch through warm sunny days. No one could remember such a spectacle and many thought that nature was as arrested by grief as were all of us. It was decided that it must have been because of the cold sap coming up and keeping the branch frozen. The loss of Jack was hard on most people as he could be relied on, always, for help and for making everyone feel good about themselves and the world. It left a big hole in my life as up through all the years with SignPost, very often, early on Saturday mornings, the telephone would ring. "Don't know if you'd be interested," he'd say, "but …." and go on to tell me of a happening which otherwise I'd have missed, and he would come to pick up the camera and me and we'd enjoy amazingly interesting mornings somewhere in the countryside.

One of Helen's stories was when a new boy, Yuri, came to her class. His parents had sent a note that he played the piano so Helen arranged a day for him to play for the children. Yuri came to school that morning in a formal suit, shoes double polished and when introduced, he bowed low to his 6 year-old classmates, clicked his little heels together and slipped reverently onto the piano stool. Helen said that she had never heard such music and that every child sat in rapt admiration. When he ended, another low bow and a little hand shot up amidst all the clapping. "Miss Calvert. I think Yuri plays the piano better than you do!" Helen stifled a laugh and retorted, "But didn't you notice. Yuri needs two hands and Miss Calvert only needs one!" Which was the only way she could start 'O Canada' every morning.

She is hugely missed and now Josie, the youngest who is 94, is the last survivor of a lovely family who gave so much joy and happiness to their world.

Dorothy Dundas, whom we had met on St. Peter's front steps on our first Sunday in Dorchester, had been widowed and of course, grew older, but kept her liveliness and good humour. Their only son, George, an Edmonton doctor, was anxious about her when she fell out of bed one morning and couldn't get up without the help of a neighbour so they decided that she would be better and safer in a retirement home. She hated to leave Dorchester where she had lived all her life, but had no other choice having just a niece and one nephew in the area. When Pete and Kathy invited me,

or on my way to Victoria where Peter and Margaret Day rented a cottage each winter and very kindly invited me to share it, I'd stop off in Calgary and fly up to Edmonton to stay overnight with her. One year when I went up to see her, my plane was piloted by two very cool blondes and when I told our lunch companions this they were shocked saying "weren't you scared?"

She was very interested in this book and suggested that I should include some of the 'wise old sayings' which modern society disregards. "They are important enough to have been handed down for maybe hundreds of years," she would say. "Add them to your book and preserve them," so we did lots of remembering and came up with:

A fool and his money are soon parted
Pride comes before a fall
Two plus two doesn't always make four
Moderation in all things, including moderation
A stitch in time saves nine.

All of these have double, sometimes triple meanings.

It's the early bird that gets the worm
Waste not, want not
The ship was lost of a h'apoth of tar (h'apoth = a dime's worth)
Every cloud has a silver lining
You have to be a friend to have a friend
Never give away your shirt until you have another one
What goes around, comes around
Don't count your chickens until they are hatched
Give a man a fish he eats for a day; show him how to fish and he can eat for the rest of his life
All that glitters is not gold
Laughter lightens the day
Night tales and morning tales don't always agree
An hour's sleep before midnight is worth two after
The sun will come up tomorrow
You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink
No use shutting the barn door when the horse is gone
Cats look down on you, dogs look up to you but pigs is equal
If you give some people an inch, they'll take a yard
If you want your dreams to come true don't oversleep
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
Problems never come in singles
Don't despair, spring is on the way
Kings sometimes get sore feet

I could keep on, but Dorothy's are here and enough is enough. The inscription on a bench which four of us had installed at the entrance to the Dorchester Park in her and her husband's memory has the dates of their birth and death. We thought that their friends would be reminded, and others interested, that Dorothy passed away just days before her hundredth birthday. I hope they know that the seat is there. They would be pleased.

CHAPTER 22

Right on top of the awfulness of the last of our beloved children going off to far places was a first visit from good friends from Suffolk, Charles and Ros Castell. They were flying over Quebec while I was weeping and watching Robin's back grow smaller and smaller as he walked up Hamilton Road to meet his travelling companions. At any other time their visit would have been such a pleasure but there was only a minute to tidy up and put flowers in their room before hitting the road for the airport. During the two weeks they were here, we went to the very new Ontario Place, a recreation peninsula built out from Toronto's waterfront using the dug-out rock from the city's first underground train system. The African Lion Safari had recently opened also. Very friendly monkeys climbed all over the car and we had a few bad moments thinking the white rhino seemed about to charge us.

All our many guests marvelled at Niagara Falls and were excited at being able to see the fabled United States of America just 'over there'. We had a funny experience when Stan's brother, Edgar and his new wife Wilma, were staying with us. Of course, Niagara was a must see. They had come from England and stopped off on their way out to Alberta where Edgar was the Minister of a group of area Churches. Wilma was just back from Missionary work in India and they longed to just stand on U.S soil, just over the Rainbow Bridge. The customs officer became excited about Wilma's passport. Stamped in India and the U.K. with her new married name written on the top of the page in what looked like pencil and no Canadian stamp. They were both taken into the office after he had told me to park the car "just there. And don't move." After at least a half hour, they came out, giggling and were just allowed to stand under the signpost saying 'to New York' 'Boston' while I took a photograph. After seeing them into the car, the officer, with his hand firmly on my door, led us back to the bridge and wished us well. We laughed all the way home.

The importance of that event emerged years later after Wilma had been refused the OAS when she turned 65. She had no proof of ever landing in Canada so officially, she wasn't here. A few years later she discovered a crumpled piece of paper stamped with the date and 'REFUSED ENTRY TO THE U.S.A'. All was well!

Charles and Ros had tickets for the Calgary Stampeded and discovered that they were four seats away from Pete and his friend, Gord. They remember it being incredibly cold, in July, but wonderfully exciting. I saw them again three months later when I went to England to help Pa sell his house and come back with me. There was another strike on at Pearson Airport so the plane was diverted to Detroit. It was an interesting trip for us as we were somehow given First Class seats but then it was discovered that Pa needed a Visa to enter the U.S. Someone high-tailed back to the Embassy to get one which meant us waiting on the tarmac for an hour with the pilots getting antsy. First Class on British Airways was sheer luxury. We flew low over Nova Scotia with, red, eroded soil visible miles out to sea. It was late when we reached Detroit, and the only sign of life was a couple of customs officers at the gate. We had a horrific landing as if the pilots were still angry about the hold-up and U.S. regulations. We landed far too fast, with a bump, a jump and a slamming on of brakes, in spite of which we stopped mere metres away from the terminal. Pa and I were the first to get off to "Uh ha, here they come!" and were directed to a waiting bus that left for Toronto the moment everyone was aboard. No one asked for that Visa! It was Halloween, October 31st, 1975. The bus driver agreed to stop at the Dorchester Road exit off the 401 for us and also phoned Stan to tell him about when we'd be arriving. It was pitch, pitch black when we climbed out and stood there beside the 401 at 3 am and no traffic. Car lights came across the bridge and a

familiar voice called out. Pa was a month away from his 90th birthday and took it all in great good humour.

He had stayed with us most winters and went back at the end of April just days before the leaves tumbled out on the trees. "Stay another week!" we'd beg, but he had his garden to plant and most probably couldn't wait to get back to a peaceful life on his own. He enjoyed our friends and made some of his own. People said, "He's a perfect English gentleman, so tweedy and erect," admiring him as he walked down to get our mail. He wasn't pleased when some young boy greeted him with "Hello, Pops" so perhaps it is better now when kids don't even look at passers-by on the street. He had two tiny strokes. We didn't know what to do. Now, new drugs administered within two or three hours reverse the damage. When he had a third one, the doctor had him go to hospital but they really had no treatment and he was there for all of July and hated every minute of it. It was so sad, but like most things, there are two sides to the problem. The doctor said to me "you might as well take him home. He's the most stubborn man I've ever met." We had a gentle three and a half months when he talked more about family than we'd ever heard, and Jim came up when the moon was full as Pa always became very restless, but calmed down when Jim was there. He passed away very peacefully on November 12, 1980, just a week after his 95th birthday, leaving a huge emptiness in the house.

It was good that both Kathy and Dharshi were able to meet and talk with him during those weeks. That November brought the end of an era, happy for the most part, and a good life well lived. He was an inspiration and example to us with the many tragedies he had had to endure and yet he would come through them, to laugh again and never lost his interest in everything. Occasionally he would tire of reading books and once remarked that he'd had an interesting afternoon with 'Dick Shunery'. "If one can't find the world interesting, one might as well be dead," he wrote in his diary.

Ian came home five weeks later, well and surprisingly unchanged. It was so very good to see him again after his seven years of travelling and adventures. Perhaps it was his return but strangely, the personality of the young man I'd hired to edit SignPost so I could spend more time with Pa changed dramatically. He had been a great help and a pleasant addition to life, staying at No. 95 but suddenly he was antagonistic and sulky. His wife came to live in Dorchester at the same time and perhaps she wasn't happy here. The only reason we could think of, and even then his sudden attitude was strange, was that he had thought he could take over the paper, and with Ian home, realised that probably wouldn't happen. Stranger still was his absence when Mildred and I arrived home from England in May. On a scrubby little piece of yellow paper he had scribbled that he had got a job in Erin and "would I send his cheque to this address!!"

Stan had decided to retire a year early, in 1975. He had grown to hate the trucks thundering down the 401 and had joined Equity, the actor's guild, hoping to make up part of his salary with acting at the Huron County Playhouse. You may ask 'Why did he go on the highway?' Good question. Every now and then I'd suggest he take the perfectly good, hardly any further roads he had used before that stretch of 401 was open. But he never did. Maybe he needed an excuse.

His sister Helen and her family who lived in New Zealand invited him out for a visit. New Zealand was a pleasure but the three days of sunshine he was looking forward to in a Fiji stop-over became three days of monsoon rain. "You'd never believe that much water could come down," he said Two months after his return in 1982, he had a stroke which affected his eyesight but not his memory. I've written about the wonderful therapy he was given as his mind wasn't damaged, so he

could respond to doctors' questions and treatment. Britain's famous television-series doctor, Jonathan Miller, visited him twice (he was giving lectures on brain reactions to strokes at Hamilton University) creating a stir in the hospital and two lovely hours for us. With all the attention and mind-therapy, he made an almost complete recovery, except that he could no longer remember lines which was really sad as that meant the end of his theatre career.

Another stroke late in 1987 made life difficult for both of us as he lost more of his sight and confidence although he was lucky in having no paralysis. Pa's left arm and leg were paralysed after his last stroke and he didn't take ownership of it either. He'd touch his arm and ask, surprised, "What is this?"

We made a space – a little room – for Stan in the office on Jane Street by the big front window, but he was never happy there so that didn't last long. There was none of the attention and therapy that had helped him so much before so we visited the local new-age practitioners. What a mind-stretcher that was. A chiropractor tested for allergies by putting various foods in jars, on the patient's tummy and then asked them to stand and put an arm out sideways and stiffly and not let him push it down. Sometimes he couldn't but sometimes it was impossible to withstand his pressure that let him know what problem the patient had. This sounds weird but it is what I remember. A charming young therapist came to see Stan twice a week. He enjoyed her visits and seemed to improve a little except for anxiety dreams. The worst dream was when he was trying to direct a new play and his actors wouldn't do what he asked so it was chaos. When I told the therapist about it recurring night after night, she suggested to him that he 'take control of the dream and make the outcome the way he wanted it'. That seemed a very tall order, but it worked. He got his dream play on stage, a standing ovation and the thanks of those rebellious actors. So much one doesn't know. These treatments may be commonplace now but at the time they were awesome.

1991 brought his 80th birthday so the family arranged a reunion at Gracefield camp in Quebec. Stan's niece, Patricia Hughes, came from New Zealand and told us about putting a cork under one's pillow to prevent cramp. Six years later when Wat's buddy from Australia, Arthur Matheson, world champion axeman, came to visit his first request was for a cake of soap. "For a shower?" we asked. "No," he replied. "It stops me cramp." They both work. On his way to the Quebec site, Peter chose to drive through Chicago at 3 am to avoid heavy traffic. "Just like rush hour, you wouldn't believe it," he said. I marvelled at everyone finding the campground in the middle of the Gatineau River valley as it was long before GPS. The pieces about their Dad which the children each wrote pleased him tremendously. We have printed them with his story earlier in this book.

All the therapies helped him at first, but each one we tried, including months of acupuncture, levelled out, leaving him with very little improvement. In November of the following year, the doctor suggested a stay in Parkwood Hospital might help him but instead, he caught pneumonia and within two weeks, left us.

CHAPTER 23

Two years later, a friend came out from England whose late wife was my wartime friend of the 'Who goes there!' adventure. They had married during the war, so I had known Wat for over fifty years. When Maud's MS advanced, he wrote for her and because I was an old friend and far away, he told me of problems and worries which he couldn't tell anyone else. We had become good friends, both of us missing our partners and looked forward to those letters. We hadn't, however,

expected orchestras to start playing when we met at the airport in May of 1994. Wat's air ticket was for three weeks and was a bit of a laugh, that ticket. He didn't have any spare money, having given everything to his three children when he retired from farming. When an antique family wardrobe was sold for £600, he was urged to use the money for something he would enjoy. "I'll put it in the Bank," he said. "No!" the family said. They insisted, "What would you really like to do?" "Well," he replied tentatively, "I've always thought I would like to go to Canada." So here he was in a Canada golden with dandelions.

Wat Rutherford was a legend in his part of Northumberland, a knight in shining armour for the care he gave his ailing wife. They travelled and visited, went on adventures many healthy people would hesitate to start. The wheel chair, people told me, became a magic carpet and when the time came, three hundred people attended her funeral. He was a hero to young rugby players as many times Captain of Tynedale, the local team, as well as a County player.

I was stunned when we 'fell in love' like a couple of teenagers and he seemed happy to give up everything he loved in England to share my life. We went back several times, for treatment for his heart and in 1997 for a hip replacement but he never wanted to go for the start or end of the Rugby season as I'd hoped and expected he would. Perhaps he needed a bit more urging as he must have missed so much, having lived as full and jovial life as anyone could. He was the third child of a 'gentleman farmer' and had a Mother all eight children adored. They were a close and loving family when I was so happily embraced in 1994/5, all still living in their lovely farm houses and where family dinners were generous occasions with fifteen or more guests and quart jugs of thick cream would be emptied every time.

Hannah, the eldest, wept at her wedding because she had to leave home, even after having run away when she learned at 12 that she had twin baby sisters. She was a feisty lady who at 90 broke a hip while trying to cut her toenails. Heck was 6 feet 6 inches tall and started farming on hilltop land named 'Dukeashead'. He and Wat went to Australia to visit war-time friends, 'wood choppers' who were on their way to France when that country capitulated and they were directed instead to the north of England. Heck's wife, Mary, was always quoted as saying, "Don't bring him back! If he dies, I don't want him back." After Wat, came Will, handsome and a topnotch rugby player who was to play for England had the war not interfered. He took over the family farm, East Mill Hills, up the fell from Haydon Bridge. Cath, his wife, was the sweetest lady. Andrew enlisted in the army and came back to buy a farm in North Yorkshire which the family thought was far too far away.

Roger farmed 'The Stelling', a lovely farm with huge stone-built house and buildings shaded by chestnuts, just off the Military Road, the old Roman Road to the north. Hadrian's Wall, the famous barrier across the north of England to keep the 'barbarians' (the Scots) from marauding is within a few miles. It is interesting that it is built where the two coasts are closest, 72 miles. Roger's wife, Jean, is the sister of the late, well-known agriculturist, John Moffit and she and her sister-in-law, Margaret Dinning, are the only two left of those lovely, generous people. Now I am called the 'Matriarch' of our two families. Me, who never expected to see the year 2000!

Wat had a fund of funny stories and loved to tell them as much as people loved to laugh at them. I am forgetting, but I'll try to recall as many as I can. They were so short and simple, straight to the point as is the soul of Northumberland.

Up in the North of Scotland, a group of old-time bible readers called themselves the 'WeeFrees' as they had broken from the main church. When Maud and Wat went to a service on Sunday, all the congregation welcomed them and one couple invited them to tea. "This afternoon?" they asked, as they were just passing through. "Oh, dear! Oh no! It's Sunday," came the shocked answer.

At a regular service in Stirling, the Minister looked at the offering plate where there were two pennies. "Ahhh," he said, "I see we have a Highlander here today." "Nay, preacher," came a voice from the back. "There be two of us."

A teacher was taking a 2nd grade religious class. "Can anyone tell me where God is?" Hands went up. "He's in the thunder." "He's in Heaven." Little Mary had her arm straight up. "Where do you think God is Mary?" "I know where He is," she said. "He's in our house. Every morning when my Daddy wants to have a shave, he tries to open the bathroom door and then he rattles the handle and says, "My God! Are you still in there?!"

His classic is about an American who stopped at a Scottish hotel for dinner. All went well until cheese and biscuit time, when he asked for another pat of butter. The waiter said that he was sorry but his orders were one pat of butter. The visitor was a bit nettled. "Sorry," the young waiter said again and again. Getting angry, the American asked, "Do you know who I am? I have a ranch in Texas as big as Scotland, two Rolls Royces and a stable of racehorses. Now give me that butter!" "Sorry," repeated the server, "do you know who I am?" "No, I do not," chortled the other. "Well, I'm the man with the butter!"

These lose a lot without Wat's north-country accent and the generosity of spirit which was so much a part of him. Butter is 'booter' and his 'Texan' accent delightful. It would please him mightily to know that a professor at Western University who laughed uproariously when Wat told this, uses it in his Political Science course.

There's another pithy one which I cannot tell when ladies are present. Back many years ago, the country roads were kept in repair by groups of three workers who were supplied with tar and gravel. Stones too - I remember men sitting cracking flints and putting them aside while they has their noon 'bait', big chunks of home-baked bread with an onion they'd slice with their pocket knives and a huge piece of cheese or cold-boiled bacon. One day when 'Tarry Jack', well-known in Wat's neighbourhood, was tending the big iron tar pot on the fire, the owner of the 'big house' came clip-clopping down his driveway and scowled when he saw the new heap of gravel. "I don't care for the look of that, Jack!" he said. Jack had a quick retort, "Don't look at the bugger then!" No servitude in North Country folk.

A custom was still very popular when we were there called 'First Footing'. The first thing on New Year's Day a tall dark man had to knock on one's door and be invited in for a drink (Scotch, of course) and a piece of Christmas Cake to bring good fortune to the house and family in the coming year. Jim Dorrance came 'First Footing' to Dorchester but to my great sorrow I forgot to ask one of our new neighbours on Belgrave Avenue to do that for us for Wat's last New Year's morning.

We were back in England on several occasions for a family celebration or for medical treatment as the U.K. had a system of private care along with the universal health service. Doctors and surgeons have to work for the Health Service four days a week and can then treat patients on their own time, either in a private hospital or using the public system when there is time in the operating theatre, and

a bed and nursing care available. So one has to wait. Wat's hip operation was started at Friday midnight and took a while as the surgeon, charming man that he was, had to send to Newcastle for a larger 'bone' than he had expected to need.

The Hexham hospital, where we went, was built in a hurry during the Second World War. It consisted of a series of Nissen Huts – large, rounded corrugated-iron buildings – which were used for dozens of different needs across the country. These were joined in pairs end to end for the hospital with a central passage. As it was built by necessity up a steep hill, not a lot of flat land in Hexham visitors to the top ward wished for a bed themselves on which to recoup from the climb. Taking gurneys down with patients must have been a tricky process.

A bit contrary to common sense, Wat was eighty and me, eight years younger, but with the good wishes and appropriate jokes from both our families, we had a simple wedding in London on February 19, 1995 and in June set off on a drive across the continent. It began with a moon-lit ferry crossing Lake Michigan to start the discovery of a thousand interesting things. The U.S. was full of surprises. An entire store sold only cayenne pepper stored in huge bins. Another advertised 'Your choice of twenty 'dogs'. We took inviting little side roads to find waterfalls, unique little communities, really old farm buildings and once a grassy field full of life-sized plastic animals waiting for a camera call. When we drove a main road it was sad to see small town stores boarded up, and a few miles out a huge box store with the parking lots crammed with cars. We picnicked on the bank of the Mississippi with a local band enjoying a hilarious practice two days before the July 4th celebrations. Montana had sounded so romantic a place in Zane Grey's novels, but we found it totally monotonous, not a bird or animal and certainly no wide-horned steers. The only bit of life was a cop who eventually caught up with us. "Didn't you see me in your back-view mirror?" he asked. He let us off for five dollars which went straight into his pants pocket.

A little further on, Wat noticed a red stone half way up a bank and he had to have it. No difficulty getting up, but carrying it down was different. We had a laugh afterwards when we realized it would have rolled down had we thought of that. Back in Ontario, it has become part of our family history – a memorial stone for Willie.

We were suddenly in a little mountainous area where the unprotected roads were totally scary. The rocks across the canyons were ablaze in colours, catching the afternoon sun and there seemed to be flowers everywhere with no time for the driver to enjoy them. So it was with mixed feelings, relief and sadness that we dropped down to 'Nine Sleeps', an ancient First Nations village, a stop-over on countless summer migrations. That was where – I think, or nearby – we came on a statue of 'Wild Bill Hickok' which excited Wat as his father had often talked about going to hear him speak about the Wild West and what a mind-stretcher that was for a lot of people who hadn't been out of Northumberland.

Then we were in the centre of a moonscape – the famous Badlands. They would certainly be bad to walk or ride across before the road was built. Great misshapen rocks were scatted about, buttes, frost-split boulders and over it all an eerie feeling that it's no place for a human on a winter's night. It is a National park of thousands of acres. Off to the west a low dark line – 'Black Hills of North Dakota'. Not at all black, it was another beautiful park of deciduous trees and grassy spaces with a little road running through it, up and down curling around major trees with sudden sunshiny patches. We drove and drove and saw no sign of other humans. Dusk started to fall. Suddenly we came upon a beat-up truck and two guys hastily putting their shotguns out of sight, poachers, and

we were glad to get past them in a hurry. Darkness came quickly and we were resigned to sleeping in the car, hoping there were no more poachers about. Then, topping a rise, there was a bright and cheerful campsite. We had never been so happy to see people and a cottage that was available on the edge of a chattering stream. Another great surprise as we drove out of the Park the next morning – a sign said 'Pig Tail Bridge ahead'. What in the world is a Pig Tail Bridge? Well, it was completely fascinating. Instead of the road winding round and round to descend, the 'bridge' was a very solid structure made from 12 x 12 beams which circled the road down as some parking exits do. As we emerged, framed by enormous rocks were the famous sculpted heads of US presidents. It was very, very dramatic.

Further north, we stopped to watch, in awe, as miniature trucks laboured up to dump their gold ore onto an immense overhead conveyor belt. And then, challenging the Presidents' carved faces, a local group of First Nations had commissioned a Swiss sculptor to create the likeness of Chief Sitting Bull, his horse's nostrils flaring against the blue of the sky. Huge and unfinished it was totally dramatic. Then on to Yellowstone Park where a bison was marching down the highway between two lanes of traffic and a grizzly down in the Park was determinedly off on his own business. Visitors took no notice of countless signs asking them to stay on the wooden walkways even though little sulphur springs bubbled up beside them, nor of the signs begging them not to go near the animals. While we watched, a couple of deer came in sight across a field and immediately off went everyone to get a closer look. It's really interesting the way humanity has such a primal urge to have contact with our wild cousins.

At Peter's urging, we went to Crowsnest Pass and the Frank Slide in the Canadian Rockies where in 1903 half of a mountain had collapsed into great piles of granite rocks, covering the road, the railroad and buried the town of Frank. From there we headed on to Red Deer for a pleasant few days to catch our breath. The memory of three little kids, Rob, Mark and Diane running beside the car as we left is a happy image in my head forever. Sweet bairns.

From Red Deer, we drove across Saskatchewan where mail boxes showed where families must have farmed. Was it Robertson Davies who famously described them as "a fist of tin atop a post, begging for contact with the outside world"? The old farm houses and barns were gone and the replacements were over a ridge, or maybe out of the country. No sign of life except a crow or two in all that expanse of field and sky, we thought of all the excited men and lonely women who had come to settle the plains after the bison were gone and we somehow shared their hopes and hard times, just a little. It was an experience we wouldn't have missed. The Canadian government of that day set low postage rates for newspapers and magazines coming in from abroad and one reads about relatives sending flower and vegetable seeds, geranium cuttings, packed in with papers. Also, the Minister of Education was a smart man, I think, to have had quite wonderful school text books printed. The 'Canadian Prairie Readers' with short stories, poems and condensed chapters of English classics were beacons of light and knowledge to me and must have been for generations of prairie kids.

After seeing the Golden Boy atop Winnipeg's city hall, we headed east, arriving at Lake of the Woods in time to see one of those famous sunsets over the island-crowded lake. 'Ontario's West Coast' and "Sunset Country' they called their unique community. We were on the way to Red Lake to see Rob and his family. We really hoped to see at least one moose along the endless, muskeggy road up north with no luck but more than likely lots of them were looking at us. Red Lake was the busiest airport in the country in the early days of flying when gold was discovered there. Rob took

us there that first evening, giving us a totally wonderful experience. As we stood talking, a faint, strange sound came from somewhere, one couldn't tell in which direction it came from as there was bush all around. It grew louder until the world was filled with sound that we could only compare to a dozen carnivals with the sound pumped up. Wolves! A pack was gaining on their prey. They were in the bush to the south and suddenly all sound stopped! We felt sorry for the deer or whatever they were tearing apart but enormously grateful for the experience of hearing their hunting song. The next day we shivered and admired pre-schoolers, Jess and Ryan, as they splashed and played so happily in the frigid lake. Two more sweet grandkids. The road home was over the huge Mackinac Bridge. We had enjoyed four weeks full of happy hours and 3800 miles by the time we reached Dorchester.

We had other great trips – to Vancouver to visit Hannah's daughter, Barbara, in their interesting house perched above an inlet. The bedrooms, very sensibly, were on the ground floor with the living area upstairs where the windows opened to the marvellous view. Another was to Tobemory and over to Manitoulin Island by ferry. Coming on the homeward stretch as the road curves south, we stopped for a picnic letting Pepper out for a sniff about. Half an hour later, we began to worry as she hadn't come back, so calling her I walked to the tree-lined edge of the grassy area. A relieved little 'yip' came back from somewhere - a twenty-foot wide creek which was running swiftly there between high banks. A few odd little shrubs were growing down the almost vertical twenty foot, or more, banks and Pepper was trying to scramble out but the swift current kept pushing her back legs from under her. Wat joined us and without hesitation started down, holding onto those slim stalks, sliding now and then, until he could hook his walking stick under Pep's collar and help her up. She scrambled up to the top but my heart was jumping around thinking of Wat getting back up. I expect we were both scared that he could slip and land on his back in the river, but he made it. Those little shrubs must have been very firmly rooted. I don't know how they held him as he was a heavy man. When we were back at the car catching our breaths and feeling so thankful that things had turned out so splendidly, that the water wasn't deeper, or the current stronger, the bushes so sturdy, Pepper put on a little act, that it was nothing, nothing at all, she was perfectly in control and 'now let's get on home'.

Our very first trip when Wat came to visit, for the both of us was to Goderich on Lake Huron. A perfect day in May with the lake so blue, the sand so warm with little cottages among the trees. Wat had been in Canada for two days but never mind, a phrase he often used I was to find, he reached for my hand saying, "Let's build a little house and stay here forever."

Wat's son Jim, his wife Liz and their youngest son, Robert, came over every summer and especially enjoyed Ian and Dharshi's cottage in Port Stanley as well as Lake Erie's beach and the pleasant little town. We were all in Dorchester to celebrate Wat's 90th birthday in 2003, gathered for breakfast when, out of a blue sky came the most indescribable crack of thunder. We thought that the house would fall (but it didn't) and the rest of the day was sunny. Very strange. The following year they were all back, Jim, Liz and Robert, Janet and Martin from England with Willie and Lisa from New Zealand. For years they had been urging us to move into a smaller house, preferably in London, so one day we gave up arguing and 'oh well, if you insist, let's go.'

We couldn't see anything that appealed in Old South, the area where Ian, Dharshi and Sajni lived. It was a surprise to her that we were thinking of moving. That evening they came tumbling through the door saying, "There's a beautiful house just gone up for sale, just round the corner from us!" We all piled into cars, looked at 183 Belgrave Avenue and fell in love. It is a low, green house with

huge windows to the east and west, and one can walk in almost on the level. There's a fireplace, three long rooms and perhaps best of all a view 'out back' of unused green lawns and trees, set off by a row of tall spruce trees inside our fence. Attractive anytime and perfectly beautiful when the late afternoon sun turns the back greenery to gold.

Wat and I were looking forward to having at least the spring and summer together in London, but that didn't happen. Two months to the day from when we moved into 183 was New Year's Day, 2005, a day filled with good wishes' calls from friends and family from around the world. At 9:30, a very happily satisfied Gran'pa said, "I think I'll go to bed," and forgetting the electric control on his chair, had a bit of a struggle to get up. He was here one minute and gone the next.

CHAPTER 24

For ten years I lived on my own at 183 Belgrave with many visits from family and friends including several family reunions – Lake Superior, Kelowna, Port Stanley, Thunder Bay. In the spring of 2013, I tripped and landed up in hospital with a cracked hip. The next couple of years were increasingly difficult as I was unable to walk without pain. I decided to move to a retirement home and made the move in February 2015. Since then, I got a second opinion on my hip and the surgeon decided to replace the plates and screws in my hip with a brand new hip. The operation was in October of 2015 and since then I have been without pain and can walk with only a cane.

This year I am celebrating 95 years of life and experience. What a wonderful life!

STAN LACEY
August 25/1911-November 27/1992

STAN LACEY
1911-1992
HUSBAND – FATHER – BRITISH COMMANDO – ACTOR – MUSICIAN – COWBOY – A GREAT GUY

Ian had these words etched on his Dad's headstone in the Dorchester Cemetery. They please passers-by we are told, as well as me when I go to pay my respects, pull weeds and grass, plant bulbs and flowers.

Stan – no middle name – was a man way ahead of his time, totally convinced that women should be on equal footing to men. He had to argue with the lawyer before he could get the deeds to the two houses we bought put in both our names. A joint bank account shocked the tellers. This was 1955.

He was incredibly talented, especially in music. He could charm a tune out of almost everything and played piano by ear, like a pro. Practically any tune that was suggested, he would play immediately, and he never had a lesson.

His head seemed to hold an unlimited fund of knowledge and his spelling and writing were far above average. He was also good at math and how he had come by all these skills was strange, as he had left school at fourteen. The British school system should have been left as it was in the 1910s perhaps. His active mind was always thinking up new ideas and ways of doing things, sometimes to the extent that things didn't get done as there seemed to him too many complications in the way.

When we met in November 1940, he was a sergeant in the tank regiment that was stationed a few miles away from where we lived. Very obviously loved and admired by his mates, he went as "Mr. Chips", partly because he was, at 30, older than most and partly because he had started a fish and chip bar on camp when stationed in Kent.
He used fresh-caught fish from the Channel that was available every morning and potatoes from a nearby farmer who became a good friend and who was very happy to sell his potatoes at top prices while "doing a bit for the lads". Many of the lads enjoyed helping in exchange for a free meal and there was great competition in how thinly they could peel the potatoes. A little corporal had found a chipper in a second-hand store and he made that job his own, so that "Billy's chips" became famous battalion wide.

Stan had enlisted in '36 when the depression in Britain had caused high unemployment and jobs were hard to get. Luck was with him though. The Commanding Officer, Col. Terrance O'Hara, was looking for someone to teach his four girls to ride. We had a photo of Stan daredevil riding two broncos, a foot on each one, so it was a good luck meeting for everyone. He became more or less a member of their family for the next three years. Philippa, the Mother, was the daughter of Lord Kitchener, a WW1 hero, and the girls were high spirited and fun. Paula, who became a doctor, is Anne's Godmother.

An interesting event in those years was when "Lawrence of Arabia" (Thomas Edward Lawrence) enlisted in their regiment. The author of "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" and famous for his desert campaign to unite the Arabs against the occupying Turks during the 1914-18 War, he was a national hero. Stan said that he was a 'lone wolf' often going off on his motor bike for day long trips and coming back late, ready to talk while he waited for his fish to cook.

Thomas Edward Lawrence was thought to be the inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's verse about a wild chase after a horse thief across the desert when the thief fell and found, instead of a dagger at his heart, his pursuer's hand stretched out to help him up. It's a gripping piece you may enjoy.

East is East and West is West
And never the twain shall meet
'till Earth and Sky stand presently
At God's great judgement seat.

But there is neither East nor West
Border, nor breed nor birth
When two strong men meet face to face
Though they come from the ends of the Earth.

The poem goes on to tell how the two men developed such a mutual respect that the Arab offered his son to the officer as a life-long body guard.

In the spring of 1940, Churchill ordered the formation of an elite group of servicemen to be trained in hand-to-hand combat, reconnaissance, martial arts, to be known as 'Commandos'. They were to be ready for combat wherever needed. The base was at Spean Bridge in the Highlands of Scotland where Loch Ness and Loch Lochy are barely separate by a thin bridge of land. It sounded an interesting thing to do to Stan and a fellow sergeant, so they were among the first to volunteer, before the camp was properly organized. The local people took 'the boys' to their hearts as it became a place of grilling marches, boot camp, extreme combat, Spartan living, and made it also a place of hospitality, camaraderie and loving kindness.

They were well into the training before they learned that 30 was the cut-off age for recruits. It was a huge blow to their egos but they were told that the training needed to be taught to the proposed reconnaissance teams back in their regiments, and that they would be equipped to do that. It's highly unlikely that any of you would be here, the people you are, if Stan had been able to stay a commando, as very few of that 'Gallant Band' as Churchill called them, survived the War.

Except for the disappointment, all turned out well as promised. They completed the training, received those coveted green berets and passed on their knowledge to the volunteers who jumped at the chance to become the new 'recon. men'. It was training that proved invaluable through the next four years of the war.

Towards the end of their training at Spean Bridge, a group of twelve with Stan among them, were sent south to sabotage enemy shipping in the English Channel. The 'frogmen', all but naked, were smothered with black grease, fitted with tight helmets which allowed only eyes, nose and ears to be free, and taken out as night fell, on silenced boats across the Channel to where German ships were moving. 'Pods' of three swimmers and raft man were formed. As they reached their targets, they would slip onto rafts and paddle them silently closer in, freezing as the search lights swept over them. Then it was off the rafts into the cold, dark water, swimming the last distance before plastering explosives on the hull nearest the engines, praying that they wouldn't be seen as they climbed on board the rafts and eventually back to the boat, a pull aboard and eventually back on solid land. Voices out of the dark congratulated them, while dim lights, towels, food, rum and companionship welcomed them.

Almost the worst possible job, in Stan's view, but some of the men, the much younger ones, thought it a great lark. To the others, it was cold, scary stuff and they were very glad when the month ended. Stan blamed the aching knees he suffered in later years on those cold forays.

Another episode was less scary, but tense enough when he and a buddy were commissioned to take an official document down to London at utmost speed. They set off with only the dimmest of lights after the moon had set. The first 400 miles were uneventful but as they reached the Midlands, they noticed that people on the streets were looking at them more and more suspiciously. They continued on, hoping to reach London before dark but it wasn't to be. The main street of the next town was filled with people and blocking the road, a group of the Home Guard. Every town and village had its own Home Guard, formed as a first defence in the event of an invasion, a threat which hung over the South and East areas of England and Scotland. They were all volunteers, citizens who were needed to keep the country running – businessmen, farmers, doctors, ministers and others who were exempt from military service. In some areas they had uniforms and guns which gave them added respect, but most were a more rag-tag group, armed with pitch forks, cricket bats, staves, sometimes old duelling pistols, sling shots, and an odd long gun.

This was the barricade they met. Everyone was looking scared but determined. Who were these guys in camouflaged pants and black leather jackets? They showed their faked credentials but that didn't satisfy the Home Guard. They were taken to a pub that had a lock-up room with no windows while an SOS went out to the nearest military camp. When a couple of armed officers arrived, they suggested that they call the War Office that would vouch for them, they hoped. All was well. Word came back that they were commandos on a secret mission. Instant transformation! They were given beer and food and everyone wanted to shake their hand, wish them well before they could set off again with much cheering, laughter and back slapping.

Eventually, Stan was back to his tank regiment ready to train the eager group of young men who had volunteered to become the new reconnaissance personnel. Six little armoured cars were expected which each needed four men. Reconnaissance meant travelling light, by night mainly, behind enemy lines to find out their strength in men, tanks, guns, as well as escape routes. They were to find that sometimes a hasty retreat was called for.

The recruits needed survival training: how to read maps, how to survive in the desert if the way back was impossible, how to silently kill if necessary, how to protect their precious water supply and how to repair their cars in the event of them becoming damaged. It would be four months before they went overseas although they didn't know that. They expected the call to come any day.

This was when Stan and I met. There were four of us girls who couldn't, for various reasons, join one of the Women's Services. We thought that since the local girls weren't getting much fun, we should arrange a dance with some of the servicemen who were stationed all around Suffolk. Two of us bicycled over to the nearest camp with the plan. The Commanding Officer thought it was a good idea and he would have a 'couple of fellas' go over the next day to check the location and said "4 pm be OK"? It was very much OK so at four the next afternoon we were there, setting up tables when two sergeants came in. I remember thinking what a kind, interesting face one had and how it took so strangely long to cross the hall to meet them. And why I would feel that I would know this man for the rest of my life! And wish that he were taller! It was Stan, of course.

Later, his friend told me that as soon as they came in Stan had said "that's the girl I'm going to marry." Me - he was far too old, a soldier, no career, going a bit bald! He was just a very nice guy with whom I'd enjoy a platonic friendship. We had six, really happy weeks, walks and talks, meals out, the ballet in Ipswich, Peter Ustinov on stage in London, and coffee some mornings when he would park his armoured car out of sight of the road. It was soul sharing as I'd never experienced with any other boyfriend.

Then came word that the Brigade was leaving, January 17th – destination unknown. There was an agonizing wait and many a heartbreak during those years when friendships were made along with promises of undying love. Then the guys were off, excited at the adventure ahead while their girls were left, hoping and waiting and looking for the letter that never came. But one came for me, from North Africa. Rommel and the German army had taken possession of most of the North African coastline and the British First Army were charged with driving them out, Stan's brigade among them.

Shortly after they had set up their first camp on the edge of the desert, a few Arabs on horseback came sweeping into their midst. It was a relief to all to find everyone was on the Allied side and welcomes were expressed with laughter and a great deal of gesturing. The Allied soldiers brought out British food and beer while the riders unbuckled leather pouches to provide huge red dates and chunks of cucumber.

The Arabs were politely sceptical of British Army food and after an hour's animated conversation and profuse thanks from both parties, they were off, away on their mysterious flight across the desert. It was especially interesting to Stan because of his talks with Lawrence of Arabia. In addition to the stresses of his job, "Mr. Chips" had other challenges. On off-duty time, he would drive off to explore the country around and found little clusters of flat-roofed houses, always with children playing in the streets and shrouded women who would give him a swift glance before looking down. He found it all fascinating and wished he could talk with the men who seemed to do nothing but sit outside the houses, smoking pipes and swapping gossip. He wanted to know what they talked about and from their unenthusiastic welcome, wondered if they knew, or cared, whether he was a 'Desert Rat', or one of Rommel's men. A packet of cigarettes turned their listlessness into interest for a short time. Usually a packet was enough to give each man one or two that he would tuck into the folds of his robe with a pat or two of pleasure.

Sometimes Stan would take off to the hills. Having spent so much of his life on his own, those quiet trips were a real pleasure - no decisions to make and no arguments to settle. The country was so different from any he had known. There were a few rocks in the hills but otherwise everything seemed to be pure sand; no pebbles as he was used to in ice-age landscapes in North America and the UK. Once he climbed into a wadi (a dry water course) and went to sleep in the shade of a bush until urgent shouting woke him. Thinking that he must be trespassing and here was the owner out for his blood, he slowly gathered up his things and climbed up. He had hardly reached the top when a great roaring started and to his dismay, a great wall of water came tumbling down the wadi, half filling it in seconds.

An Arab came up, all smiles, slapped him on his back and Stan easily understood what he was saying. "You nearly had it, you stupid westerner! Shouldn't be allowed out in this country! Big storm up in the hills – see the black clouds! Much rain and nowhere to go but down here. Nearly took you too? Look!" Stan looked in horror at the scorpions and snakes, a dead goat, a smashed

shed went rushing by, realizing that but for the Grace of God and a wandering Arab, and he would be there among them. An English thank-you didn't at all cover the gratitude he felt so he emptied the contents of his pockets and rucksack to offer them to his saviour who would have none of it until he saw the package of sandwiches and some 'hard tack'. "Aah" he said, bringing out dates and almonds. So they sat down, the best of friends and shared their lunch while having a cheerful conversation with much arm waving and emphatic words. When they had finished and had a friendly cigarette, Stan gave him a ride in the armoured car, obviously a new experience, and they parted the best of friends.

When they were camped near enough, the men could go down to the Mediterranean and enjoy the luxury of a swim, a different sea altogether to the cold English Channel or Loch Ness. There were hours of boredom in between the nightly patrols and the fierce tank battles and artillery fire which were slowly pushing Rommel's forces to the East. There were heart-breaking times as well, when men would be lost or bad news came from home. Stan had always been a 'father figure' for his men and their problems. One tragic day, half a dozen of his men were waiting out a thunderstorm in the only protection they had, their tent, when lightning struck the tent pole and two of them were killed. When death was at their elbow every hour, this was a very hard blow to them all.

Another bad time for Stan and his fellow sergeant came when their beloved commander and good friend, Major Tom was given a promotion and transferred. In his place, a young self-important officer just out from England made their lives a misery. He thought he knew everything and treated the men, and particularly the N.C.Os with contempt. Mistakes were made causing loss of life and injuries which would have been avoided had he listened. All that was very bad but what came next was far worse. When the camp moved on, he had the munitions buried far too close to where the men were working, against all argument and reason. Of course, what they were afraid would happen, did. A shell hit the cache, shattering the camp. Men were killed and injured, equipment destroyed. There was a military inquiry where the new officer said that Stan and his fellow sergeant had been told, by him, to have the munitions moved but had refused to do so. The verdict was 'guilty on all counts' for 'insubordination and dereliction of duty' and they were to be court-martialled. The Battalion was aghast, but what could they do? An officer's word was taken as gospel in the army and their side of the story was never asked for, although all the personnel thought that the officer should have been up on a charge of murder. A court-martial meant shame and death. "Shot at dawn" was the dread in every serviceman's heart.

The blatant dishonesty to save his own skin was shockingly unbelievable in a British Officer and it destroyed the trust they all had in the fairness and loyalty of the system. It must have been a brutal, terrible time for Stan and his friend, Mike. But shortly word came down from Command Headquarters that "all charges on these men be dropped" and that the officer was "to be moved". Stan never heard how that verdict was reached – all court-martial cases are most likely reviewed at the top or perhaps someone in the unit had got through with their names. However, it happened, their lives and reputations were saved. From the heavily censured letters, I knew that he had been through a traumatic time but had no idea of the seriousness of it until much later. The memory stayed to haunt him for the rest of his life.

There were great tank battles with guns blazing, land was lost and regained but gradually Rommel's army gave way and the fight inched to the East. Finally, Rommel met General Montgomery to hand over the formal surrender of his troops to the 'Desert Rats'.

(In 1990, I met a Bavarian veteran in southern Germany. It turned out that he had served under Rommel in North Africa in the Spring of '42 and became all excited to hear that my husband was also there, on the other side of the guns. "Whoa", he exclaimed, jumping up and down, pointing an imaginary gun. "Bang, bang! Bang! Missed you, buddy!" He was laughing, while we all thought what a stupid thing, two nice young guys sent out to kill each other.)

They had two weeks to relax and regroup – and to escort the Germans and Italians to prison camps – before the invasions of Sicily and the eastern coast of Italy at Palerno and Taranto. There were fierce battles, but gradually the beachheads yielded with high losses and landings were made, September 3, 1943. As the guns quietened and the surviving troops stormed up the beaches, they learned that the Italian army had capitulated, leaving the Germans furious and more determined than ever. In spite of that, the battle was won and the enemy retreated up north.

From June to August/September 1944, the Allies pushed up until both sides met again in the central North Italy. That winter was harsh in the mountain terrain and the streams and rivers were swollen which made advances difficult. They hated leaving the warm South where the Italians were friendly and hospitable, but eventually Florence was taken and the 'Gothic Line' reached. The line ran from the East Coast along the jagged Pennine Mountains to that city and to Bologna and on to the Mediterranean coast, about 30 miles north of Pisa.

Stan was lucky in that his regiment moved up the Eastern coast where he found the Italian people friendly and open. The Adriatic was beautiful. All the 'Desert Rats' became buddies with the people right away, exchanging cigarettes for fresh fruit and often had meals in their homes with their hosts laughing with surprise and pleasure at their tasting pizza for the first time. But the war went on, with terrible losses on both sides. It was back to the nightly reconnaissance and stiff resistance with German reinforcements making the outcome problematic. The push to the North went slowly but relentlessly until both sides were fighting for a commanding position on Monte Castello. The battle raged for four days and four nights but finally the Allies were successful. The German surrender came on April 29, 1945, and their war ended on May 2nd, four days later.

There were terrible losses that we never heard about. The total Allied losses were 59,151 killed with 30,849 missing and 220,000 wounded. That included troops from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and perhaps others, the report doesn't say. The Axis loss was 658,000. No other European campaign suffered the losses the Italian one did.

Stan wrote that the Italians didn't seem to be, and didn't appear to feel, like defeated enemies. They were a laughing, happy people, glad to engage in conversations that, with plenty of gestures, always seemed to get through. The Allies stayed to guard their hard-won territory and Italy became a happy adventure. "They make the most wonderful meals," Stan wrote, "with little bit of meat and things they would fetch from their gardens." Crusty bread – "you've never tasted anything so good as their fresh bread dipped in olive oil and herbs." It was heaven after the tough years in the desert.

I wish I had understood what a shock it must have been for Stan – for all returning service people – coming back to post-war Britain with everything utterly basic and frugal, and us, unemotional WASPs. It was a cold, cloudy autumn that made things worse after the first euphoria.

Then, suddenly there was extra food available under the US Marshall Plan! I don't know if there is a statue to General Donald Marshall but there should be. He coerced the US Congress to billions of dollars for badly needed food for Europe and to start the reconstruction of the destroyed

infrastructure and buildings. General Marshall was Secretary of State in the US and is sometimes still mentioned as the wisest, most forward-looking General the US has ever had.

The canned goods that reinforced our meagre war rations were enormously welcome in Britain and must have been like manna in the desert to Europeans who had suffered from hunger and malnutrition. In Britain, everyone had their 'rations' which seemed such a tiny amount, but kept us all healthy with the help of some home-grown food. It was a triumph for the Minister of Food, with so many million people living on an island surrounded by dangerous seas.

So Stan came to Wyverstone on October 12, 1945 – back home to England after four years of active fighting. He was a changed man, as I should have expected. Gone was the debonair enjoyment of life, the quick one-liners, the confidence and tolerance that had so attracted me. The platonic friendship didn't last very long. We were caught up in the surge of the time to want security, marriage, and children. It must have been very hard for him to come into a family with such a very different background, to be suddenly without the authority and responsibility he was used to. He was a civilian again in a strange, changed world. It was not easy living with Jim, Jan, Pa and me, I'm sure. They weren't helpful, always butting with our small experiences of jettisoned bombs, refugee children, and shortages if ever he wanted to talk about Africa or, more often, sunny Italy. They laughed at his Liverpool accent, his small knowledge of country things, the way he called coyotes 'Kyotes', as all of Canada does except in Manitoba where we had lived.

As I was more or less committed to staying, at least until Jan was older (she was 9 at the time) and I had had a very vivid experience a couple of years earlier that we should get married so that 's what we decided we should do, hoping that things would work our to everyone, happily. But before I write of the 48 years we spent together though, there are 30 years of his life to tell.

He had told me a little about it before he went overseas and some he wrote about. He was the third son of William and Mary and has three younger sisters. It was not a happy childhood as his father, probably frustrated at his repetitious work in a Bank, would come home and take it out on the boys, brushing off the pleas of their Mother.

There were compensations. Liverpool was an exciting place to live in, back in the First World War era. It was the shipping hub of the British Empire, always interesting vessels coming into port from all parts of the world or leaving for exotic places. It was long before containers so all the merchandise had to be man-handled, first off the horse-drawn wagons, then up on the dock, then down into the holds. Coal too.

It was hard, heavy, poorly-paid work by men from around the world. As a group, they were known as 'Lascars' and most were brown skinned. They were not treated fairly until the unions came in to give them a voice, but they were kind to the boys who hung around the docks, absorbing all the sights and smells and dialects. Sometimes a bag of long sweet pods from the topics would snag, some pods would fall out and suddenly there would be twenty or more boys, all scrambling to share in the loot. Sometimes a crate of bananas would split and amidst shouts of "Snake! Snake! Look out lads" and they would grab whatever they could and enjoy a feast. Stan said that the Captains and crews were always kind to them which made a big impression on him.

Stan had another interesting outlet. He hadn't been long in school when it was discovered that he had a very good singing voice, and was put in the choir. It was a church school so that meant being

at Matins every day, practices on Saturday and attending many weddings and funerals. When the boys turned eight, they were paid for special services, a 'shilling' (about 20 cents) and for very special ones, 'half a crown' (about 50 cents) which was a great prize. That pay went straight into the family pot and Stan said he thought he should have fewer beatings for those contributions. He couldn't remember ever being thanked or praised.

A highlight was when King George V and Queen Mary attended the official opening of Liverpool's famous pink brick cathedral which had been built over many years with the 'penny a week' which every resident was expected to give. It was a big excitement to have the King and Queen there. His Mother was thrilled to be invited along with the other choir members' mothers and told me she was stunned by Stan's voice as he sang a solo as 2nd choir boy. "I had no idea," she said, "it was like listening to an angel sing." He was paid a whole 10 shillings.

He enjoyed school and finished all the classes by the time he was twelve. As fourteen was school leaving age, he spent the last two years helping with the younger children. That was a happy time for him with the respect he got from the teachers and from his classmates and little students. Sometimes he'd be given a sixpence or two for his help which meant that he could buy some food and go home later so that, if he were lucky, he could slip into bed without his father knowing that he was home.

It must have been a good education, with good teachers as he was the best speller I've ever known. He also had excellent handwriting and a head so full of knowledge it was astounding. His first job on leaving school was as a runner. Before telephones, cell phones and faxes (not invented for another sixty years), boys were hired to take documents between businesses and banks. He learned all the downtown streets and the delivery men as well, who would sometimes give the boys a bun or doughnut. There were many deliveries to be made as almost all the necessities were taken door to door and it was amusing to him to see the way the horses knew exactly at which door to stop and when to move on without being told. That was the era when women would be out scrubbing their doorsteps and whitening them with a pumice stone first thing every morning and children would run out to pick up the horse droppings for the family garden.

Although he must have grown up around men swearing, I never once heard him swear, a very likeable trait he has passed on to his sons.

When he was going on fifteen, a Merchant Captain helped him get his papers he would need to apply for the seafaring job he was hoping for. However, his eldest brother, Edgar, had emigrated to Canada as soon as he was old enough, eighteen, and had a job in a lumber camp in Quebec. He wrote that he would sponsor Stan as the cook would need a helper, a job a fifteen year old could do. There were difficulties with immigration as legally no one could leave England alone, especially anyone under the age of fifteen. In the interval, Edgar, a bit discouraged by the blackflies and the French loggers' practical jokes, took his winter's pay and headed for Alberta. So that was where Stan headed when he finally turned fifteen and was on his way, with his Mother's blessing, his father's scorn and his little sisters' tears.

It was May when he arrived and no brother! So he stayed the night at the Y and set off in the morning to look for work. Hungry, he smelled fresh bread, went in and found the baker was a man he had known in Liverpool. Over toast and jam, he told them all the news from home, said that he had just arrived and was looking for a job. "Got just the thing for you," exclaimed the baker.

"Friend of mine has a farm just out a piece. He needs a good boy to help him out for the summer." So, armed and hopeful with a letter of recommendation, Stan set off, hitched a ride, met the farmer who looked him up and down and didn't seem to like what he saw, gave him a hoe, took him out to the field of young carrots and told him to get busy. It was the first carrot field he had seen. So this was the way they grow? And a hoe? What was he supposed to do with that? The field was enormous, the end almost out of sight. He was all alone. His heart sank.

He told me now he hoed, pulled out the weeds between the plants while the sun grew hotter and hotter. He grew hungrier and hungrier until he couldn't keep his eyes open, tired out after two weeks of travelling. The next thing he knew he was being awakened by the farmer's boot. Scrambling to his feet he apologized, but to no avail. He got his marching orders and could never look at a carrot again.

A mile or so down the road was a house. Thirstier than he'd ever been, he knocked on the door to ask for a drink. A kind-looking man took him into the kitchen, dipped water from a pail, pulled out a chair saying, "You've come right time for dinner." Life began to look better and he thought that maybe Canada wasn't so bad after all. The wife plied him with questions about 'home' while he ate. She had come from the Ukraine and had worked for two years in Edmonton to pay for her fare before meeting and marrying the man who was now rolling a cigarette with cheerful satisfaction. They wanted to know all about him – how he was allowed to emigrate at such a young age? Was he impressed with Pier 21 in Halifax where all immigrants were checked and welcomed to Canada? Had he ever seen such huge trains? Did he think he would find his brother? He stayed the summer with them learning, eating, enjoying his luck in being there.

His first job was to help take the straw out of their cold pit, something completely new to him. There was still a smidgin of ice left and smoked meat that would be hung in the well to keep cool. Come September, they relined the pit with fresh, golden straw, held up by chicken wire, ready for blocks of ice, cut from the stream when it froze. They packed in the fish they had smoked, buried vegetables in sand and straw, and brought down pails of eggs preserved with 'islingbas'. "That's us for the winter, son," the farmer said. "Twenty dollars will see us through: coffee, tea, sugar, a bag of flour, oatmeal. Wish you could stay with us but there ain't enough work from now on."

Stan said he felt like a man after all the summer work and the kindness he'd received. He went back to Edmonton to meet Edgar but he didn't go to see the baker, still ashamed of being fired from that job he'd suggested. His brother had bought a quarter section – 165 acres, I think – mostly white poplar bush, so they spent the winter cutting and sawing up wood to sell in town. Poplar has to dry for a year before burning or creosote oozes out of it, sometimes running down the stovepipes, always creating the danger of a chimney fire.

They lived on the money Stan had earned and proud of that he was too. They used the first logs to build a cabin, stuffed moss in the cracks and sloped the roof so the snow would slide off. They built a little jetty out in the creek and tied a rope from tree to tree to guide them in the blizzards Edgar promised. They bought a wood stove, books, a second-hand guitar and cut cedar branches for their beds.

His first winter in 1926 began at the end of October and didn't let up until the following April. The cold was unbelievable to them, especially to Stan who was used to the mildness of England's west coast. Old timers invariably said that the weather had calmed after the first settlers opened the land,

that both the summer and winter storms were less violent, less frequent, but newcomers had a hard time believing them. The cold came down 'like a wolf on the fold' making them appreciate the fur-trimmed helmets they had been urged to buy. Night after night, the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights, would sweep across the sky – green, pink, white – flickering, dancing as if in silent command from some almighty force. Eerie too. Stan used to say, "made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up." He remembers a crackle, and so do I from Manitoba, but scientists say that that isn't so.

Some nights they would go out for wood or game or water. Or just to admire the moonlit tracks in the snow. They were lucky. Among the used books they had bought was a Robert Service "Songs of the SourDough" with the gift of giving the soul of the North to its readers. Some of those lines would come back, out on those frozen acres in Peace River Country, to fill him with immensity and aloofness, and to give him, even at 16, a powerful connection to all there is and yet at the same time, the feeling of man walking the earth as a guest, unneeded in the vast scheme of the Universe.

They left the little cabin to the wood mice after that winter and bought, or perhaps granted, a half section further west where it had been discovered that wheat ripened so far north because of the long hours of sunlight. As it was virgin land they had tremendous crops (but pitiful to modern yields) after they had bought a team of horses, pulled out stumps of the few stands of bush, and 'turned the ancient sod.' Prairie grass has such a root system that slabs were used to build the first prairie homes, lovingly named 'soddys'.

Ed met an English girl, Olive, and when they married, Stan went off on his own. He spent a winter with a farm family and was delighted to find that they had a radio. He and his friends had managed to get crackly music when they joined a couple of copper wires together in a galvanized bucket back in Liverpool. Other farm families would come over to listen and marvel and argue about 'Social Credit', an idea suggested by one C. H. Douglas and was being considered by the Alberta Government as a means of getting people out of the poverty which plagued the Province. It was based on a theory that "all citizens have the right to the wealth they jointly produce" and naturally was very popular with farmers.

A local Minister, William Aberhart, talked up the idea from his pulpit and on a radio program he hosted. Later, when Ed and Olive moved to Stettler they became good friends with him and held lively discussions after church on Sundays. What Stan remembered from those times was that every household was given $5.00 –not worth much now, but would have been a big help back then.

About this time, Stan went down to the States with some friends who had a Model T. After a week they had a visit from the police and as they had neither passports nor papers, they were hustled back to Canada after a night in the lockup and told not to ever come back.

His next job was looking after a farm while the owners went south for the winter. There were horses, chickens and a flock of turkeys that he was to sell 'come Christmas'. The only food he could find was a huge pile of cantaloupes taking up most of the space in the bedroom, and the daily laid eggs. There was no buggy or harness that he could find so he caught the friendliest horse and rose bareback into town to get some provisions. He had a happy winter there. Come spring and the family's return, he took his caretaker's pay and headed west. He marvelled at the mountains and said that he was surprised he hadn't felt their presence. At the shoreline, he was befriended by a native family and spent some time with them, fishing, stretching hides, sharing their wigwam that was tucked in between great stacks of washed-up logs.

Back in Calgary, he stopped in at the Stampede grounds to see if any work was to be had. There was and he started then and there looking after the horses and found he had a gift for riding and for making friends with the broncos. He had read that if a horse shares a breath with a human, they are friends for life, so he tried that and it worked! That is all except with one wild stallion that would have none of it. He tossed his head, stamped his feet, reared and rolled his eyes. Stan got the message.

Letters kept coming from his Mother, how she and the girls needed a legal separation from his father and he realized he needed to go back and help as his older brother, Alfred, was away at sea and rarely got home. In one of those happen-chance cases, he met someone who had taken a shipment of cattle over to Liverpool in exchange for room and board. He quickly got a similar commission and although he was sorry for the forty head of steers during the long train journey and the way they objected to the Atlantic swishing over their feet as they stood tied up on deck, it was a good, inexpensive way to get to England. He sold his horse and saddle to put money in his pocket.

He was hoping that he would stay only long enough to help his Mother, and hopefully, see the Depression out. He wanted to come back to work on the ranches on the open 'whaleback' south of Calgary. He loved the life the cowboys lived, free, open with wide skies, full of stars each night and loved the haunting songs they played on their mouth organs with meals cooked on an open fire and a good horse under him.

The steers delivered safely to the cattle pens behind the docks in Liverpool, he set off to see his family. After months of legalities, the separation was signed and the father seen off to relatives in the south of England. The process had taken most of his savings so it was a blow to find that the Depression was almost as bad as it was in North America, and many people were looking for the few available jobs. So, what to do? As it seemed as though a war against Germany was almost inevitable, he enlisted. And there began another epic change in his life, which I have already written about.

So Stan's life story as I know it is picked up from when he was 'demobbed' and arrived at Firmingham Railway Station on October 12, 1945.

In hindsight, we might have had a much easier life as the Government was offering free university tuition to returned service men and women. I have no doubt at all that Stan would have easily passed an entrance exam but the idea just never came up. There were Government-sponsored training courses available also, and as Stan had enjoyed the small amount of welding he had done, that's what he decided to do. We had the hope that he would make iron railings, planters, etc. while I could use my green thumb to raise plants to fill them. We didn't realize that in the country, no one would have the money for such things. 'Disposable income' didn't happen for years.

We were married in Wyverstone Church on Sunday, November 25, 1945, with a good friend of Stan's, author Peter Howard, and my friend, Cicily Piper, there to sign the register. We hadn't told anyone and that was a silly misstep. Everyone seemed so disappointed not to be there! But it was practically impossible to buy extra food, or wine, or anything for a banquet. But we should have tried harder.

Col. Terrance and Phillippa met us for lunch in London. They were really nice people. We ate roast swan, courtesy of the Royal Estate (so they told us) and they gave us the keys to their car and their cottage in Kingsbridge, Devon along with their blessing. Although when the Col. said, "You're a brave girl to go off on your own with a new husband," panic surged through me. Brave? Why was one brave to go with someone with whom you have had a love affair? I must have looked so innocent. But I was lucky, no need for the sudden panic his words had caused.

There was lots to do around Norman Farm so Stan helped out. Pa was a vigorous 60 but he seemed so old to us! There were lots of times when two pairs of hands were much better than one. We were still a way-station for canned goods en route to London and the potato crop needed earthing up and thatching before the frost.

I don't remember much about the next couple of years except for feeling that Stan must be missing the respect and camaraderie he had had for so long. Our life in Wyverstone that had seemed so good and interesting lost its lustre when I tried looking at it through his eyes. He never said anything about it though. We had a new-fangled, 3-wheel tractor, bought with the Food Ministry money, which was incredibly hard to steer with the plough on the back. Jim took a photo of his wobbly furrows but happily Stan could redeem his honour when no one else could get it started some mornings.

Stan endeared himself to me when we first began to talk about marriage and I told him what a doctor had told me ten years earlier when my left knee was smashed by a hockey stick and ball at the same time. He warned me "that I could be in a wheelchair by the time I was forty". Stan said, "Well, I don't think that going to happen, but if it does so what!"

Another trait I admired was his philosophy that "I'd rather be 'had' than not help someone who needed it". Me too. Ten or so years later, when we were living at 95 Hamilton Road in Dorchester, we would get vagrant men knock on the door for food and a drink, now and then. When Stan felt that they looked genuine, we would give them a meal, let them sleep on the downstairs sofa and send them off with breakfast, our good wishes and a 'care' package. I don't think that people would/should do that nowadays, there seems to be so many weirdos about, but I've always felt happy about doing it then. Maybe the pleasure they apparently got from a small kindness went along with them.

I also admired Stan's tolerance. "There's always two sides to every problem," he'd say, or, "one should wear that proverbial moccasin before making judgements." I do remember a couple of occasions when the children were really impressed. The first time was when we were playing cards one night and the scariest noise came from the back of the house. Norman Farm is/was a bit spooky on winter nights to start with, and the NOISE was something very different. It was real scary in Jim and Jan's eyes - mine too, probably. Stan picked up a flashlight and with a "come on, let's see what it is" led the way to the back door that opened at the top, the lower half separate. We all peered out, afraid of what we might see – goblins or monsters come out of the sea? Thirty round globes of light greeted the flashlight. A good thing we didn't know about UFOs and little green men! Stan flashed the light around and we saw, with a lot of relief, the bodies of fifteen, stray cows. They were gone by morning and we never found out whom they belonged to.

Another time was when Jim was learning to drive and got the car stuck in mud on the field road. He went to fetch Stan who told him to ease on the gas while he lifted the back. We were all stunned

at such strength. The next time was when Pa came home with a piano! It was for Jan to learn to play, but he asked Stan if he could play? The Maestro sat down and played every tune we suggested. We were at it all afternoon and evening, astonished at his ability.

When our 'hired man', who had left to work in a munitions factory, came back to see if his job was available, Stan thought he should make use of the welding course and leave space for him. He found a position quickly with an agricultural dealer nearer to the coast. As agriculture was changing so were the implements and Stan was given the interesting job of adapting them to suit. He lived in a shepherd's hut under an oak tree for two years, coming home on weekends.

Anne was born in April of 1948, making her Dad a rather bewildered father. He hadn't had any experience of this. He didn't know what to do. During that summer, the hired man decided to move to his wife's village in Norfolk so Pa suggested that Stan stay home. Jim was away at Chadacre Agricultural College, so we began a bit cozier family life. In general, things were getting easier, petrol was available again and a warm feeling of security was coming back over the country.

Jim was due to graduate in 18 months but we thought that he would want to go out on his own for a few years so we tentatively suggested that we start a market garden on the 'home field' which wasn't really used much. However, Pa said that Jim was going to come back home so it wouldn't be a good idea. In the mind-set of English men, sons inherit property and his telling me 'that it was your misfortune to be a woman' was a bit irksome. So we decided that we should go back to Canada as Stan had been hoping to. Jan would be 15 by the time Jim was due home and as we had always had help in the house, a dear girl named Jean Cooper, Jan could take care of Pa while she was still going to school. And there would be our home to come to if Pa would like to. He was always talking about Canada as though his heart was there.

So in June of 1950, Stan left on a Greek liner from Southampton, bound for Toronto and a place to make a home. Leaving a wife and two little children sounds totally impossible now, but then families were often split for one reason or another and it was just taken as the way life was. He found a job without difficulty, but found the politics and safety standards so poor that he left after a month. Someone then told him about a position in London, a hundred miles southwest. He was hired after he had done several welds and been praised for his good work. He found a friendly landlady who, when the children and I joined him the following year, rented us two rooms. Anne and Ian were as happy to see him as he was to see them, so we had a good ten months with one memorable incident.

Ian's second birthday was coming up and he longed for a wagon as he'd seen other children enjoying. We had promised him one and he went off for his afternoon nap, happily looking forward to his Dad coming home to take him shopping. After an hour I went up to check on him and no baby! He and his 'blanky' were not in the house, not outdoors, nowhere. After searching the neighbourhood, I called the police.

A long, long hour later a police car pulled up and there he was, tear stained, looking both proud of himself and scared. The police had found him a good mile away by the Aolean Hall on the far side of Dundas Street where we had often patted the model 'His Master's Voice dog' on walks. His 'blanky' was tucked between the paws and around the corner, our little two-year old, looking very lost, they said. Luckily we had been telling them that policemen were their friends. He had gone to meet his Daddy, he said, "Get my wagon." Happily, the one in the car when Stan got home was the

'right one' so the three of them had a happy time running up and down the sidewalk with Ian steering.

Sadly, Stan's mother died that year. We had hoped that she would come out when we had ourselves a house. Instead, Jan had an opportunity to live in France and really wanted to go, so we all thought the children and I should go back so she could do that. We'd all leaned over backwards thinking that Pa shouldn't be alone.

While we were away, Stan stopped in at the Grand, at that time an amateur theatre, to see if he could help in the evenings. The London Little Theatre, as it was called, welcomed him and before long he was acting and making a name for himself on stage. It was the love of his life and became a major part of our lives for the next thirty years. During the previous month, he had taken a Dale Carnegie course and found he could speak in public and had a gift of making his audience laugh. So the theatre was a perfect outlet for those talents.

By the time the children and I were back, Stan was well known for his many roles in plays in both London and Woodstock. He had made interesting, like-minded friends who had fun with the children, giving them shoulder rides up and down Dundas Street. Harry Ronson was one, an expat from Manchester who had been here during the war, teaching radio communications to air crews. Another was Orlo Miller, who became Peter's Godfather and wrote a book about the infamous Donnelly's of Lucan. He and his wife were good friends. She stopped our hearts once when she was taking the children for a ride in her new Mercedes and made a U-turn in front of an oncoming car!

Before we arrived, Stan had bought a little house in Dorchester, across from the Hardware store. We had a funny experience there when he brought home a Christmas tree that he insisted on taking indoors to see how much of the stem needed cutting off as it was huge. As we were taking it back out, I suggested that this was the sort of thing of which superstitions are made, and sure enough the very next day, a real estate agent knocked on the door and said, "Had you thought of selling your house?" Of course we had, having suddenly become a family of six in a two bedroom house. The would-be buyer was a Bishop in a religious group called 'The Ecclesiates" who was translating the Greek edition of the Bible and printing it on a duplicator.

We went house hunting. Stan had chosen Dorchester because at that time it was a small village with trees meeting over the roads and a good feeling of community. I thought it was lovely, especially the big old brick houses on the south side of the river. One of them especially, which had an extra half lot, and its chimney was the highest point of the village. I had sat on the steps up from the road to rest when seventeen-month old Peter and I would go for walks. It had many trees and a comfortable looking veranda. It had a 'For Sale' sign but disappointment! It had already been sold. We couldn't find anything else that we liked so you can imagine our delight when that sale did not go through. We had to get a mortgage for seven thousand dollars. It was such a huge sum! But why we didn't get an extra thousand to help with some alterations, I cannot think.

We had a busy two weeks. Robin was born on December 19 (1957), followed by Christmas and then we moved on the 28th. The kitchen was painted avocado green and had a stovepipe going up through it. The whole of the rest of the house was painted pink, but it had three bedrooms, a bath, a big attic, closets and a balcony. We loved it! We were in heaven! Perhaps the best of all was the huge, coal furnace, a wonderful real fire and the first I'd seen in Canada.

Peter found a little stool and thinking he was helping, sat on it just where the movers needed to go. Ian and his friends found that they could climb a lilac tree and then climb on to the garage roof, up to the balcony, through the window, hurtle downstairs and out to do it all over again.

The house, which seemed so perfect at first, needed a lot of renovating. Stan had no experience in that, so things took a great while to get finished. He once said that he could think things out in metal but wood was really difficult for him, but he soldiered on and eventually we has a pleasant and comfortable home.

The 'Cold War' was an over-riding worry. US war planes would leave contrails across the sky each morning en route to the DEW line in the north as the first defence should Russia attack. People were asked to make shelters and put in a stock of provisions. A national 'civil defence' was set up and Stan volunteered as an area superintendent going up to Arnprior (near Ottawa) for training several times. None of it was needed, thank goodness.

We demolished a rainwater tank which took up a lot of space in the basement as well as scaring the children. It was the size of a small room and held six feet of water most of the time. In its place, we made a shelter, collected a cache of food, water and bedding, hoping we'd never need it. Most people had black and white TVs by this time so we saw the Russian war fleet make that big circle out from Cuba's Bay of Pigs and turn back home. The shock and horror of the atomic bomb devastation and terror in Nagaski chilled everyone's soul for many years. That fear gradually diminished and we could look forward to a future again, in large part because of the heroic airlift to Berlin.

On Saturday mornings I would get up early to do baking for the week ahead. Stan very kindly cleaned up and did those dishes for me as dishwashers hadn't been invented yet, and then the boys would beg to have a 'wrestle' with him. So they would wrestle until everyone was sweaty, exhausted and hungry. Come summer, he would get home from work, shower and we'd be off down to Lake Erie (Port Bruce) where he taught Anne and Ian to swim.

Then the Beatles burst onto the scene and the western world mainly of course made a giant leap forward. The old ways had run their course. Welcome to the brave new world! Anne and Ian, like all other teenagers, were crazy about them and the house rocked with 'It's a hard day's night' and 'Yellow submarine'. Ian bought a guitar and learned to play very well. Then one day their Dad came home with tickets to the Beatles' Toronto concert – well, what excitement! Later there was another 'happening' in Toronto to which he drove them – in an hour and a half. Did the wheels ever touch the ground? But I cannot remember what it was, only that Stan earned a lot of Brownie points for getting there in time.

We sometimes went to the dances that were popular then, with the waltz, foxtrot and polka. Friends would rhapsodize about Stan's dancing and I was always so sorry for both of us that we didn't mesh. I could dance with other men, whom I presume were not as rhythmic as Stan. Practice at home? Somehow we never did. Nor did he ever get to teach the boys to dance, or to help us all to speak in public, all of which I really regret and wonder where our priorities were. He was always busy, of course, as he had been – was for years - appointed chairman of the Public Servants Association, chairman of the local Parents' Association, on the Board of the newly-formed Business Association, and active as well in the theatre.

He had some welcome changes made through the PSA. I remember he would come home sometimes, ill with the fumes of engines that weren't vented outdoors. He got that changed and of course it would never be allowed in later years. Another big help was to get the pay dates altered from once a month to weekly. The men were shorted a week's pay in the original system and the end of the long months were tough going. Lots of other things, but mostly I hated all the brown manila envelopes stacked in our bedroom.

In addition to acting in at least two plays each season, he was asked to direct. His first effort was "Twelve Angry Men", a play about a court scene. It was so interesting to see the would-be actors, awkward and shy at the first get together, change into the polished and convincing group they had become two months later.

Another, written by a Londoner, was a flop and naturally Stan was very unpopular in some circles for a time. One year he directed "Anne of Green Gables" in Dorchester with a local cast. This was before the revival of 'Anne' and was a huge success that launched two of the cast into theatre stardom. People begged him to do another the following year, but for some mysterious reason he wouldn't agree to do that.

In what summer was left available, we would go north camping. It was a wonderful treat as I would stop publication of SignPost for all of August. One night we arrived at dusk at the campground at Rice Lake near Peterborough and just got the tent-trailer up when a black cloud came determinedly towards us. We made a dive for cover and fortunately were able to zipper it up just as they hit. Blackflies shouldn't be out and about in August, or so we were told. As we arrived, I had the feeling one gets all across England - that God had walked over the land - but had missed in Canada. In the morning we learned that Rice Lake was the site of the earliest native settlement known in Canada. Was there a connection, I've always wondered?

In 1982, his sisters in New Zealand wrote suggesting he go to visit them. Stan had retired in 1976 at about the same time that our youngest, Rob, left to go to Alberta. We begged him to go to town, mix with people to get used to the crowds, which he would meet at the airports. Brick wall. He went, enjoyed meeting his family, came home and within the month, had a stroke. It could have been a coincidence, but we thought it was the stress after five years of quiet living.

He was very lucky. New drugs and treatments had just been introduced for stroke patients and St. Joseph's Hospital in London had just bought one of the first MRI machines. Magnetic Resonance Imaging allowed doctors to see patients in three dimensions and as Stan's case was unusual (his speech and thought processes were only minimally damaged) he could talk about his reactions as few stroke patients are able to. So doctors were very interested in his recovery, giving him mind-stretching puzzles and maps and, with our permission, many MRI scans, hoping to see if his right side brain would take over the damaged functions of the left.

It did to a degree. The UK's famous doctor, communicator Jonathan Miller, who had produced a TV series 'The Body in Question', was invited to speak to the Hamilton hospital's brain trauma team. He heard about Stan and came to London to see him. Dr. Miller was such a charming, gangly, interesting man. He came several times, sitting on the side of Stan's bed, asking questions, teasing me, laughing and encouraging. Once he brought a video of lights weaving over a dark background and asked the group of doctors, nurses and me what they signified? Such a variety of

answers – from UFOs to activated stars, to fireflies, phosphorous under water. Stan's answer was 'dancers holding candles". Dr. Miller cheered! Right answer! It gave Stan's ego a large boost while I privately wondered if, kindly man as he was, that Dr. Miller always cheered for the patient's ideas.

Stan thrived under all the attention and lively life that was prescribed. We had to go back to therapy twice a week when he was finally allowed home. Mind exercises had to be done at home that were startlingly helpful. He had to draw figure 8s for ten minutes twice a day. From not being able to sign his name, he could write again! He was given maps to link a list of towns, draw in mountains and rivers, asked to sit with his fingers touching, quietly, several times a day. He got better. Totally better except he could no longer memorize lines; so, sadly, that was the end of his acting career. The doctors insisted that he stop smoking, which he did. He was able to carry on with the play he had been writing, to read again – he had gathered nearly all of Edgar Cayce's books, and he enjoyed biographies.

In 1987, we heard that his sister, Margaret in New Zealand, had a sudden cancer. We phoned the hospital the night we heard. Her nurses pushed her bed over to a phone and we were able to talk to her. She sounded bright and hopeful, but the next day we had a call to say she had died. Whether that shock caused Stan to have another stroke, we couldn't know, but this time was quite different – different hospital, or perhaps because he couldn't talk so well, he had no special attention, no MRI, no therapy – it was a big letdown. He was discharged, coming home for a disturbing and difficult four years.

We made a comfortable place by the front window in the SignPost office, where we hoped he could be reasonably content while we worked. It was not to be. He could hear the conversation, which naturally was about problems – there were always those with a newspaper – and became really worried, thinking that the business was in trouble. What to do? I hoped that the staff, who had been with me for years, would take over the paper, but no. One evening help came in the shape of a man asking if I'd sell. Sad and glad at the same time, we made a deal, beginning four anxious years. There were some happy days and some when he was back in the war, a strange look in his eyes, seeming to not know who I was. His anger would suddenly flare. He had told me about a neck hold he had been taught as a Commando, how easy it was to kill, and I was afraid he might think I was a Jerry who needed to be dispatched. The angst would quieten if someone came in, especially one of the family.

In November of 1992, our local doctor suggested he go into a London hospital to be checked and given therapy. The resident came to interview him and after some questioning said, "I'm afraid you don't fit into our program." I was furious and Stan wilted, as anyone in his condition would. He was admitted, which neither of us wanted, and within days, was very ill with pneumonia. The ward doctor was a different sort, kind and concerned. He told me that it would most probably be fatal and did I have family. I'd always known that the children were great people but I loved them with all my being when they were there within hours, from Alberta, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and Ian who was in London, thankfully.

Stan hadn't recovered from the coma but seemed to know and was comforted that they were all there. The doctor said that they could send him to the main hospital where they might be able to help him, if we wished. Or would we rather let nature take its course as he was 81 and his quality of life would be compromised. We all agreed with him. The children stayed another day but as there was no change, went back to their work.

When the nurse came in every three hours with a morphine injection, I began to realize that a worry I had had for years was a reality. There had been a note in the doctors' voices that concerned me too. Soon after Stan had that first stroke, he hit his head on a sharp counter edge and the wound didn't heal for some months. When all seemed better, he hit it again - same place, same edge of counter. We went to the hospital where doctors took skin from his thigh and stitched a patch on this head when again it didn't heal. Several doctors over the last two years had felt the glands in his neck and looked thoughtful.

The regular morphine shots and a strange way that his nose seemed to be changing shape, made me realize that my fears were right, that there was cancer and it had spread. My second reaction was a great wave of gratitude that things had happened the way they had – no pain seemingly, calmly, peacefully. Gratitude for him and for us.

During the night of November 25th, I was writing the column for SignPost, urgently as the deadline was early next morning. A cot had been brought in beside his bed so I had been staying over at nights. Concentrating on trying to write something interesting, my mind was totally on Dorchester when I heard his Mother's Liverpool voice – no mistaking it. It came from above the left foot of his bed. "Come on fella, why are you holding back? We're all waiting for you." A great peace settled over him as I sat holding his hand. Around 5 am, I could sense a deep relaxation and gently, gently, he drifted quietly away.

We had lost a kind man and a good father.

Sheldon – the Early Years

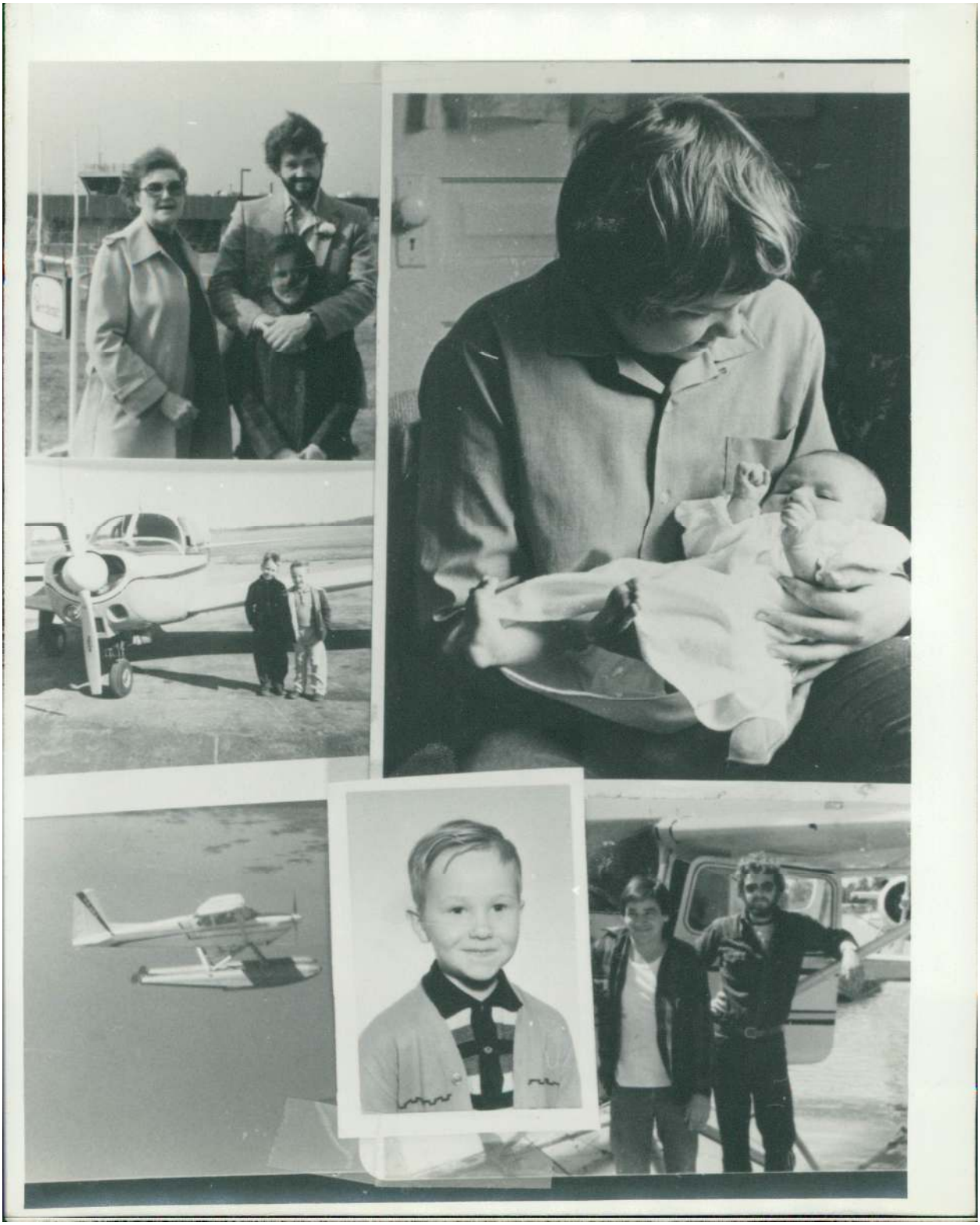
Ruth, Kathleen, Barbara, Mary Sheldon with friend
Grampa and Babs sitting on the shore of Clear Lake, Riding Mountains National Park

Barbara, Ruth and Kathleen

Mary and her husband, Stan

Jennifer and Tisha with Grampa Sheldon
Ian and Anne with Grampa Sheldon

LACEY – Early Years



The first house in Dorchester on Catherine Street

Dad doing what he loved best – playing the piano with grandkids Rob and Mark


SIGNPOST

The Family in 1989