



Blackouts to Bright Lights

Canadian War Bride Stories

*edited by
Barbara Ladouceur
& Phyllis Spence*

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated
to the war brides who were not able
to record their stories for
Blackouts to Bright Lights.

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PROLOGUE

The stories in this book offer a passport to another time and place through the eyes of World War II war brides. Their stories describe how it felt to be a young woman coming of age during a war that resulted in a level of destruction and suffering never before experienced by a civilian population. They also demonstrate the conflicting emotions of fear and pride, the dark memories of bombings and deprivation along with proud recollections of the important work they accomplished as part of the war effort.

The war brides' stories point to the vital new roles and responsibilities that women assumed to assure their nation's survival in the midst of war. Before and after meeting their future husbands, these war brides were ambulance drivers, balloon barrage workers, nurses, fire fighters, air-raid wardens, factory workers and members of the armed forces, including the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service), Land Army (farm work) and Air Force.

Some of the war brides were as young as twelve or thirteen when the war began, but their childhoods ended abruptly as the bombings began and the harsh realities of blackouts, rationing and civil defence preoccupied their lives. These young women met and fell in love with Canadian soldiers. In doing so they encountered a whole new set of problems: first, the lengthy bureaucratic procedure required before approval was granted to marry a Canadian soldier and emigrate to Canada; then the emotional turmoil of saying good-bye to family and friends before embarking on a journey to a strange new country.

Over 48,000 war brides came to all parts of Canada during and after World War II. With them they brought their children—some 22,000. Many of the war brides settled in cities or towns where they coped with postwar housing and furniture shortages. Others travelled to remote regions of Canada that placed them in the midst of isolated living conditions and long cold winters. Wherever the war brides went, they displayed a pioneering spirit that grew from the determination and creativity they developed during the war years. And throughout their stories these remarkable women—whether they wrestle with balloon barrages in the United Kingdom or wood and coal stoves in Canada—display great courage, spirit and humour. The narratives of these extraordinary war brides are histories which have become an important part of our Canadian heritage.

The concept for this book began with Eve Mitchell whom the editors first met in 1993. As President of the Vancouver Island War Brides at the time, she invited us to record the war brides' oral histories and publish them in book form. During the past year the editors have had the pleasure and privilege of listening to war brides as they remembered times past. We tape-recorded their reminiscences of participating in the war effort, meeting their Canadian husbands, leaving their home countries and adjusting to life in Canada. We then transcribed their spoken words into written life histories that highlight their individual voices.

The war brides featured in the oral histories of this book have played an integral role in the proofreading and editing of their stories. The editors thank them for their invaluable assistance and generous sharing of their experiences as well as the photographs that enliven each of their stories. Fifteen of the war brides chose to write their own stories, and these narratives are presented in the final section of the book.

These stories are truly representative of the war brides who emigrated to Canada during the 1940's. ~~Although all the war brides in this book now reside on Vancouver Island, most of them initially lived~~ in other parts of Canada, including the Maritimes, Ontario, Quebec, the prairies and the Yukon. Thus these women's stories reflect the Canadian war bride experience from coast to coast.

This year marks not only the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II; it also represents fifty years of memories for the war brides in Canada. Many of them have recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversaries or are about to do so during the forthcoming year. Their memories will always be double-edged with joy and sorrow, because their promising partnerships with their new husbands began in the tragic context of World War II. The life stories of thirty-six of those war brides are recorded in this book for future generations to cherish.

Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence

January 1995



Three war brides with children arriving in Halifax at the end of World War II.



**“MY DEAR YOUNG LADY,
DO YOU KNOW WHAT
YOU’RE DOING?”**

Betty Patriquin was born in Croydon, England. At the age of sixteen, she attended an art college to study dress design for two years. She was nineteen years old and still living with her family when the war started in 1939.

You really can’t explain how bad it was. It was very serious, really. But I think when you’re young—eighteen or nineteen—you think the war is all sort of a lark. It’s an adventure. My mother would say, “It is not funny—it’s very upsetting and worrying.” But there were all these troops around, and young people had lots of fun.

At this time, the air raids took place every night. It wasn’t just the bombs but the shrapnel from the guns as well that was dangerous. It was a funny sort of life but when you’re young, you adapt more easily. My brother and I used to sit up and play cards in the air-raid shelter in our garden. We had lights and a radio down there as well. We used to take a little hot plate down too so we could make tea. If there was a lull in the air raids, one of us would run up to the house if we needed anything or had to go to the bathroom.

If we could manage to go to dances, my friends and I would do so. When the air raids were heavy, of course, we couldn’t go. But anytime there was a few days respite from the bombing, we would go to dances. Otherwise, the bombing was so heavy that you couldn’t go anywhere. It was a difficult time for everybody. You look back now and you’re amazed that you survived it so well.

In 1941, I was to be called up because they now had conscription for women from the age of eighteen to thirty. They said that I could only go in the Army or into munitions at that time. I moved with my

family down to Bognor Regis which is on the south coast of England. We got the upper unit of a furnished duplex right on the seafront, which during peacetime had been a very, very good area—usually very expensive. But, of course, most people had gone from the coastal towns by this time.

My father continued to go back and forth by train to work in London. I went to find out what kind of work I should do, and I was told that I could go in the Land Army because they needed girls for farm work all around there. I thought, “Well that would be better than being cooped up in a factory.” They sent me to this place in Sussex, but it was twenty-five miles away from where we now lived. So I had to live there during the week and go home on the weekends.

I was billeted in a little cottage in a village. It had no lights and no toilet. I was staying with a young couple, and the wife was very kind to me. She did her best for me. But it was lonesome for me because I’d always been with my family. This was the first time I had ever lived away from home. At night, I had to just sit in the kitchen with the young couple or go to bed. During this time, I went to bed earlier than I ever had in my life.

On the farm, another girl and I spent most of our time planting vegetables and digging up potatoes. We worked at a market-garden farm, and our main task was to bed tiny plants in the greenhouses. We also had to clean out the barns which were where the farmer kept his cattle. The cattle were kept mostly for the manure they provided. We did all sorts of dirty jobs, and all this work got to be rather boring. Then one day, the farmer asked us, “Which one of you girls knows how to drive a horse and cart?” So I said, “Oh I do!” I was thinking it would be a nice change, but the problem was that I really didn’t know how to drive a horse and cart. I just decided that there couldn’t be much to it.

The farmer took me around to the barn to pick up various things that had to be delivered to other farmers. When he showed me the horse and cart, he did try to explain that “you do this and you do this to start and stop the cart.” “Oh yes,” I said. He piled up the back of the cart with all these big boxes of little chickens and what I think were sacks of flour. Then I set off in the cart with a list of the places to which I was to deliver the various items.

I would get the horse and cart into a driveway, and then I would say to the farmer, “Could you turn my horse around, please?” Because I really didn’t know how to do it. The farmers would look at me as if I were a moron but they were all nice enough to say, “Oh yes, sure I’ll turn it around.” Then there were Canadians everywhere along the roads, and some of them asked me, “Could we come for a ride with you?” I had to reply, “No, you couldn’t.” Then they asked, “Could you go out with us this evening?” I answered, “No, I couldn’t.”

The next thing I knew, one of the Canadians fed the horse some candy which I could have drooled over because it was such a rare treat in wartime England. Then when I tried to go in a different direction, the horse started to follow the Canadian who’d fed him the candy. Suddenly the back of the cart went down in a ditch, and the Canadians had to help me pull the cart out—with all the chickens squawking hysterically.

On the way home as I was going around a corner, the vicar was coming from the opposite direction on his bicycle. I caught the side of his bicycle on the cart wheel, and he fell into the ditch. I was very upset. He didn’t hurt himself but I was just horrified that I had knocked over a minister. He looked at me and inquired, “My dear young lady, do you know what you’re doing?” And I assured him, “Oh yes, I do. It’s the horse that doesn’t know!” Then he got up and he was alright but I thought that I better g

back before anything else happened.

After that exciting first ride, I took the horse and cart out whenever I was asked to do so, and those outings gave me a much needed break from the usual chores. Obviously I got to know what I was doing. And as I drove the cart around the countryside, I found it both fun and interesting to meet other people, including the other farmers in the area. It was great to do something entirely different from the other responsibilities I had. But then I suppose most of the girls in wartime did different jobs from what they were used to.

I went home on weekends, and eventually I met my husband, Pat, at a dance when he asked me to dance. He asked me where I lived, and I said, "Well we really live in Croydon. Do you know where that is?" He answered, "Oh yes, I've been up there on a course." I explained that we'd moved here because the bombs were so bad in Croydon. Then he declared, "Well, when we're married, we'll live in Croydon, and we'll spend our holidays here." I really didn't take him seriously but I agreed to go out with him on Monday night.

The next day, Pat came marching along the seafront with this group of soldiers. I think they were marching to the cookhouse for dinner. My mother and I were walking along, and Pat said to the troops "Eyes right." My mother asked me, "Do you know that man?" I said, "Yes, I do." So she remarked, "Well, he's a nice healthy looking boy," and I responded, "Oh yes, I guess so."

Come Monday evening, it was pouring with rain—just pouring. My mother told me, "You're not going out tonight, dear." But I said, "Yes, I am. I'm going out with that nice healthy looking boy." She protested, "Not tonight!" I assured her, "I really don't think he'll be there." I was thinking to myself that he'd had a few beers the night he asked me out, and he'd probably forgotten about tonight. However, I thought I would go along and see if he did show up. I told my mother, "If I don't come back, you'll know he was there and we've gone to the show."

When I reached the corner where we were to meet, there was Pat waiting for me with the rain dripping off him. So we went to the show and then for a drink afterwards. Of course, in those days, nobody had cars. You had to walk everywhere. He asked me if I would go out with him again. A couple of days later, he told me, "I'm going to London for seven days' leave. I wish I didn't have to go there now that I've met you." But I just said, "Oh well, that'll be nice for you." Then he said, "Oh I do wish you could come too." I informed him, "I couldn't do that—my mother wouldn't let me!" For one thing, she wouldn't let me go to London with all the bombing, and for another thing, girls just didn't run off for a week with their boyfriend in those days.

Finally Pat said, "Well I'll see you when I get back, so don't forget me." When he came back we went for a walk and he asked me, "When are you going to marry me?" I quipped back, "Oh tomorrow!" I thought it was ever so funny—a joke—although I really was very much attracted to him. He was a nice, tall, healthy man. But I didn't know anything about him.

When I returned home, my mother and aunt asked me, "Did you get along alright with Pat?" I answered, "Oh yes, I sure did." Then they asked me, "Does he like you?" I said, "Yes, he's just asked me to marry him!" They laughed and laughed. They rolled on the bed with laughter. My mother said, "You've only known him a week!" I declared, "Well, that doesn't make any difference." I was so young and very clever. "Love at first sight," I said, "You've heard of that."

My mother went and told my father, and he just about hit the roof. "I never heard such a lot of rubbish," he said. "That girl doesn't know what she's talking about. She's *certainly* not going to marry him!" And so on and so forth—I could hear him going on and on. I thought, "Oh dear!"

The next night Pat came around to the apartment and we went out. He said, "I went to my Commanding Officer today, and I put in an application to be married." "You did *what*?" I asked. He explained, "Well you have to ask for permission, and you have to wait so long. And I didn't think we wanted to wait so I put in an application. When they asked me how long I had known you, I said ten months. I was up in the Croydon area before and I *could* have met you then." But, I protested, "That wasn't true." "It doesn't matter," he assured me.

We got married on March 14th, 1942, and then went to Bournemouth for a week-long honeymoon. While we were on our honeymoon, I got this terrible tonsillitis (it was very wet in March). I was awfully sick. I went home, and Pat went back to his station. I had a high fever so my mother sent for the doctor. He said, "Well you won't be going back to work for awhile. You're going to have to stay in bed for a couple of weeks with that." I ended up in the hospital to have my tonsils removed, and for some time after I was very weak. So I wrote the Land Army a letter, and they said they understood. If at any time I felt well enough to go back to work, they would be glad to have me.

The war certainly opened up different work opportunities for people like me. You could see that the class system was breaking down in England. Before the war, the upper class hired members of the working class to be maids, gardeners and butlers. After the war, both men and women had higher expectations. I think that the war made women much more independent. A lot of them didn't want to go back to the same life.

I returned home and went back to my dressmaking. I had piles and piles of work. I could have worked twenty-four hours a day because all the different seamstresses and dressmakers were called up during the war, so there weren't very many that could provide such services. It wasn't exactly what you'd call war work, but still women needed things to wear. It kept their morale up. I also sewed children's clothing. During wartime, there were so many alterations from old clothes to make them do, because clothing was rationed as well as food. In any case, I could have had much more work than I wanted.

In 1944, Pat was sent back to Canada on leave because he had been one of the first ones in England, and he was due to go back. I would have been allowed to go, too, but I didn't want to go. It was 1944, and I said, "I won't leave my family in wartime while there is still danger from the bombing." My family had returned to Croydon but now the Germans were sending over doodlebugs and rockets that they shot over from France. You had no warning, and it was very, very nervewracking. So I couldn't leave my family yet.

You put out of your mind how sad you are about leaving your family. Part of you wants to go so badly to see your husband again but another part of you doesn't ever want to go. You're very torn, and I think with all the war brides, this has been a common dilemma. Some of them settled down in Canada immediately and never worried about England again. Others never really adjusted to coming here. They'll always have one foot in England and one foot here.

When the war was over, I put in an application to go to Canada. I had to wait a whole year because they took all the troops first. The women were getting very fed up. There were many articles in the paper about it. Finally, the war brides marched with banners to Canada House to protest the long wait.

to get to Canada. I had gone just to see what was going on. Then they started to take wives but naturally they gave priority to women with children and women who were pregnant. They also took women whose husbands were ill and in other situations like that.

Eventually I did get to go. First I had to go up to London to Canada House. I had to have quite a strict medical examination to prove that I was fit to travel. Then I was interviewed as to where I was going. I think that the Red Cross in Canada went to wherever you were going and met your in-laws just to see that there was an adequate place for you. They did all this before they sent you. Then we just simply had to wait until our name came up.

We were told that we were to go to London on a certain day. I remember my mother and father took me to the station in Croydon where I was to catch the train to London. It was so hard to say goodbye to them. They wanted to come up to London with me, and I said, "I wish you wouldn't." I knew all the girls would be taken away in a hurry, and I wouldn't even have time to spend with them. So they just took me to the station in Croydon.

When we reached London, they took us to this great big house, and it was awful. There was no furniture in it. It was being used to move troops or war brides through London. It was all bedrooms with bunkbeds and washrooms with rows of sinks. In the eating areas, there were old trestle tables. It was very, very primitive—just horrible. That night as we were waiting to go to Liverpool the next day, there was a line-up of girls to use the two phones to say goodbye once again. It was heartbreaking and everybody was crying.

Our ship, the *Aquitania*, left Liverpool in the last part of February 1946, and it landed in Halifax in the first week of March. Pat was to meet me there. I had been with a group of about five war brides from my area of England, and I was the only one whose husband was going to meet me in Halifax. So they were all quite intrigued about him. I thought he would arrive in his lovely officer's uniform but he was in civilian clothes with a big fedora on, which they liked to wear in those days. And I thought, "My goodness, doesn't he look funny!"

I guess we all thought that our husbands looked strange when we first saw them in civilian clothes. It was not just seeing them out of uniform; Canadian men dressed differently from British men. They dressed more flamboyantly. British men were more conservative. My father always wore a dark suit, white shirt and a bowler hat to go to work in London. In the winter, he would wear what were called spats. He was immaculate.

Pat was on leave so we went to visit his parents, and then we went up to New Brunswick to visit his sister and her family. Pat's parents were very nice and kind to me. I'm sure they wished their son had married a Canadian girl as I'm sure many in-laws of war brides wished, if they were honest. Pat's parents were strict Baptists, always going to church, which wasn't my way. I was an Anglican. As Anglicans, we went to church on Sundays but we didn't go two or three times during the week and two or three times on Sunday. My mother-in-law was a very devout Baptist.

When I met people at church, they made such a fuss, and they wanted to know who I was and where I was from. And did I like Canada? It was strange to me all around. I did my best when I was with my in-laws but I didn't have to live long with them as was the case with many war brides. Some had to stay with them for years until they got on their feet. I didn't have to do so, and in that way I was lucky.

We were in Nova Scotia for a couple of years. We stayed in Kentville, Nova Scotia, which was outside of Camp Aldershot, a big military camp where my husband was stationed. Pat found a boarding house in Kentville, and there were three Army wives at that house as well. They were Canadian women married to Army officers. There were also four young men who were at the agricultural college in Kentville. They were nice and very kind to me. The landlady was lovely too and took me under her wing. She invited Pat for dinner on the first Sunday I was there. That Sunday, we had dinner, and we were all sitting around this big table. After dinner was over, my husband asked, "Do you mind if I smoke? If you don't mind, I'll go and get my pipe." One of the Canadian Army wives asked me, "Why don't you go and get it? We understand that English girls wait on their men hand and foot." I protested, "Oh no we don't!" I felt very hurt and realized how much they resented me.

Later, the Army wives were talking to each other, and they said, "The weather's so nice, we must go for a good walk tomorrow." It was springtime you see. Then they asked me, "Would you like to come?" I replied, "Well yes, but I didn't think Canadian girls walked." They looked at me and I said, "Well the Canadians always told us that Canadian girls had to be driven everywhere, and they all had cars." Of course, we never had any cars in England, especially in wartime. We had to walk everywhere.

The next day, they walked me for miles—five miles I think! But I didn't give up, and I wasn't in a good state of health, I must say, when I first came to Canada. I suffered from malnutrition, and I was very, very thin so I got tired very quickly.

When I first came to Canada I used to walk downtown and see the little shops. Kentville wasn't a very big place but they had the most gorgeous ice-cream parlour in the drugstore, and everyday I used to go and have a great big ice-cream sundae. Sometimes in the evening when Pat came over, we'd go again and I'd have a milkshake because I enjoyed all these lovely things. I suppose because I was so thin, milkshakes didn't do me a bit of harm. They were probably very nourishing.

Afterwards, I got to know those two Army wives, and they were lovely. We got along just fine. And Pat took me to the officers' mess where I was one of the first British war brides there, and most people were nice to me. The Commanding Officer's wife took me out in the car with her for lunch several times. It was very pleasant—people were good on the whole. I was surprised there wasn't more resentment. I do think the Canadian girls were rather upset that so many of their best men had gone to the war, and then came back with wives!

Canada is a wonderful country—one of the best in the world. And I think we're so fortunate to have what we do have. Since we moved to Victoria twenty years ago, I have felt more settled than anywhere else I've lived. I've developed a stronger feeling that Canada is the place to be, and after all our moving around, Victoria is the first proper home we've had.



“MOTHER WAS HORRIFIED, SHE REALLY WAS”

Connie Rust was born in Wem in Shropshire. As a child she made her own fun, playing with her dogs, climbing trees and taking music lessons.

I had arranged with my skating instructor to go up in his plane the morning war was declared. He was to give me my first flying lesson. But I had to listen to the radio first. We all sat and listened; they said all planes were grounded, so that was the end of that, no flying lesson. I never did learn to fly. I used to lie on the ground and watch all the dogfights. There were many because we lived in a triangle of three air fields and we were one of the worst bombed areas. I used to lie outside sunbathing in the summer, and all these fighter planes would come over. The sirens would go off, but I didn't care. Then all of a sudden the planes would start peeling off, and I was there watching the fighting.

Since we had to have an air-raid shelter of some sort, we cleared out underneath the stairs so we had somewhere to go. I had a Scotch terrier and she was always the first under the stairs, and my mother was the second. I hated having to go in there. If we were at work and the siren went, we all had to go down to the basement of the store. This is what we did on the morning they dropped a land mine. It didn't go off so they had to defuse it, but it dropped back in the hole and all the crew were killed. I was standing in the candy shop downstairs, and the mirrors bulged right in and then went back out. It was amazing, as if they were elastic.

I was nineteen when war broke out. But I had to wait until I was twenty-one before I could join the Air Force without my mother's permission, because I knew she wouldn't let me go. I decided that I didn't want to be pushed into the Land Army or a munitions factory. I wanted to be in the Air Force and that was it. That's why I dashed up to London the minute I was twenty-one and signed up. I was notified within three weeks to report. Mother was horrified, she really was. But I said that was what I wanted

to do, and that if I didn't, the authorities could send me up north to a munitions factory. She got used to it. After my training, I was sent down to Colerne, Wiltshire, and this is where I spent the whole four years. It was only a little village with a few houses, a bakery and a large wartime Air Force Base. I ended up as a physical training and drill instructress, which I just absolutely loved. I loved the service life altogether and I ended up as a sergeant. As new girls came into the Air Force, we older women would look out for them. Some of the girls were only seventeen or eighteen, and it was the first time they had been away from home. I was only twenty-four but I would kind of mother them up a bit until they got on their feet. I was in charge of the barrack block and there were seven rooms with twenty-eight women in each room. I used to have to inspect the rooms every day to make sure they had mopped under their beds. Apart from taking daily drill and PT (physical training) sessions, I used to head up a lot of parades and put on PT demonstrations.



Physical Training session during “Wings for Victory” week, in Bath, Somerset, 1943. Connie with her back to the photographer.

I met David, my future husband, in September of 1944 at the coffee urn in the sergeants' mess. My friend introduced me to him. He asked her if she would find him a nice girl with money and she said, “Yes, here's Connie!” I knew the minute I looked at him that this was the guy I had been looking for. He told me on our honeymoon that he felt the same way when he met me. David was an instrument mechanic in the 406 Squadron, and he had been a watchmaker and jeweller in Canada before he joined. He went over before the main body of the Canadian Air Force did, so he was attached to a Royal Air Force squadron, and this is where he got the nickname Rocky.

David and I went out together for about two months, when he asked me if I would marry him and go to Canada. But then when he was sent to camp to go back to Canada, he said, “Let's get married before he leaves.” He went off to report to Warrington to see if he could get off the draft to get married. I stayed behind and planned the wedding, never knowing if I would ever see him again. I planned it in five days. I horrified my mother because I had only mentioned his name once to her in a letter saying I had been out with him, and then I phoned her up and asked her to come to my wedding next Saturday. My mother asked why I didn't fall in love with an Englishman; she was afraid I was going too far away. In England, Canada is the back of beyond. I said, “Oh well, we won't be going that soon.” But of course three months later we were gone.

David had to get permission from his Commanding Officer to marry. In fact one morning when he met me in the mess, he pushed this piece of paper across the table. I opened it and read that “Sergeant

David Rust has permission to marry Sergeant Constance Morgan,” and that was what we had to have in order to get a marriage licence. We had to take it the next day to the registrar at Chippenham to make the arrangements to be married. We could have been married on the Friday, but I knew my mother wouldn't come if it was a Friday because she was very superstitious. I went and stayed the night before the wedding with my girlfriend and I was just terrified that David wasn't going to turn up the next morning—that he would get cold feet and wouldn't come.

We were married in December 1944 in the registrar's office. It was a very simple wedding with just my mother, my sister and my girlfriend, who stood up for me, and David's friend, for him. Afterwards, we went for lunch. We took off to Stratford-upon-Avon for a week's honeymoon. We had to report back to Warrington near Liverpool, and that was when they told him he could stay back and wait with me to go to Canada. Before we were married he thought he should go home and get a house but once we got married that was it, no way were we going to be separated. In the Air Force, they had what they called an AMO (if your husband was on leave they had to give you leave at the same time). After we were married, we were both on indefinite leave, drawing full pay for three months before we came to Canada. So we went down to Cornwall where my mother was and lived in this fabulous hotel right on the waterfront, until they could get a passage for the two of us.

We left England on March 1, 1945. The war with Germany was nearly over but not with Japan. When we went back to camp for my discharge, they took my uniform because they wouldn't let me bring it over to Canada. Anybody who got out after the war was completely over was allowed to keep their uniform. That always annoyed me as I would have loved to have kept my cap and things like that. I only got to keep my badges.

The Air Force arranged our passage, but I had to go to Canada House in London and sign things. They told us what kind of weather we would encounter and that you would need a warm coat and boots in Canada. We were given coupons to go out and buy the things in England. We also were told not to talk to anybody about this, and when they sent for us we weren't to tell anybody where we were going. It was very secretive, so my friend and I had this little deal cooked up that we would phone each other and just say something to let each other know that we had been called. When they sent for David I knew that we would be going in a few days. Then I got my notice to report to London. He left independently and the brides all left together. We all went to a hostel in London, then we were taken to the docks the next morning, and we didn't meet our husbands until we boarded the ship.

The men were mostly together below deck; some actually slept in hammocks on deck. The women were all in large cabins (they had knocked the small cabins into larger cabins). There were thirty women in my cabin. There were three-tier bunks and I drew a lower bunk, but I traded with another woman and I got the top bunk. We were the first ship of war brides that came over without an escort. There were no children on the ship so that was why we were allowed to travel without a convoy. It was called the *Louis Pasteur*. It was actually a French luxury liner, and we made it over in five days. Some of the girls were seasick before we left the dock. It was terrible coming out of the North Sea. It was mined so badly that we changed course every five minutes, and the ship was tossing up and down. Out of the thirty women in my cabin, there were only two of us who weren't seasick. They were all moaning and groaning, so we took our pillow and blanket and sat in the shower all night.

It wasn't bad, five days. Some of the ships took two weeks in convoy, they travelled so slowly. We couldn't believe the food—white bread and bananas! Things we hadn't seen in so long. I did not miss

a meal. I could get together with my husband during the day, if he wasn't on watch. We were allowed to be together until sundown; the minute they had to blackout the ship, we had to go to our separate quarters.

When we docked in Halifax our husbands had to go off separately again and we met on the train. My first impression of the houses in Halifax was that they looked tall and narrow. As we came across Canada, we dropped people off, and as the train emptied we also left train cars behind, so the train grew smaller. It was comical because there were quite a few wives, and the porter would make all the bunks up, but nobody ever used the top ones. So after a few days, he didn't bother to make up the top berths.

When I came to Edmonton, I thought it was a dreadful place because it was so dull. I had lived just a half hour from London, and had done things, like going up to the London Palladium and hearing Kate Smith sing "God Bless America." And then I came to Edmonton and there was nothing.

My husband had said not to bring a lot of stuff because I could buy everything I wanted in Canada. So of course I hadn't brought a lot of stuff. I thought why trail it over there; I can buy new clothes when I get there. In England I didn't have what you call a bottom drawer, collecting linens and things, because I hadn't any intention of getting married. We didn't have a lot of wedding presents because we didn't have a big wedding. So I had to go out looking for things to start a household. When David went to work, I would go into Edmonton with him and shop for the day; then I would go back with all these packages. For six weeks we lived with his parents until he received his discharge. I had money my grandfather had left me, an inheritance which I brought with me. So I went out and bought our first house. It was fun fixing up the house.

I was so newly married and so crazy in love with this guy that he was the main person in my life. But I did miss my family when I came over to Canada, and I resented the way everything centered on my in-laws. The first argument my husband and I had was over going to see his parents every Sunday. I said if my family lived here we would have to go visit my mother every other week, so the weeks I should be visiting my mother, I wanted to go somewhere different. I didn't want to have to go visit his mother. I won the argument, and we used to go off to visit friends and do other things every other week. We wrote long letters to my family telling them everything about Canada. They thought we were crazy, as we used to drive a hundred miles to go fishing on a Sunday and a hundred miles back. That's halfway up to Scotland; they couldn't visualize the distance here at all.

We moved into the house in the summer. I can remember the next winter I was out sweeping the sidewalk in bare legs, and my neighbour called to me, "Have you got bare legs?" I had a dress on, so I said, "Yes." Then she told me, "It's twenty below." I guess my blood was so thick I didn't mind the cold weather. I bought a fur coat and boots with fur on them. I loved to skate, and we often went skating. When our oldest daughter was about three, we flooded our back yard so we could teach her.

A few years later we bought a jewellery store up in Whitehorse, in the Yukon, and I always said, I think if I had gone from England straight to Whitehorse I might have been one of the ones who didn't stay. There was nothing when we went there; there was no pavement or anything. We drove up to see the store, and it took us three days to reach there from Edmonton. It is a beautiful part of the country, it really is, and everyone is so friendly. We were square dancers so we joined a square dancing group as soon as we got up there. We had also bowled in a jeweller's league in Edmonton, so when we got to Whitehorse we also got into bowling. We would get a sitter for the kids and off we would go.

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