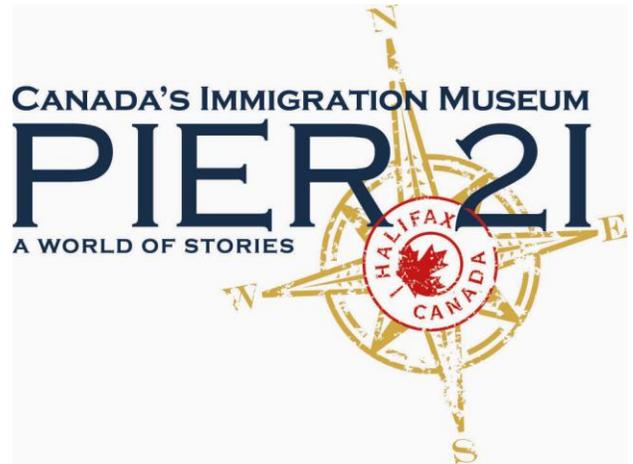


Ria Conroy
by Daughter Sandy Sheppard
Dutch War Bride
Aquitania
October 10, 1946



Ria was born Maria Antonia Brukner on June 6, 1914 in the town of Groningen, the Netherlands.

During the Second World War Ria worked as a nurse, and was able to give help and comfort to many of the casualties who passed through her ward. On occasion Ria was obliged to treat German soldiers, an occupational hazard as Hengelo was occupied by enemy troops. Like many war brides Ria was an integral part of her country's war effort.

One evening in May, 1945 Ria was invited by a friend, Christine, to a private bar owned by Christine's father, the brew master. Mr. Merling had invited a group of Canadian soldiers to the pub for an evening of socializing, and had asked Christine to be the hostess. Ria remembers, to this day, almost every detail of the pub's décor. Blue delft tiles, copper and brass fittings, and a large pit in the floor with a built in fireplace.

Ria had no idea that night would change her life forever. Being an attractive woman, Ria had no trouble finding dance partners, however, with her very basic English social repartee was not easy. Midway through the evening Ria was approached by a Canadian soldier who spoke French, a language Ria knew fluently, and so their friendship began. Actually, for Bob, it was love at first sight and he proposed after just four days.

Two months later, on July 23 1945, they were married, giving Ria the distraction of being the first war bride in Hengelo. When Bob and Ria left city hall there was a crowd of townspeople waiting for them. Bob, thinking it was some kind of demonstration, left his bride of two minutes to go back and find out what was going on. The officials from city hall told him the people of Hengelo were there to show their support and to celebrate Ria's marriage to one of the Canadian soldiers who had helped to liberate their town from the Germans. Their daughter, Edith Sandra, was born 13 months later on August 29 1946.

Ria, Bob and baby Sandy arrived at Pier 21 on October 10, 1946 aboard the Cunard ship the Aquitania. It was a memorable landing for the small Conroy family as Ria was stricken with appendicitis and taken off the

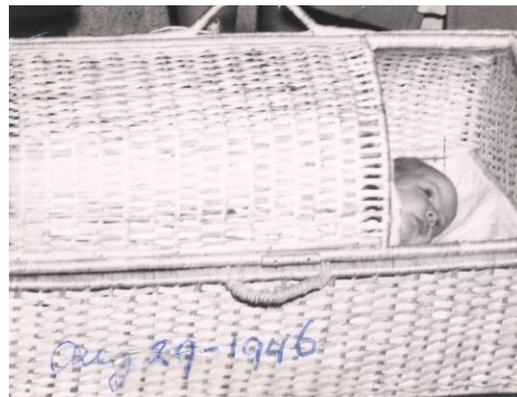
ship on a stretcher. During Ria's convalescence she was introduced to Canada from her hospital room window. The magnificent fall colours of the maple trees will always stay in her memory and was probably the reason why she wanted to buy maple furniture when she got her first home.



Two weeks after their interrupted journey Ria, Bob and Sandy were on their way to Bob's hometown of Montreal. There Ria was introduced to Bob's brother Larry, a crime reporter for the Montreal Gazette, and Bob's sister Marcelle, a housewife from St. Andrews East. The photographer who accompanied Larry to take pictures of Bob's triumphant return from seven long years in Europe, ended the

session with a picture of Larry looking through the window of his new niece's straw travelling basket.

In the spring of 1953 Ria took Sandy back to visit her family, travelling to the Netherlands via Le Havre, France where their ship docked. Three months later, when they were due to return to Canada, there was a dock strike at Le Havre, forcing Ria and Sandy to travel to Southampton, England to get to their ship. The irony being, by the time the ship left England the strike was over and the ship ended up leaving Le Havre to pick up more passengers before sailing on to Canada. Both Ria and Sandy enjoyed their trip, but were very glad to see Bob waiting for them at the pier in Quebec City.



Ria and Bob were happily married for twenty-three years, when sadly Bob died of a massive heart attack. Even now, after thirty some years and many memorable moments Ria still misses Bob and the closeness they shared.

Today Ria enjoys travelling and visiting family and friends. One day Ria hopes to make a trip to Halifax and Pier 21 where her life in Canada started.

A small note of interest:

On St. Valentine's Day, 1948 Ria's sister Ida followed her to Canada and also landed on Pier 21.

