

Florence Cooper  
English War Bride

My Story

Florence Cooper



Mine is probably a little unusual due to the fact that before the war I got married as a young girl of 18 very innocent years. I have to say this was in 1934 and in 1935 had a daughter who today is 64 years old, also a



son who is 61 from the same marriage.

He was a Scot and very aggressive. He was not liked at all by anyone, even my mother. They were depression years, no money around, and I even had to take food tickets. As in most marriages things went from bad to worst. A lot of pain and abuse. Then the war broke out and in 1940 he was called up by the Army. They had a hell of a time with him. AWOL all the time, also as you will be aware; the blitz was on my little girl and was evacuated. But it didn't work out. So I brought her home. Night after night we went to the brick shelter till dawn. I put the children to bed and I played

cards with the neighbours. This lasted for many weeks.

In the new year of 1941 I got a baby-sitter for the youngsters and got myself a job at the Ever Ready Company in Stoke Newington, a part of London. The young men having gone off to war, I did their jobs working the big machines. I was 24 years old, my marriage was getting to the point where I had to make a decision. And sure enough there was a bang up fight. So I packed up and left, taking the 2 children with me. That night we slept in the Tube Station. The next day I sent my children up north with a relative and I got myself together. Within a week they were back so I took them back to the baby-sitter, as I had to work. About two weeks later I got a call from her telling me my husband and his mother picked up the two children and took them off. They were never returned. It was very traumatic but what could I do? I had no one

to help me. June was 7-8 and Alan 5. It was at this time that my brother being in the army, his wife invited me to stay with her; which I did. Also about this time I had a suitcase full of clothing stolen from me by a con-women. All I had was what I stood up in so every morning (I worked the graveyard shift). I had to wash everything and have it ready for the next night. The police did retrieve my coat.

~ON TO THE NEXT CHAPTER~

About this time a friend of mine asked if I would go on a blind date.

Fortunately I was due some days off, so after some persuasion off we went to Euston Station to meet these 2

Canadians. One was a corporal. The private took my arm and off we went. We wound up pub-crawling and Walter, my Canadian, and I talked back and



forth. He told me a lot about Canada and showed me pictures. Right off the bat I told him of my circumstances. I thought honesty was the best policy. He empathized with my situation. We went for a walk in the park. I can't remember which one but the point being he was a real gentleman, and that was important to me. That evening we parted and he took my address. I didn't really expect to hear form him again, however after a week had gone by I had a letter from him saying he had enjoyed my company and on his next leave would I see him again. He signed it always your friend, Walter. And that's how it started.

When on leave he sent me a cable to meet him at Marble Arch. I remember I was a little late and he had been at a book ship and bought a book (Life is Sweet) and gave it to me. I had that book for years and years. I learned he was stationed in Farnham near Aldershot. He was at the 2nd Echelon (Head Quarters) so I arranged to go down there every Sunday. I took a picnic basket and we'd go into the countryside. I remember once he took me on the River Thames in Richmond; he rowed the boat. I was really beginning to like him; he was a good friend. He wrote me many beautiful letters which I still have today. We courted for

3 years. I dreaded having to go to the divorce court but that is what we both decided to do. But once again I got an ultimatum from my former spouse. I had to leave my children behind. Walter was very important to me, so I gave up much. We did marry on the 24th of December 1945. I had a new son in 1946 and brought him to Canada with me. My husband sailed 5 weeks before me on the Aquitania. I sailed from Southampton on March 12th with many other war brides, except for my children. I did not mind leaving England at all; too much heartache. The journey was pleasant, lots of good food. I did not get around the ship too much because of the baby. I shared a very nice cabin with another war bride. About my 4th day out at sea, the ship heaved somewhat so I stayed in the bunk with my baby.

Coming into Halifax was exciting. There was a band playing the Red River Valley. It was quite something, lots of coins thrown over board. The Red Cross was very good to us. We boarded a train for Montreal. We had a few hours to spare so I went shopping for nylons near by. They were a no no during the war in Britain because everything was rationed. I finally got some new clothes together to make up for my loss. My



Husband Walter bought me a coat down petticoat lane (Black market). Anyway, I finally boarded a train for Vancouver, a five-day journey. I found it fairly comfortable

except for cleaning the diapers for my baby. Going through the Rockies we ran into a landslide and we had to be shunted off to the side. I was pretty scared, I can't tell you! Especially after the bombing in Britain we were delayed several hours, but finally reached Vancouver. There was my husband in civvies with his sister and brother-in-law. We just had 1 room to start, this was in March, but by June my husband bought a small house. The bedroom, living area and kitchen, which we used most of the time, were large. I was also once again pregnant with my youngest. I was thrilled with all the food one could buy especially fruit. I lived on bacon and eggs for 3 weeks solid.

Anyway, my life in Canada has been one experience after another. Good times and bad. It was a lot of work raising my two children. When Wayne was 10 years old I took a job with BC Tel. My husband did night-duty at the airport; that's how we managed our first little home which we sold and was a bad investment. After that we rented for years. We lived 16 years in Richmond. After our children left home we settled down by ourselves. Both of us were still working but after 21 years, me with BC Tel and my husband with the municipality we both decided to retire and had many years of pleasure traveling. We bought another home in 1967. My husband renovated it as a matter of fact. He died there in 1986 of Cancer, a great loss for me. I loved this man dearly. Before his illness I visited England and by a miracle found my oldest 2 children. Of course Walter was very happy for me. This took 28 years. I prayed and asked God to spare me, to have my 28 lost years. My wish is coming true. For now it's been 23 years. I'll be 84 this year. We are indeed a happy family once again the children are all close. Walter and I were married over 40 years and I wouldn't change a thing. Canada has been good to me. I live in an apartment and every day I remember my dear husband, a kind, sensitive and gentle soul. I'm sure God led the way. Love is the greatest gift that will ever be.



