

Irene Joan Coates
English War Bride
Letitia
April 1946



Canadian Museum of
Immigration at Pier 21
Musée canadien de
l'immigration du Quai 21

Pier 21, April 1946

I met my husband Reg (Slim) in September 1943. I had just had my 19th birthday. My hometown was Gosport (Godspost), Hampshire, a submarine base opposite Portsmouth, a historical Naval Base- across the harbour actually.



My husband was a dispatch rider with the RCEME- he had brought a convoy of trucks and anti-tank vehicles to be waterproofed in preparation for D-Day. We dated and then became seriously interested in one another- we fell in love! Six months later, we were married, after gaining permission from the powers that be in the Army and persuading my widowed mother that it was going to be all right. When my husband left for France, I was pregnant with my daughter Shirley

Ann. The day of her birth, Reg managed to get leave and was able to see her. He wrote to his mother- "she is pink and white and has hair like corn silk." He had two leaves before he returned to Canada. I joined him in April 1946. Shirley Ann was a year old.

The ship I came on was the SS Letitia, small in comparison to some of the other ships. I awoke on my arrival at Pier 21.

Shirley Ann fared very well- her cot was hooked to my bunk, and at night I had netting to pull over so that she wouldn't fall out. The day was bright and sunny. Halifax didn't seem to have too many buildings surrounding the harbour. Everyone was so kind and considerate. I went to find Shirley Ann's pram and my luggage, prior to embarking on the train for Moncton, NB, when a big hand grasped my shoulder- it was Reg!- a very happy reunion. I had left England in the throes of a heat wave, and we had been wearing cotton dresses. It was quite a site to see snow amongst the pine trees (all trees were pine trees to my eyes at that time). I wasn't totally ignorant about Canada as, prior to the war, a radio program was introduced to my school. We had booklets with pictures of the different provinces, but it didn't convey the vastness of the country. The train was smaller than those in England- my husband told me the 'boys' had joked about how small they were and said they'd take them home for souvenirs.

My husband's home was in Moncton, NB and Reg's mother, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins too, formed the Welcoming Party. We stayed with an aunt of Reg's (his mother lived in the country) who had a teenaged daughter, Jean and we became fast friends. We did eventually manage to have a rented house from CMHC. We now had a son, Mason John followed by Stephen Christopher and Phillip Bruce. I've had a very happy marriage and have no regrets. My husband passed away 29 September 1998, a very sad day for me and my family.

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