

Margerie Paige
English War Bride
Franconia
April 11, 1945



I met my husband, Blackie Paige, in London, the year was 1942. We married the following year, and in 1944 our daughter Arlene was born. After being overseas for 5 ½ years my husband, a Canadian Soldier, yearned to return to Canada. Though I have never regretted his decision, and love this country I must admit at the time I would have loved to have stayed in England.

The Franconia left England on March 29th, 1945. I remember the wonderful food on board the ship white bread, fruit and ice cream but the first day I had no appetite, as I had never been away from home before. When we got out into the open sea nearly all on board were seasick, but towards the end of the journey we felt better and really appreciated the marvelous meals.

When we wondered why it took 13 days to cross we were told we had sailed south to the Azores, to avoid enemy submarines and mines. This thought did not worry us too greatly as we were sailing in a convoy.

We docked at Pier 21 early the morning of April 11th, 1945. I had gone on deck to see what all the commotion was about. Looking to the left I noticed rows of white wooden houses, all with coloured roofs of red, blue and green. I thought it looked just like a fairyland with all the lights on! What a contrast this was to London, which was still in a blackout when we left, with its homes built brick with grey roof tiles. I thought: I am really going to like this place, with all these lights and houses with the coloured roofs! On board the ship we had taken some instruction classes as to the money, clothes, climate of the region etc., and I remember the rate of exchange was \$4.44 to the pound, it has really changed since then!

After disembarking, we all sat on the quayside with our one suitcase, it seemed all the arrangements were made by alphabet, allowing some of the women aboard the train first. It was parked alongside the quay. When the "P's" were called I could not wait, as the early alphabet women were already eating their lunch and were holding their plates up to us along the quay. We saw steak, white rolls and ice cream. However, when mine came I could not help but think of England, and how this

meat I had on my plate would have been our ration for our family of five for a week.

When we stopped in Levis Quebec, I was taken off the train with my little girl Arlene. She had been so sick with dysentery we were taken to a Red Cross Nursing Station so a doctor could look at her. The Red Cross Nurses were marvelous and told me to go for a walk and see something of Levis. I did not venture very far as I could not speak French and had not had any previous dealings with the money but I do remember seeing a bunch of bananas hanging in a shop window, and remember thinking if only I could send my mother a couple!

After a day or so on the train I kept thinking my mother will never find me. In England, if you go on a train for a whole day you would be in a ocean! The scenery was terrific, just like the postcards we had seen of Canada with the Christmas trees everywhere.

My husband's sisters welcomed me with open arms, one is still living, I believe she will be 89 years old this year. I remember going downtown a few days and being treated to a banana split. I so enjoyed it and kept remarking how marvelous it was to get bananas and ice cream again! My husband's nephew, who was about 16 and probably wanted to please me, went and bought me another one. It was very kind of him, but I just could not eat it, so he did.

The first three months of my arrival in Canada I stayed with my husband's parents on their farm in Lennoxville, Quebec. Eggs, butter and milk were plentiful, and I learned how to make marvelous angel food cakes, cookies, desserts and such. So when I went back to England. In 1948, for a visit, I told my mother all about these lovely 10 inch high angle food cakes, and had promised to bake her one. I said to her: "I need 10 eggs", and my mother replied : " WHAT!" Even in 1948, food was still rationed one egg per person, per month. Needless to say, she never tasted an angel food cake until she came to Canada in 1958.

When I first arrived via train in Melfort, Saskatchewan, it was 7:30 am. My husband (who was back with the R.C.M.P) had just completed the night shift and was wearing his R.C.M.P. uniform when he first met us at the station, (until this point I had only seen him dressed in his army uniform). There he was in his navy breeches, with wide yellow stripes down each side, and a cap with a shiny peak. I said: "Oh, do you play in a band?" I don't think my comment was appreciated!

In Melfort, we stayed in the Winston Hotel for three days whilst we went furniture shopping. My husband had managed to rent an apartment over a garage "Bush's Garage". We moved in on Friday and unpacked

our dishes, and put the cardboard box with the straw in it on the back porch at the top of the stairs (we were on the second floor). Not having used a wood stove before, I emptied the grate with the ashes into the empty dishes box. I thought being grey, the ashes were harmless; however, as you might know a fire started, and we were lucky to get out down the stairs. The fire engine came and my daughter and I were taken to the apartment of a girlfriend of one of the other Constables. When my husband came home (expecting his lunch prepared by me) he was directed to where we were, the first thing I shouted as he came through the door was: "I WANT TO GO HOME, RIGHT NOW!" My husband replied: "If you start any more fires, you will go home".

Of course we had to move back to the Winston Hotel for three weeks whilst the apartment was painted and the stairs replaced, and when my husband went to the desk to pay our bill the clerk told him: "It has all been taken care of, the Legion has paid your account". Such an abundance of kind gestures awaited me in Canada. Also, on the way back to the hotel after the fire, a lady stopped us in the street and asked: "Are you the English War Bride who has just had a fire?". When I replied yes, she said: "I would be very happy if you would come and stay with me, as I have a spare room". We thanked her and declined, but I was very moved by this. Although we lived in Melfort for three years, I never did find out who the lady was (as surely could not go around town asking people if they were the one to offer their room)!

As my husband was in the R.C.M.P. we lived in many small towns and villages in Northern Saskatchewan, Regina, and in the Peace River area of Alberta, finally retiring in Edmonton, Alberta. I am very fortunate in living in this wonderful country, and am forever grateful to my husband for not listening to me when I wanted to stay in England.

I am presently Secretary of the Edmonton Branch of the Alberta War Brides Association, we meet monthly and do enjoy each other's comradeships and friendliness. We have 68 on our books in Edmonton, and in the Province of Alberta we have 237 paid members! I am sure every one of them has interesting little stories to share of their arrival in Canada, and I have asked members within our Edmonton chapter to write to you with their memories. Our members are from; England, Scotland, France, Holland and Belgium. We hold an annual reunion each year in September, this year the host city is Lethbridge, Alberta.

