

Dorothy Blaikie nee
Shipley
Scottish War Bride
Lady Nelson
June 29, 1946



Editor's Note: The following memoir is based on an interview that was conducted by Elinor Maher and Beverly MacLellan for the Colchester Historical Society Museum & Archives as part of the museums Year of the War Bride research and exhibit of 2006. The Pier 21 Society would like to thank Ms. Maher, Ms. MacLellan and the war brides that contributed to this collection by sharing their experiences and impressions of the war years and their early days in Canada.

Name:

Dorothy (nee Shipley) Blaikie

Parents:

Flora and Thomas (Smallwood) Shipley

Home:

Dorothy was born and brought up in Glasgow but her parents were English. After WWI the Shipleys moved there as Thomas was hired to supervise a factory. Dorothy was the middle child of a family with six brothers and two sisters.

Birthdate:

March 18, 1924

What are some of your war time memories: "I certainly recall the blackouts. We didn't have any real bombing raids in Glasgow but there were attacks at Greenock which was a busy port.

All of my six brothers were in the military. The oldest one was in the peace time army for ten years and was to be demobbed in three months. However, he was kept in the army for there was talk of war. He was in the Dunkirk offensive and was taken prisoner-of-war for four years by the Germans. I remember when I was sixteen I used to write to him at Stalag XXB, Germany.

One of my other brothers was taken prisoner at Singapore and held by the Japanese for three and a half years in Taiwan.

I volunteered for the Land Army. We wore a uniform and worked on farms, in place of men who were in the military. Two of us were on a farm, about thirty miles from Glasgow, with an old couple. We boarded there and cleaned barns, picked potatoes. There were also two Italian prisoners-of-war working on this farm but we weren't allowed to have anything to do with them.

I was only able to stay about six months because my Dad died suddenly and with the worry about my brothers it was too much for my mother. I was given permission to go home and stay with her. In addition to taking care of her I was sent to work in a factory which made army uniforms.

All of my brothers survived the war."

What was the attitude to Canadian service men in your community?

"They were very well liked."

Husband:

George Morrison Blaikie from Upper Stewiacke, born April 13, 1921

George was in the Royal Canadian Signals Corps. He was a dispatch rider and truck driver with the troops who landed in Italy and came north through France, Holland and Belgium.

How did you meet your husband?

"I went dancing one evening at Greens Playhouse Ballroom and met my future husband, although at the time I didn't know it. He didn't dance with me just kept talking and eventually wanted to walk me home. My girlfriend didn't want this to happen so we went out another door but he saw us and walked all three of us home.

It was May when we met. We used to go walking and visiting but George didn't do ballroom dances, he just did old time dancing. We had to wait for three months for permission from the Commanding Officer to marry. George sent to his family in Canada and his mother and sister bought engagement and wedding rings at John Doane's Jewellery and sent them over."

Wedding date:

November 2, 1945

What was your family's reaction to the news you were marrying a Canadian?

"My mother gave him the third degree. She was looking out for me. She said, 'If it doesn't work out, I'll send you a one-way ticket back.'

When it came time for me to come to Canada she was concerned for me because I didn't know any of George's family. Her advice to me was 'Just treat people the way you'd like them to treat you.'"

Can you tell us about your wedding?

"I was twenty at the time of the wedding. I wore a turquoise suit with brown accessories. We were married at the church but the reception was at home. The doorbell rang when things were all set up. I went and it was my brother who'd been in a Japanese POW camp. We hadn't seen him for 3 and a half years. My mother was thrilled. She told him I'd just gotten married and he said, 'To whom?' She told him a Canadian and he replied 'That's good.'

George was home on three weeks leave from Nijmegen, Holland. After the wedding he had to go back and we never knew when he was coming back to Glasgow on leave. He'd just be there to meet me when I got off work."

How did you come to Canada and what are your memories of the trip?

"George left for Canada in March of 1946. I stayed in Glasgow with my mother until it was time to leave for Canada in June of that year. I came on the Lady Nelson.

I had a feeling of uncertainty on the ship. You didn't know where you were going, how you'd be received. Some girls were crying as we left. When I left my mother in Glasgow she was crying. As we were getting on the Lady Nelson a ship full of British servicemen was nearby. They shouted over "You're going to be sorry."

The authorities were very good to us and very well organized. The meals were wonderful.

My bunk was in a room with a lot of other women but no children."

What was the date and memories of your arrival?

June 29, 1946

"Pier 21 was a big barn with not much there. The Red Cross was there to help us.

George was there and it was the first time I'd ever seen him in a suit. We didn't see much of Halifax. We went right to Brookfield to visit his sister and her husband, Alda and Eldon Brenton. She had been very good to George and written to him all the time. I felt like I'd known her forever."

What were your first impressions of Canada?

"I kept thinking, "Where am I going?". There were no paved roads, just farmhouses and fields." George told me, "There's nothing much to see or do. It's very quiet."

"George's family was very welcoming."

Where did you live when you first arrived in Canada?

"There were five Blaikie homes close to each other.

For the first two months we lived with my in-laws. George's father owned a mill.

I helped with the housework because Mrs. Blaikie had to feed the mill crew and there was a lot of work.

George had bought an old house. It had electricity but at first no running water. He worked in the mill in the daytime and on the house in the evenings.

We moved to Bible Hill fifty years ago. My husband of 49 years passed away on July 5, 1993."

Children:

"My first pregnancy resulted in twins in 1947. We didn't know I was carrying twins and my own Doctor, Gordon MacKenzie, had a practice in Upper Stewiacke but he was away. My mother-in-law called Dr. Jack Reid in Truro and told him I was very sick. She didn't tell him I was 7 and a half months pregnant. He came to see me and carried me out to his car and told Mrs. Blaikie to get someone to come with me for the long drive to Truro. Mrs. Hedley Creelman, who had been a nurse, came with us. We went to the Cedars on Queen St. and Dr. Reid carried me up the

stairs. The twins were born six weeks early. Gordon, weighing four pounds, and Gary, weighing three pounds, were kept in incubators. I was able to take Gordon home when I left, after fourteen days, but Gary, being smaller, had to stay an extra three weeks.

We were very proud parents. George was very helpful but we had to hire someone to come and help me.

Five years later Rhonda was born, then two years later Stephen. When I was 43 Patricia was born and both George and I were very pleased because we felt it kept us young.

I have nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren."

Tell us about the adjustments you had to make.

"I came from a city and living in the country with no plumbing or running water was difficult.

Life was very different from my own and it was very difficult. There were fourteen other war brides in the vicinity (Middle Stewiacke, Brookfield and Stewiacke East). We got together and formed a club, the Overseas Club, in 1947. It's still on the go but there are only a few of us left.

Canada, my new home, has been very good to me."

Did you have trips home? Did your family come to Canada to visit?

"I went back to Scotland quite a few times. My mother came out for a visit once and stayed six months."