

Eleanore Coburn
English War Bride
Franconia
April 10, 1945



Story of Eleanore Coburn -
War Bride
Ex WAAF - 438090

Arrived on ship Franconia, April 10, 1945
Sailed from Liverpool, England, on March 28, 1945



Sailing from Liverpool, England, on March 28, 1945, two weeks before peace was declared and traveling in a Convoy across the Atlantic with depth charges being sent down, was quite an experience for all the War Brides who were on the ship. The name of the ship was "Franconia" and there were not only War Brides aboard but Servicemen from all branches of the services. Most of them were being repatriated back to Canada for many reasons. Some had wounds and many I am sure had emotional problems. The Servicemen and the War Brides were segregated and not allowed to go near each other. Some of us had never been on an ocean before and it was quite nerve racking because of the motion of the waves and the rolling of the ship. Most of us were seasick but were

given good advice by one of the stewards who served our table "try and eat your meal before you feel sick". It certainly worked for most of us.

I was in a cabin with five other war brides and we each had a bunk to sleep on. We found out, much to our consternation, that the soap would not lather when we had a shower because it was salt water. I don't think any of the brides in the cabin had children. I think I would have run the bend in such small quarters, if there had been.

We went on deck at every opportunity and reveled in the fact that we were facing a great adventure, being on this ship. I don't quite remember what the weather was like but I don't think it could have been very bad

or I would have remembered. A times, when we were close to the barrier, there was exchanges of banter between the women and the men which at times which, at times, could be quite raucous, all being service people.

Finally, after this long journey across the Atlantic, we arrived at our destination of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. We were herded into a big building like a hangar where our cards were stamped as Landed Immigrants by Immigration Department. After that we were taken to a railway station and put on a train. We stopped there for a while and were shown Mount Royal before proceeding to our final destination in Toronto. Most of us on that train were dressed for British weather and nearly died of the heat in the compartments. We were not accustomed to central heating and, after trying to open the windows, we realized that you didn't do that or the heat would go out the window, so we just had to put up with it. For me, it was a shock to see that the dye from my blue suit and my brown blouse had mingled because I perspired so badly. Well, we were on our way at last to our final destination. After quite some time, the train stopped at a place called Lac Megantic and I presumed that meant Lake Megantic. Here we were allowed out of the train to go to the telegraphy office and send cables to our husbands to let them know we would be at Union Station in Toronto at such and such a time. I cannot remember exactly what time of day we arrived, or how long it took from Montreal but I know it was daytime when we arrived. All this was very strange to all of us, we were in a new country, didn't know the customs and our husbands were the only persons we knew. It was really terrifying. I know we arrived during the day and my husband was there to meet me, as were the other husbands. He had brought along a Scottish terrier for me and it was a great surprise. He had been busy getting things ready for me with the help of his oldest sister. They had managed to rent a room from about 4:30 till 1 a.m.. Being in a strange country, knowing nobody but my husband made me feel very, very lonely and as I write, I don't think my new relatives came to keep me company at night. The fact that it was only one room too was very confining, and I was not familiar with the place we were living, quite naturally, I started writing to my family in Edinburgh, to my father, my brothers and sisters, in turn. Unfortunately, my mother had just died two weeks before I sailed for Canada, which made it all the more heart breaking.

At night, after my husband left, I used to turn on the radio, which he and his sister had bought (which was a God send) and listened to a radio station called CKEY whose call signal was "It's Make Believe Ballroom Tim and Free for Everyone". The number was 680 on the radio dial. Listening to the radio till about the time, about 1 a.m., my husband came home. We slept in rather late, then my husband took me out and showed me the area where we were living so that I could go out by myself

while he was working, which worked out very well. Gradually I began to familiarize myself with the stores (which I called shops) and was able to get things for us to eat. The district we were in was called High Park Avenue at Dundas Street and I soon got to know the stores and everything around there. Sometimes my husband and I went over in the afternoon to see his parents and if we stayed to eat, sometimes my husband's brother-in-law would drive me home. Since in Canada they drove on the other side of the street from my hometown, it was quite confusing. However, there was no option for me, I had to get used to it in a hurry. They had tramcars (streetcars) running from where my parents-in-law lived to the intersection where we lived so eventually I could go there and back on my own. At that time the tickets on the streetcars were four for a quarter and if you were traveling further, you could get a transfer from the driver when you put your ticket in and go on another car without paying another fare. I remember one time, when I was traveling with my baby to see a friend, I got on the wrong bus on the wrong side of the road. Very confusing. When I was still at home in Edinburgh and communicating with my husband through the mail, we had decided, at our earliest opportunity, that we would buy a house, if we could, right away. We lived in the room for months, then started looking for a house. Since my husband was working down town we had to find a place suitable for his transportation because he would be traveling via public transit. We looked in the Kingsway district, I remember, and liked what we saw at the time, but the buses and streetcars were not available there. (At that time there was no subway, there was, many years later). Then we looked in the Jane and Annette area which too was in the west end of the city but further south. Here we saw two bungalows, one which was finished and the other in the process of being built. We were shown through the finished one and liked the layout. It had five rooms, cement basement, small backyard and a garage. However, this one had already been sold. Managing to go through the other one, carefully walking up planks, we saw that it was exactly like the other one, only reverse. It, too, had a small backyard and a garage. We talked it over and decided to buy it and after talking with a lawyer about the down payment we contacted the builder/owner, put down the deposit and were scheduled to move in July of 1945 after all the paperwork was done. We managed to contact Mutual Life of Canada and arranged a mortgage, paying principal and interest at the rate of I think, thirty-five dollars a month, at the minute I am not sure just what it started at but I know when we finished paying it was quite low. But this was just after peace was declared and as far as we could gather from various people we talked with, we got a very good deal.

Moving into a new house and being in a new country was quite traumatic, I can tell you. By this time, we did not have much money left, but my husband got a one time bonus from the government which meant

that we could buy something which we needed, and we did need many things. So we had to decide what we needed most which was probably the bed. Getting settled in was another thing. Since my husband was on shift work we had to do as much as possible before he went to work. It was a few weeks before we even felt as if we were gradually getting things in order. My husband's brother, I remember came down from a place called Caledon and put the electric system in and the lights, which naturally were essential. A card table and four chairs served as our table in the kitchen. Later, much later, we managed to get a dining room table and four chairs. We managed to get an icebox too for the kitchen, that was all we could afford. Curtains for the front room was a priority, since people could see right into the room. Since I had no experience at this domesticity (being in the armed forces for four years), I had no idea about curtains and rods as such. Remembering the first ones I got and put up were not long enough nor wide enough and looking back on it now, they must have looked terrible. However that's the way it was. The things we bought will not be in the right sequence because it is now 61 years since all that happened. In the kitchen we bought a 30inch stove, I think from Eaton's store, which was the only size we could put in. We bought a tall boy and a dressing table for our bedroom. The sheets we had we also bought because it was wartime, and both of us were in Britain, we did not get the usual wedding showers which most people had in peace time. So, most of our furnishings we ourselves had to buy. Eventually we managed to buy, for the front room, a chesterfield and two matching chairs which we could not do without. There was nothing in the small bedroom next to ours for a long time. In those days most houses had coal furnaces and ours was no exception,

There was an imitation fireplace in the front room on the side of which was a sort of pull chain which was attached to the furnace downstairs in the basement. If it got a little cold, we just pulled on this to open the door on the furnace and that's how we controlled the heat. Then, if it needed filling up with coal we went downstairs and shoveled more coal, which brought the heat back up again. The coal was in a kind of scuttle. At that time there were only wooden storm windows. The outside window, which was the storm, had a little opening along the bottom to let some air in and a wooden flap to close if necessary. In the summer, we opened the inside window and put a little screen which fitted the window so that flies etc. could not come in. Through the summer, this house was extremely hot until we managed to get insulation in the attic and it helped a little. So, from then on, as I got used to living in Canada, it gradually began to get a little easier as I settled down and learned more and more about everything. Recently, November 11th, 2006, I heard that a contingent of British War Brides were leaving for Halifax to commemorate their landing in 1946. I had always assumed that us

coming in 1945 were the first contingent of war brides coming from Britain.

However, it seems I may have been mistaken. I, myself, had known about them going. I would have loved to have gone too.

That is my story of a Scottish War Bride. My husband and I met in Cranwell, Lincolnshire, England, while we were both on courses at the station, he as a Wireless Air Gunner and I as a Teleprinter Operator with the WAAF (RAF). He flew many, many missions over Germany, bailed out twice, once out of a burning aircraft, for which he and all the crew got a Caterpillar Pin from the Irwin Parachute Company. It had a Ruby in it representing burning. There was another pin for parachuting out of a disabled aircraft which had a Greeneye as it were. My husband attained the rank of Flying Officer. We were married on October 12th, 1942 and then he was repatriated home eight months before I arrived in 1945. We had a daughter and a son and were married 54 years before he died in 1996. As you can see, I now live in Burlington, Ontario where my daughter resides also. My son lives in New Jersey with his wife. I hope that this narrative is not too long, and it will be of some interest.



Sincerely,

Eleanore Coburn
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