

**There's No Place Like Home: A Study on World War II War Brides and  
Their Families in Northwestern Ontario**

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## **Abstract**

During the Second World War an estimated 48,000 women, mostly from the United Kingdom, met and married Canadian soldiers who were stationed overseas (Oosterom 2011, 26). These women immigrated to Canada as new wives and new mothers and came to be known as “war brides.” This research examines war brides who settled in Northwestern Ontario and explores how these women created home and community in their new environments, as well as how they made meaning in their lives through traditional expressive culture. Consequently, this study is as much about war bride families as it is about war brides-- perhaps even for so. In this study I ask: How were war brides able to create “home” in a new country so far away from their families? And, how did ideas of home get passed on to the children of war brides? Most importantly, I ponder the concept of “home” and how it is understood differently by so many people. These questions are explored through three folklore genres: foodways, family narrative, and material culture.

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## Introduction: The War Brides



*Figure 1 Hazel and Reg Bailey on their wedding day (Anne Miller's family photo collection).*

This thesis explores the unique experiences of five war bride families, who I spent the past year conducting in-depth interviews with. When using the term “war bride family,” I refer to the husbands, children, and grandchildren of war brides. A war bride is a woman who marries a foreign serviceman during times of war or conflict. Given that the Second World War ended approximately seventy-four years ago, most of the women who were considered WWII war brides have since passed away or are no longer in good enough health to be interviewed. As such, in order to share their stories, it was necessary for me to reach out to the family members of these women when conducting interviews for this project. While this thesis initially began as a study about war brides, it has grown

to be so much more than that as it also includes the perspectives and experiences not just of the war brides themselves, but of their family members. Adding these multiple points of views has allowed me to better understand the complexities of war bride experiences, including how these families dealt with the traumas of war, immigration, and creating home and community in new places and spaces.

### **Who Are the War Brides?**

During the Second World War an estimated 48,000 women, mostly from the United Kingdom, met and married Canadian soldiers who were stationed overseas (Oosterom 2011, 26). Some couples knew very little of each other before they married as courtships were often quick during wartime. The first marriage between a Canadian soldier and a British bride took place on January 28, 1940, shortly after the Canadian Army had arrived in Scotland (Jarratt 2009, 15). Anthropologist Seena B. Kohl explains:

More than any other factor, World War II shaped the lives and outlooks of the war brides... To understand their lives, it is necessary to remember how young these women were when the war began. They were, for the most part, twelve to sixteen years old in 1939 and most had graduated at age fourteen from eighth grade. Prior to the war, they would have entered the workforce, continued in technical programs or continued their formal educations. All that changed with the onset of war (2006, 23).

Between 1942 and 1947 these, often young, women immigrated to North America as new wives and new mothers and would come to be known as “war brides.” My research explores the lives of these women and their families in Northwestern Ontario.

The majority of the 48,000 war brides, along with their 22,000 children, were brought to Canada via free transportation provided by the Canadian Government (Lambert 2012, 100-102). While the transportation for married couples was provided, war fiancées were required to make their own travel plans at their own expense (Ibid.). In the case of the brides, some of the women were sent on board ships with returning soldiers, and those who came between 1942 and 1943 were in real danger due to enemy U-boats that prowled the North Atlantic.<sup>1</sup> Though, most of the women immigrated to Canada after the war and travelled on large “bride ships” which were specifically outfitted to carry both women and children. For example, on the *Queen Mary*,<sup>2</sup> the cabins were equipped with six bunks that featured attached cribs to make sleeping easier for both mothers and babies (Ibid.). Historian Melynda Jarratt, explains that the Canadian Army’s task to transport the families of servicemen to Canada was, “affectionately dubbed ‘Operation Daddy,’” by the Canadian Press (2009, 24-25). After docking at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia many of the brides and their children then boarded “special war bride trains” that carried them to various destinations across the country.<sup>3</sup>

While stories of war brides being reunited with their Canadian husbands are often told with an air of sweetness or excitement, it is also important to note that many of these women left their homes and families without knowing if they would ever see them again. War brides are an interesting immigrant group because they were not necessarily pushed or forced out of their countries, nor were they specifically attracted to Canada as a

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more, see: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadian-war-brides> (accessed November 10, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> *The Queen Mary*, a retired British ocean liner, was the most notable of the ships which brought war brides to Canada during and after the Second World War (Veterans Affairs Canada).

<sup>3</sup> To learn more, see: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadian-war-brides> (accessed November 10, 2018).

desirable location. In this way, these women do not fit into those “push or pull” categories that help us to better understand the reasons why immigrants leave their countries. In commenting on the lives of British war brides in Canada, Melynda Jarratt, writes:

Every woman’s experience was unique, ranging from the ‘idyllic to the tragic.’ They shared much in common: meeting and falling in love with a Canadian soldier in Britain, marrying and coming to Canada, settling into a new culture and adapting to a new way of life. But far from the stereotypical War Bride with her tea-cosy and loveable accent, the War Brides are as different from one another as they are to any other immigrant group (2009, 31).

Each war bride may have married a Canadian soldier during the Second World War, but every woman’s experience in Canada is her own unique story. Once the excitement and fanfare died down, these women were often left to adapt to life in a new country without the support and guidance of longtime friends and family (Kohl 2006, 37).

### **A Brief Literature Review**

Scholarship and literature on war brides have often taken an oral history approach to the topic. Studs Terkel is thought of as one of the most famous oral historians of our time and can be described as an author, radio host, actor, and activist. Over the course of his life, Terkel wrote eighteen books, recorded thousands of taped interviews and broadcasts, and received numerous awards and recognitions. Terkel’s books are described as “written ‘radio’” because they contain the straight words of participants with little of Terkel’s own analysis (The WFMT Studs Terkel Radio Archive).<sup>4</sup> Oral history often

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<sup>4</sup> To learn more, see: <https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/about-studs-terkel> (accessed May 12, 2019).

comes from a place where underrepresented voices are given the opportunity to be heard. In his book *Division Street: America* (1967) Terkel includes interviews with diverse peoples from the working class, to businessmen, to sex workers. The book is laid out in such a way that each section includes a person's name and their words. This approach is both meaningful and effective because it allows the interviewee's words to be felt and expressed in their original form without being overanalyzed or edited. This can be especially empowering for people whose voices are rarely heard within society.

As is customary in oral history traditions, the words of participants are often highlighted over content and analysis, as in Terkel's works. Though, oral historian Alessandro Portelli explains that the use of oral history in academic texts should not replace writing and rationality, or vice versa, because, "written and oral sources are not mutually exclusive" (2016, 49). In this way, both the written and oral word should be interpreted in order to be both meaningful and useful to the reader/listener. Similarly, oral historian Jack Dougherty suggests that scholars need to take "new directions" when it comes to oral history collection and analysis. Instead of simply collecting narratives, Dougherty believes that scholars should "pose broader questions, draw effectively upon preexisting source materials, and reflect more clearly about our modes of analysis" (1999, 720). The tendency to highlight orality over written analysis is especially true when it comes to literature on war brides. Authors often take a romantic or popular approach to the topic. Even the term "war bride" can elude to ideas of youth and romance without touching on the reality of what life was like for these women.

Much of the literature on war brides in Canada takes the form of edited collections that compile the accounts of numerous war brides from across the country, or focus on a

specific community of war brides, sometimes re-writing the women's stories for "tellability"<sup>5</sup> (for example: Faryon 2004; Granfield 2002; Ladouceur and Spence 1995, Lambert 2012). Also, of note is how the majority of these books are edited by war brides themselves or by the decedents of war brides, thus allowing them to weave their own personal experiences into the introductions of these books. While not academic, these collections and first-person accounts are useful because they explore the day-to-day lives of war brides in Canada and allow the women's feelings and emotions to be felt through their narratives. What is missing from this popular literature is deeper analysis where room is left to ask and explore bigger questions. In Melynda Jarratt's edited collection (2009) each war bride's story is framed by the province where she settled, emphasizing the importance of place in the experiences of these women. Also, of interest is how Jarratt covers topics that are not always explored, including: war brides' military service, war widows, war fiancées, and the children of war brides. While Jarratt's book is informative about their lives, the downside is that the author offers little analysis, save for the opening introduction. The layout of the book and the materials found within suggests that these edited collections are concerned more with the general public's enjoyment, rather than further exploration of the topic. Similar to Studs Terkel's works, books on war brides often include the name of each interviewee and her story but fail to include any real analysis.

Historian Sidney Eve Matrix's work takes a more critical approach to the experiences of war brides. In her article, "Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belongings: Canadian War Brides and the Fictions of Naturalization" (2007), Matrix

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of tellability will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

explores the issue of citizenship and the role that the Canadian media played in portraying the experiences of war brides in Canada. Matrix explains that on one hand the war brides were treated as sweethearts of the Canadian media as well as ideal citizens, but on the other hand, the women were encouraged to assimilate into the larger Canadian society, and some struggled for years to achieve secure and legitimate citizenship. Matrix's work is a valuable addition to the study of war brides as she not only focuses on positive or humorous experiences, but also explores bigger issues related to the women's sometimes complicated positions within Canadian society.

Like other immigrants, war brides are a diverse group. In the United States, Barbara Friedman has studied the media's changing depictions of British war brides in the 1940s (2007), and Anna Amundson explores the experiences of British, French, and German war brides in South Dakota (2010). While works focusing on the Japanese war bride experience in the United States and Canada can be seen in Debbie Storrs' "Like a Bamboo: Representations of a Japanese War Bride" (2000), Ayaka Yoshimizu's "Hello, War Brides: Heteroglossia, Counter-Memory, and the Auto/Biographical Work of Japanese War Brides" (2009), and Caroline Chung Simpson's "'Out of an Obscure Place': Japanese War Brides and Cultural Pluralism in the 1950s" (1998). Each of these works highlights the difficulty that many war brides experienced in fitting into their new communities, as well as the racism and cultural differences that they faced in North America.

While much has been published on war brides by scholars and enthusiasts alike this work has been done almost exclusively with an oral history focus. It is also important to recognize that there is still much yet to be explored when it comes to the topic of war

brides Canada. While edited collections of war bride experiences are useful in understanding the day-to-day lives of these women, there is ample room for these first-person narratives to be examined and analyzed further. Bigger questions need to be asked in order to better understand this unique immigrant group and how their presence is still felt within modern Canadian society.

## **Methodology**

My research uses a folkloristic approach, in order to examine new angles of war bride communities. On the differences between folklore and oral history methodologies, folklorist Tim Lloyd explains that while oral historians focus mostly on *the interview*, folklorists take a broader approach through *fieldwork*, as they are “most fundamentally interested in those occasions, practices, and performances in which artfulness and everyday life intersect” (2012). Specifically, my research examines war brides who settled in Northwestern Ontario, and how these women created home and community in their new environments, as well as how they made meaning in their lives through traditional expressive culture.

While my research is set in Canada, it builds on other studies of various war bride communities in the United States. In particular, I look to Seena B. Kohl’s anthropological study as a model. Kohl’s work on British war brides who settled in Montana following the Second World War (2006) has many similarities to my thesis research. Kohl points out that war brides did not just set up their homes and adapt to life as newlyweds, but they did these things without the support and guidance of family and longtime friends (2006, 37). She suggests that as a result, the women often felt like they were living two different

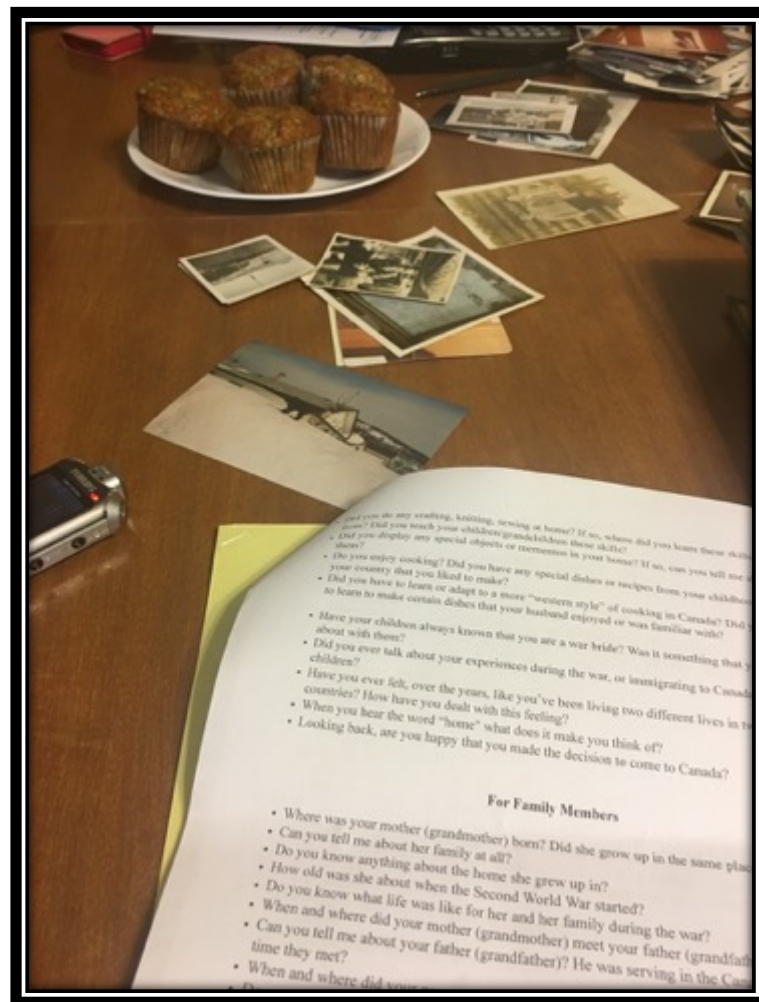


lives in two different countries, as their childhood homes and families were in Britain, while their husbands and children were in the United States (Ibid., 28). Furthermore, my study considers not only happy stories of home, family, and marriage, but also examines regrets, homesickness, isolation, and the reality of getting to know one's husband outside of the uniform. This work will illuminate what goes into making a place a home, and how war brides were able to adapt to new places, spaces, and communities. In this study I ask: *How were war brides able to create "home" in a new country so far away from their families? And, how did ideas of home get passed on to the children of war brides? Most importantly, I ponder the concept of "home" and how it is understood differently by so many people.* I explore these questions in four chapters, each dealing with a distinct folklore genre. **Chapter One** focuses on food, recipes, and domestic labor within the home. **Chapter Two** examines personal narratives and family stories, dealing with both tales of war and trauma as well as special memories that people have of their mothers. **Chapter Three** looks at material culture, including special items that war brides brought with them to Canada and how these objects share connections to memories and family history. Finally, **Chapter Four** explores the concept of "home" and how this word can be interpreted differently by so many people.

### **My Fieldwork**

My fieldwork was completed over the spring and summer of 2018 and during this time I conducted audio-recorded interviews, used documentary photography, and identified and analyzed everyday objects, from the homes of my interviewees. I interviewed a total of nine people for this thesis. Settings for these interviews were often

the living rooms or kitchens of peoples' homes, but also included hospital rooms, senior living facilities, public spaces (such as coffee shops or the mall), as well as at the Port Arthur Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 5. Initially, I was worried that I would not be able to interview any war brides, but I was thrilled to have the privilege to speak with Mary Ross, a ninety-five-year-old war bride from Paisley, Scotland. I also interviewed five people (who ranged in age from their mid 50s to their mid 70s) –who are all children of war brides. Furthermore, I interviewed a married couple (husband and wife) who grew up



*Figure 2 Interviewing Rona Godin in her home (photo by Maeghan Chassé).*

in Britain during the Second World War, as well as a ninety-eight-year-old woman who served in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Women's Division. The war brides whose stories I will be focusing on also come from a number of different countries including: England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Netherlands. Listening to the stories and memories of war brides, their children, and other individuals who experienced and survived the Second World War has given me a unique perspective into the lives and homes of war brides and veterans in the post-war era. These stories and memories offer what linguist Ned R. Norrick calls, the ever evolving "dual assessments or evaluations" (Norrick 2006, 91) that come from trying to tell a singular story with multiple perspectives and points of views. Furthermore, my research takes place in several neighboring communities in Northwestern Ontario: stretching from the Manitoba border, to the city of Thunder Bay, and the small communities that dot the North Shore of Lake Superior. While some aspects of Northern Ontario's wartime history have been documented (see Zimmerman 2015), the stories of war brides have yet to be recorded. My goal was not to collect the narratives of every war bride family in this region, but rather, to collect stories that shed light on the unique experiences of many war brides who settled and created homes in Northwestern Ontario.

### **Personal Connection to My Research**

While I myself am not a descendant of a war bride, I have always had a keen interest in the subject. My Pépère (grandfather) served in the Second World War, and I often felt a special connection to the topic of WWII, perhaps through my father, who also feels connected. The first time I heard the phrase, "war bride," was in my Grade 10

Canadian History class. We were given a list of twentieth century topics by our teacher and instructed to choose one for our final essay. I was unsure of what a “war bride” was but nonetheless chose the topic as I was curious and wanted to explore further. This small decision led to an interest that would persist well into my academic career as I continued to write papers on the topic while completing my undergraduate degree in history and accumulated a growing collection of books pertaining to war brides and their stories. The pull to deeply examine this topic never let go. As I began fieldwork for this thesis, I was surprised to learn that Schreiber, Ontario (the small town that I grew up in) was home to at least ten war brides who had settled and raised families in the community of approximately one thousand people. As the years go on and the people who lived through the Second World War pass away, the collective memory about these remarkable women is fading. Though, as Jarratt writes, “their legacy is alive in the one in thirty Canadians who can count a War Bride in their family tree” (2009, 32). Within this thesis I shine a light on the experiences of war brides while attempting to better understand how their families remember these brave women who travelled across an ocean to create homes and new beginnings in Canada.

### **Participant Biographies**

As I have stated, this thesis tells the stories of war bride families as well as other individuals who experienced the Second World War firsthand. From interviewing war brides and their children, to people who lived in England during the war, and those who served in the Canadian Military. My aim was to gain a better understanding and paint a more complete picture of what life was like for war brides both during and after the war.

By interviewing a variety of people, I could gain a sense of these women's lives, even if I could not interview them personally.

1. Erik Leet

Erik was born in Stoke-on-Trent, a city in Staffordshire, England. In speaking on growing up in Britain during the war, Erik stated, "As a kid you don't forget it... it's so traumatic that it's emblazoned in your mind." While Erik is not a descendent of a war bride, I interviewed him and his wife, Marion, as a way to better understand where the war brides were coming from and what it was like to live with rationing and bombings in the U.K. Erik was raised by his grandparents after his father got called up to join the British Army. Sadly, Erik's father was killed in action and is buried in Italy. Today, Erik and Marion live in Rosslyn, Ontario.

2. Marion Leet

Marion grew up in Yorkshire, England in a town called Keighley. She experienced the war as a child and remembers hiding in the trees with her three older sisters during nightly bombings. Following the war, Marion went to Germany to attend school. She lived with her older brother, who had served in the British Army and settled in Germany after marrying a German woman. While Marion is not a war bride herself, her experiences in war time England are an invaluable addition to my research. Marion and Erik kindly put me in contact with fellow interviewee, Ida Maxwell, who they have attended Remembrance Day Ceremonies with on November 11th.



**Figure 3** Erik and Marion Leet pose for a photo in their home (photo by Maeghan Chassé).



**Figure 4** Marion and her father pose in front of their home in 1953, the year of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation (Marion Leet's family photo collection).

### 3. Henry Lewis

Henry is the son of Dutch war bride, Cathrine (Van Velzen) Lewis. While Cathrine did some work as a model before the war, her experiences living in Nazi occupied Holland were described as unpleasant and brutal. Henry's parents met when his father, quite literally, liberated his mother from the Nazis. Henry grew up in Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay) and joined the Canadian Military himself as a young man. Henry is a friend of my father, having served as my father's Sergeant in the military during the 1980s. Henry was incredibly helpful during this project and I am grateful that he agreed to meet with me on more than one occasion. It was through Henry that I was introduced to Erik and Marion Leet.



**Figure 5** Henry Lewis poses for a photo following our interview at the Port Arthur Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 5 (photo by Maeghan Chassé).



#### 4. Mary Ross

Mary is a ninety-six-year-old war bride from Paisley, Scotland. She met her husband Keith, a member of the Royal Navy, at a skating rink in her hometown. While telling me about meeting her husband, Mary joked, “I didn’t really like him at first. You know, tried to ditch him, but it was no good.” Mary and Keith were married in Scotland, and Mary immigrated to Canada following the war with their eldest son, John. Together Mary and Keith raised eight children, including two sets of twins, in Schreiber, Ontario.



***Figure 6** Mary and Keith Ross on their wedding day (Linda Ballentine’s family photo collection).*



5. Linda Ballentine

Linda is the daughter of Mary Ross. She grew up in Schreiber, Ontario and is one of two sets of twins in her immediate family. Linda now lives in Terrace Bay, Ontario, a short drive away from her hometown.

6. Rona Godin

Rona is the daughter of Irish war bride, Margaret (O'Shea) Godin. Margaret grew up in the community of Dingle in Country Kerry, Ireland. She worked as a nurse in a hospital in London, England during the war and met Rona's father, Leo (a member of the Canadian Air Force), on the steps of a church. Together they raised four children. Rona continues to live in her hometown of Schreiber, Ontario and even resides in the same house that she grew up in as a child.



***Figure 7** Margaret and Leo Godin on their wedding day (Rona Godin's family photo collection).*

## 7. Anne Miller

Anne is the daughter of British war bride, Hazel (Bayliss) Bailey. Hazel grew up in Birmingham, England and worked at the Cadbury Chocolate Factory while also volunteering with the St. John Ambulance Brigade during the war. Hazel met her husband, Reg (Canadian Army), at a family function and immigrated to Schreiber, Ontario, Reg's hometown. Together they raised four children. Over her lifetime, Hazel was instrumental with her church and community, even winning citizen of the year. Hazel passed away in the spring of 2018 and is missed dearly by her daughter, Anne, and the rest of her family.



**Figure 8** Anne Miller poses with a photo of her mother, Hazel, on her wedding day (photo by Maeghan Chassé).

## 8. Donald Campbell

Donald is the son of war bride, Elspeth “Elsie” Jean Campbell. Elsie grew up in Dumfries, Scotland and served in the military as a tele-typer. She met and married Ralph Campbell, as Canadian soldier from Hurkett (a dispersed rural community in Northern Ontario). Following the war, Elsie sailed to Canada on the *Queen Mary* with Donald and his older sister. Donald’s father, Ralph, served in the Forestry Division during the Second World War and continued his work building bridges and roads when he returned to Canada in 1945. Ralph’s work caused the family to move around when Donald and his siblings were growing up. The family lived in a number of remote communities and work camps from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Atikokan, Ontario, to Thompson, Manitoba, and many other places in between. Donald currently lives in Atikokan and is the sole caregiver to his aging mother.



**Figure 9** Elsie and Ralph Campbell pose for a photo during the war (Donald Campbell’s family photo collection).

## 9. Ida Maxwell

Ninety-eight-year-old Ida Maxwell resides in Thunder Bay, Ontario. She served in the Royal Canadian Airforce, Women's Division, as a dietician during the war.

Her first husband was deployed overseas and his experiences in the war affected him for many years after. Whilst serving in the air force, Ida travelled everywhere from Manitoba to the east coast of Canada and remembers her time in the air force fondly. While I do not consider Ida to be a war bride, within this study, her memories and insights have added nuance to my research.



*Figure 10 Photographs of Ida Maxwell during the war (Ida Maxwell's family photo collection).*

Each of these individuals brings a perspective and experiences that have helped me to understand the home lives of war brides and their families. In the next chapter, I will take a close look at how these women created home in Canada through the lens of food.

**Chapter One- Memories of Food, Home, and Domestic Labour**  
**“I was amazed at what an impact that smell had on me” – Linda Ballentine**

Making a house into a home takes work, and often it is the women in the household who takes on this “labour of love” (Luxton 2009, 12). Many war brides, and brides in general, had to learn about housework on their own. In her article, “Why Folklorists Should Study Housework,” folklorist Judith Levin suggests that we can gain an understanding of how people’s creativity and culture can come out in interesting and unexpected ways through their practice of housework. Levin does not suggest that people necessarily have to enjoy doing housework, or that women have to be the ones to complete housework; rather, she urges folklorists to look at what people (both men and women) “have made of housework” (Levin 1993, 295). Housework or domestic labour are terms that are largely ambiguous in their meanings. These words could mean anything from cooking and cleaning, to taking care of children and their needs, or completing endless loads of laundry (Ibid., 295-296). As a form of housework, food and the preparation of food will be my main focus within this chapter. I decided to examine foodways because it was a topic that came up often within my interviews. As I sat in people’s kitchens and interviewed them over cups of coffee, I came to understand the importance of food within people’s lives and the different ways it can evoke memories. In this chapter, I explore women’s roles within the home in the post war era, and the effects that the earlier food rationing they experienced had on their lives. As well, I look at food as a means of staying connected to one’s culture and family. Finally, I examine the idea of becoming “Canadian” through cooking and meal preparation. As folklorist Michael Owen Jones suggests, recipes, food, and the ways in which meals are prepared can hold

meaning for those who are doing the cooking, as well as those who are eating the food (2007, 133-135).

### **Rationing: A Way of Life**

Coming from strict wartime rationing, many war brides were overwhelmed by the amounts and types of food that were available to them in Canada (Jarratt 2009, 109). War often changed people's perception of food, not only in its tastes and smells, but also in its meanings and importance. Erik Leet is a man who grew up in Stoke-on-Trent, a city in Staffordshire, England, during the Second World War. Erik is not a descendent of a war bride, but I interviewed him and his wife, Marion, as a way to understand where war brides were coming from and what it was like to live with food rationing during times of war. Erik was raised by his grandparents after his father got called up to join the British Army. In our interview, Erik discussed the challenges of growing up in wartime Britain. Erik's grandfather, a miner in England's Black Country, received extra food rationing due to his labour intensive occupation. Although, Erik was quick to inform me that even with extra rations, his family only received two ounces of meat each week; "You were lucky if you got two ounces because there would be no meat at the butchers," Erik explained. He recalled a time where the family was shocked, to say the least, at what his grandmother had brought home from the butcher's one afternoon:

I remember my grandfather coming home from the mine one night...I remember the hullabaloo that went up when my grandfather came in, and "what the bloody hell is this?" Then I heard the plate smash and everything, and he had thrown it on the fire... Anyway, it turned out what my grandmother got, it was the only meat

that was on the slab in the butcher's shop...it was whale meat. Well she had no idea what to do with whale blubber, she cooked it like meat, and it was like eating the sole off your shoe (Leet 2018).

It can only be speculated that experiences like Erik's were not isolated cases in Europe during the war. People not only had to make do with what they were given but they had to adapt to living in times of crisis. These were the types of conditions that women who became war brides would have experienced all over Europe in countries like England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Netherlands. As Rona Godin, daughter of Irish war bride, Margaret "Marg" Godin, suggested "It was rationing, and it was tough rationing. They never saw, as I said, real eggs during the war. Powdered... It was very tough to make a meal." For most people living during and after the Second World War, rationing one's food was both a way of life and a person's "patriotic duty," but that certainly did not mean it was a pleasant experience. In other cases, as with Henry Lewis' mother, people literally starved under Nazi occupation. Henry explained to me that in Holland people ate whatever they could to stay alive, from scraps out of the garbage to eating the tulips that are now so often associated with Canada's lasting wartime connection to the Netherlands. In these instances, food became less about comfort and taste, and more about basic human survival.

Following the war, war brides were introduced to a variety of new foods upon arriving in Canada. At the same time, the women were re-introduced to foods that many had not seen since before the war had started. Some of these experiences occurred prior to the women setting foot in Canada. Henry Lewis described the first time his mother tried Carnation brand evaporated milk, on the boat destined for Canada:

My mother kind of read or asked another person, what is that tin? And they said, milk. Oh, my mother says, milk. And she told me, I'm going to have some. So, she opened up her can of Carnation milk, that's what it was, and she started drinking that. But when she got done halfway, her stomach didn't take the Carnation milk because that was really thick. And she chucked up, and chucked up, and her voyage from England to Canada was a mess (Lewis 2018).

Henry's story is an example of how food is not always something that makes us feel good, and I could not help but wonder if his mother ever drank Carnation milk again. While Henry's mother thought she would be drinking the type of fresh milk that she was familiar with, she instead drank a whole can of Carnation milk, and this made her very sick. Carnation milk has many different frames of meaning depending on the context. It is often viewed as a "hard time food," having traditionally been a cheaper alternative to fresh milk, not to mention having a much longer shelf life. For my parents, Carnation was a staple in their households growing up in the 1960s and 70s. Both my mother and father came from large families and when they could not afford fresh milk, they resorted to drinking evaporated or powdered milk. For me, just looking at a can of Carnation milk reminds me of baking pumpkin pies with my mom around Thanksgiving. Although, after living in Newfoundland, my understanding of Carnation milk evolved, because I learned that many Newfoundlanders prefer to add Carnation to their tea, rather than using fresh milk or cream. In these ways, Henry's story is not only about drinking a can of Carnation milk, but it also addresses deeper issues of difference. The various ways that food is perceived and eaten in different families, provinces, and countries. Coming from the



Netherlands, Henry's mother could not speak enough English to understand what was labelled on the can of milk, nor was she familiar with the Carnation brand. Henry's story highlights the many differences that war brides faced when it came to experiencing foods in Canada.

When I asked Scottish war bride, Mary Ross, if the food was any different when she came to Canada, she stated, "It wasn't bad...I didn't think it was terrible." Mary explained how the food was actually better when she arrived in Canada following the war, and how she and other war brides "overstuffed" themselves, "Everything to us was plentiful. To the people that were here [in Canada], they couldn't get a certain this or certain that, but to us it was really plentiful. I think I put on a bit of weight." Whether people realize it or not, food can be powerful in its meanings. To war brides like Mary, the abundance of foods that they discovered in Canada may have been viewed as an indication of the life that was to come. While life was not always rosy and was even extremely difficult for some war brides, there was promise and novelty in the foods that were tasted and consumed. As Mary illustrated, the sheer availability of foods in Canada was something that war brides had not experienced since before the war had started. From the moment that these women stepped aboard the ships destined for Canada there was change, whether for good or for bad.

### **Work Within the Home in the Post War Era**

Most war brides were on their own to learn the basics of domestic culture in a new country. Being so far away from home meant that many war brides did not have the support and guidance when it came to setting-up their homes in Canada (Kohl 2006, 37).

Donald Campbell's mother, Scottish war bride, Elspeth "Elsie" Jean Campbell, served in the military in London, England as a tele-typer during the Second World War. During our interview, Donald stated that his mother never worked outside of the home when she arrived in Canada. Although, it was important to her husband, Ralph, that housework and chores were done on a daily basis. In her book, *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home*, historian Meg Luxton explains that, "The man leaves the household regularly to earn money elsewhere... Whether or not the woman has a paid job, she is primarily responsible for domestic labour" (2009, 16). Furthermore, just as the household relies on the wages earned by those leaving the sphere of the home to work, "the household also depends on domestic labour, which makes the reproduction of this labour power on a daily basis similarly important" (Ibid., 18). In this way, Elsie's home was her workplace, and caring for her children and her husband was a



**Figure 11** Donald and his younger brother stand outside one of the homes their family lived in. This house is the one the boys nearly set on fire (Donald Campbell's family photo collection).

full-time job, from which she rarely got a break. As Donald recalled, his dad would not let his mother do anything outside of the home and expected that, “his cigarettes were made in the morning, there was homemade bread [each day], and enough to eat.” I came to understand that Donald’s father was not very supportive of Elsie working outside of the home and believed that her time was better spent looking after the house and children, while he left the sphere of the home to work and earn money. When Donald’s father, Ralph, returned home from the war in 1945 he continued his work building bridges and roads. Ralph’s work caused the family to move around a lot when Donald and his siblings were growing up and the family lived in a number of remote communities and work camps across the country. Donald further explained that his mother was most surprised with everything that she had to do as both a wife, and a mother of three, in these remote locations:

Looking after three kids in camps... all because of the animals. You had to pay attention to where your kids were... My brother and I started the house on fire one time. We crawled underneath- well that house was jacked up a little higher. We could get under there. So, we were sitting there playing with matches and- lucky it didn’t burn down. Yeah, oh yeah. She was always chasing us around (Campbell 2018).

The danger of wild animals and the safety of one’s children in remote or isolated settings is something that most war brides probably did not consider when they made the journey to Canada (let alone the thought of their children nearly burning the house down whilst playing with matches). Looking after young children, cooking, cleaning, and doing other types of domestic labour or housework must have seemed endless, especially for those



***Figure 12** Donald and his family pose with a grizzly bear that they shot near their house in British Columbia (Donald Campbell's family photo collection).*

women living in isolated communities or rural areas. Sociologists Janet Stiltanen and Andrea Doucet write that unpaid work done by women within the home often goes unnoticed (2008, 109). Though, in the case of Donald's mother, her "good work" may have gone unnoticed, but if she did not complete a daily task within the home, Donald's father certainly would have noticed that something was amiss. The idea that housework and childcare is "invisible" work is in itself an isolating notion and one that many war brides must have felt upon arriving in Canada. It was not often an easy life for these women. They had served as tele-typers, nurses, and factory workers during the war, but many were expected to take up the roles of wives and mothers in the post-war era.

Stiltanen and Doucet further write that in many cases, even if the woman had a profession or left the sphere of the home to work and earn money, she was still relied upon to perform the majority of the unpaid labour within the home (2008, 109). In speaking to this, Rona Godin explained that her mother, Margaret, worked as a trained

nurse in a hospital in London during the war. When I asked Rona if her mother ever continued her work as a nurse once she came to Canada, Rona stated:

No, she was busy having kids. From 1947 to 1954 she had four kids. Almost two years between the each of us. And then moving into the house and finishing the house... She stayed home, she was a housewife (Godin 2018).

During the post war era, most women were expected to work in and care for all areas related to the home. Historian Veronica Strong-Boag suggests that, “During the Second World War and into the 1950s, couples married at ever younger ages... Bigger families increased women’s home-based responsibilities. Not surprisingly, women were often preoccupied with their roles as wives and mothers” (1991, 473). Linda Ballentine, the daughter of Scottish war bride, Mary Ross, similarly recalled her mother having her hands full raising children and taking care of the home. With a family of ten, life in the



**Figure 13** The Ross family poses for a picture. Linda is the baby sitting on her mother’s lap. (Linda Ballentine’s family photo collection).

Ross house was busy. Mary's husband, Keith, worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway and Linda explained that, "my dad was in and out with the railway, so we didn't see a lot of him most times." In another instance, Linda elaborated:

Growing up it was, it was always busy. There was eight kids in the family... Mom was busy with the kids, so my elder sister, Sandra, she looked after me and Larry, my twin brother. Because my mom still had Steven and the other set of twins to look after. Eight kids, two sets of twins in there. So, yeah, she was busy...My mom was there all the time (Ballentine 2018).

In many cases, women were spatially segregated to the home while their husbands worked elsewhere (Strong-Boag 1991, 473). In the post war era the goal, whether conscious or sub-conscious, was often to re-establish the woman as both wife and mother, someone who was solely dedicated to the private space of the home (Ibid., 477). While Judith Levin suggests that some continue to view housework as simply, "not work," (1993, 287-288) it is important to look at and realize just how much *work* goes into making a place a home and ensuring that one's self and one's family are taken care of (Ibid.). Through my fieldwork, I discovered that most people who I interviewed emphasized just how busy their mothers actually were. In this way, Anne Miller, the daughter of British war bride Hazel Bailey, remembered her mother as being "always busy":

We called her the "mom's taxi," whether she walked us there, eventually she got her driver's license. She would drive us to wherever. If the boys had hockey, or we had figure skating, school sports, my mom did it all. Because with my dad working... My dad worked for CPR [Canadian Pacific

Railway], so he'd go to work, and we might not see my dad for two days, so my mom was the main person... She was a very busy lady (Miller 2018).

In talking about her mother, Anne remembers a woman who did everything because "she was never afraid to do anything." This strength is something that is echoed throughout each of the interviews that I conducted for this thesis. While most war brides were not at ease-- separated from family, friends, and all those things that were seemingly comfortable-- they learned how to survive and sometimes even thrive in their new surroundings. In this way, we can look at the creative ways that women incorporated recipes from their home countries into their "Canadian" cooking as a way of creating feelings of "home" away from home.

### **Staying Connected Through Cooking**

In many ways, food can be used as a means of creating comfort and evoking memories of cooking and sharing meals with loved ones. In this way, food and the preparation of food can be used to stay connected to one's culture and family, especially for those people who are not in close proximity to their family groups and/or childhood homes. In her article about "Transnational Homemaking Practices," visual ethnographer Adriana Sandu, looks at one of her interviewees' practices of making coffee as a daily ritual that works as, "a link to the past but also anchors her in the present" (2013, 506). In this way, the comfort, smells, and tastes that are evoked from the practice of preparing, brewing, and drinking the coffee reminds the woman of home, but at the same time, the woman also associates the practice with making and sharing cups of coffee with new friends. From my interviews, many war brides experienced similar feelings, and in this

section of the chapter I look at the types of recipes that war brides brought with them from their home countries and their practices of preparing these dishes in Canada.

As a child, Anne Miller recalled her mother, Hazel, making dishes that she brought to Canada from England. While her mother was only nineteen when she arrived in Schreiber, Ontario she tried to re-create the recipes that her own mother had taught her as she was growing up in Birmingham. In reminiscing about her mother's cooking, Anne stated:

At Christmas time... She would do the turkey and all the trimmings and we'd have plum pudding. I remember my mother making that. It's a cake. And then it's the caramel icing. And she would make that and the house it would be steamy! Because she would have to put it in a dish and it would kind of steam, and then she'd make the caramel sauce, and then she'd unwrap this cake, and it was like a fruit cake kind of thing. It was good, so we had that. And she used to make fruitcake and trifle that kind of stuff. If we had roast beef, we'd have Yorkshire pudding (Miller 2018).

Anne's mother, Hazel, cared enough for dishes like plum pudding, fruitcake, and Yorkshire pudding, that she went through the trouble of making them for her husband and children in Canada. In her article "From Whim Whams to Spotted Dick: 'Pudding, [England's] Universal Dish,'" folklorist Rachelle H. Saltzman explains, "As the quintessential comfort food of the English at home and abroad, puddings are often equated or used synonymously with the larger vernacular of 'nursery food'" (2017, 43). In discussing the meaning of "nursery food," Saltzman uses a definition from a British



discussion board which describes nursery food as “childhood favourites made by your nanny or your mum, depending on where you stood on the social scale” (2017, 43). Hazel may have had memories associated with dishes like plum pudding or Yorkshire pudding that reminded her of her childhood home and close--knit family in Britain. Anne elaborated, “They had lots of family gatherings, they gathered every Sunday I do believe. She used to say they would go to their grandparents’ home, or an aunt’s home... But it was all about family time back then.” For Hazel, recreating special dishes for her family in Canada brought about feelings of comfort and home. Through this practice, Hazel made new memories that Anne now associates with her own childhood: “She used to make rice pudding. Apple pie was the best. Lemon meringue pie was the best. Butter tarts, my mother was well known for her butter tarts.” Anne’s childhood memories bring her back to her mother’s cooking, and both those dishes that were brought from England, as well as the ones that were learned in Canada, like butter tarts, are remembered fondly.

Similarly, Donald Campbell, remembers his mother, Elsie, always making fresh baked bread at home. While the reasoning behind the baked bread had more to do with necessity than a connection to memory or family, to Donald, just the smell of baking bread now reminds him of his mother and his childhood. Today, Donald continues to bake bread similar to his mother’s (albeit he uses a bread maker). Donald recalled one recipe that his mother brought with her from Scotland:

She’d mix the bread dough and then instead of baking it you’d fry it in a frying pan. Gob the butter on it and just flatten it out and cook them both sides. Very fattening. But I’ll remember that forever...She hasn’t cooked for a long time, she can’t cook anymore (Campbell 2018).

Donald referred to this dish as “scones.” I was intrigued because what he was describing sounded nothing like the scones that I had grown up with. Instead, it sounded more like a recipe for bannock. Bannock is usually made with ingredients such as flour, baking powder, salt, water, and butter, but extra ingredients like dried fruits, nuts, and spices can also be added for taste. The mixture is then fried in a pan with butter, lard, or oil, on the stove or over an open fire. Bannock is also a dish that is commonly associated in North America with many different First Nations or Métis communities. That said, variants of the dish have also historically been eaten in Ireland, parts of England, and in Scotland, where Donald’s mother was from.<sup>6</sup> While Donald did not elaborate about how his mother learned to make scones, he did know that it came from her childhood in Dumfries. Donald is now in his seventies and Elsie is in her nineties, so the image of Elsie making bread and scones is tied to happier memories when she was in better health. These memories are nostalgic for Donald. In his article “Migration, Food, Memory, and Home-Building”, anthropologist Ghassen Hage explains:

Nostalgia is nothing more than a memory of a past experience imagined from the standpoint of the present to be homely. Clearly, nostalgic feelings abound not only in migrant life but in everybody’s life. They guide home-building in the present because one seeks to foster the kind of homely feelings one knows. And nostalgic feelings are invariably those homely feelings one remembers having experienced in the past (2010, 420).

Recreating dishes from one’s childhood is not only making or baking what one knows, but in the act of making, the person is connecting to their past. By using recipes from

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<sup>6</sup> To learn more, see: <https://ueat.utoronto.ca/a-history-of-bannock/> (accessed May 27, 2019).

their “home” (where they were from), war brides also attempted to create feelings of “home” in Canada with their husbands, for their children. While discussing nostalgia and memory with Linda Ballentine, she stated: “It’s funny how certain smells will jog a memory... Because I was somewhere and there was a smell and it reminded me of something in my childhood. I was amazed at what an impact that smell had on me.” A smell can transport us back to a time and place from our past, and as Linda suggested, this experience can be powerful. The foods that war brides cooked are now memories that the children of war brides think of nostalgically when they remember their mothers, and those childhood smells and tastes that make them think of home.

### **Becoming Canadian**

While food can be comforting or nostalgic to people, it can bring forth feelings of otherness, especially when one is in a different country and unfamiliar with the food customs of that place. This was the case for the thousands of war brides who were cooking for their Canadian husbands and in-laws, often for the first time. In 1944 the Canadian Wives Bureau was established by the Department of National Defense. The Bureau’s purpose was to assist war brides and their families in adapting to their new lives in the post war era. Interestingly, the Bureau distributed a Canadian cookbook for war brides as a way to help them transition to cooking in Canada.<sup>7</sup> In the first few pages of *The Canadian Cookbook for British Wives* the reader can easily see how unfamiliarity and difference are highlighted:

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<sup>7</sup> To learn more, see: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadian-war-brides> (accessed November 19, 2018).

It is true of many things that they are “different here” and equally true that the differences are what the newcomer notices first. Your Canadian kitchen will be different. For one thing, it won’t have a scullery. You’ll have to learn how to manage your new stove which may be a wood or a coal range (1944).

One can see the difference in equipment that the women are first faced with in this passage of the cookbook. For many war brides coming from cities in the United Kingdom or western Europe, the idea of cooking on a wood stove, a coal range, or even an open fire, would have seemed like a huge step backwards and may even have been considered “primitive.” Though, in many cases it was the reality of living in some of the smaller communities in Northwestern Ontario where some houses did not have indoor plumbing or running water, let alone a modern stove to cook on. As I will discuss further at a later point in this chapter, many war brides were unprepared for the types of places or homes that they would be living in. While some women were promised riches and a life of plenty, many ended up with small homes in isolated settings, only accessible by rail. The next passage in the cookbook continues with the theme of “difference” but instead shifts focus from equipment to food:

When you go shopping you will find many things different.

The plentiful supply and attractive display of foods will delight you...

There are differences, many of them, in ways of cooking and serving, in recipes and in the foods themselves. For instance you may find that a cake recipe you used at home turns out quite differently here (1944).

The theme of plenty is again highlighted within this passage as most war brides certainly would have been impressed by the amount and types of food available to them in Canada. As discussed earlier, rationing took its toll on many people during wartime. Even though Canada also had to implement forms of rationing, it was nothing like what people faced in Europe and the United Kingdom during and after the war. While this passage suggests that things may be different in Canada and that a cake recipe may not turn out as expected, there is still an undertone of hope and excitement:

Yes, a lot of things are different here but you will find a lot of things that are very like they were at home. In the pages that follow you will find little mention of them for the purpose of this book is rather to provide a guide to the things that are different and to give you recipes for dishes that are likely to be among your husband's favourite things to eat (1944).

By no means is the book's use of "difference" subtle or understated within its opening pages. While *The Canadian Cookbook for British Wives* may have been created to alleviate feelings of anxiety, unfamiliarity, and discomfort with the woman's new surroundings, it actually might have done the opposite. Without the support networks from home, war brides were often on their own to learn the basics of domestic culture. Life in Northern Ontario, for example-- sometimes rural and remote-- was not an easy way of life for most people. While Henry Lewis' mother had been told by her husband of a country where the streets "were made of gold, and you could get money off the tree," that was not the life that awaited her in Canada. As Henry explained:

My mother used to tell me that things were really bad during my bringing up, because she had to work to keep us alive. Work for food. To heat, she

used to go and steal wood to put in the stove. Coal off the tracks because there used to be a coal dock here, used to pick up chunks of coal and put it in their stove (Lewis 2018).

Cooking was not always as simple as walking into the kitchen and putting a pot on the stove or a baking sheet in the oven. For Henry's mother, the cooking process began with finding a means just to heat the stove, sometimes piling wood on her back, so that her children would not only have food in their bellies but so that the family would stay warm during cold winter months. Henry's mother also had to learn how to cook, not from a Canadian cookbook passed out by a government bureau, but from Henry's paternal grandmother. In regard to his mother's lessons in cooking, Henry explained:

My grandmother is full Native [Anishinaabe, also known as the Ojibway People] because my father was full Native. And she [Henry's mother] learned how to make bannock and pies in the fire place. So, we ate good there and we weren't starving, I guess. Especially when you eat bannock, and you know it was good (Lewis 2018).

Many of the war brides who came to Canada were not only young and sometimes inexperienced with cooking, but they also had to learn how to cook the kinds of foods that their husbands were used to eating. As *The Canadian Cookbook for British Wives* suggests, the goal was to learn "recipes for dishes that are likely to be among your husband's favourite things to eat." In this way, many war brides not only had to learn how to cook their husband's favourite foods, but they also had to adapt their own eating habits.

Donald Campbell recalls how his mother, Elsie, had to learn how to gut and clean fish as well as how to prepare wild game like moose, deer, partridge, and rabbit. One of

Donald's favourite memories of his mother came from a fishing trip that the family went on one weekend when he was a child:

When we were fishing, the limit in them days was six fish. So, four goes out for the weekend and you get six fish a day, so we'd come home with 24 fish. She'd stand there for eight hours cleaning these... Yeah, she'd stand there for eight hours cleaning them. There'd be no bones, no extra fat on them, she'd go down the back of them, very tedious. She'd go, "psh, psh," throw it in the water and take the bones out. That's it... She wanted to make sure everything was done up to snuff (Campbell 2018).

As Donald illustrates in his story about fishing for walleyes,<sup>8</sup> the cleaning of fish is not an easy task nor a quick one, especially if someone is doing it in such a meticulous way as to ensure that no small bones are left in the fish and no meat is wasted. I could relate to this story, having fished on Lake Superior and other in land lakes in Northern Ontario for a variety of fish, from lake trout, to walleyes, to white fish. I know how time consuming it is to clean a fish, especially when you have had a good day of fishing. It is also clear from this story that doing a thorough job when it came to preparing and cooking food, was important to Elsie. I asked Donald how his mother learned to do such tasks like preparing wild game and cleaning fish, especially since she had no experience with this kind of work in Scotland. Donald replied: "My dad would tell her, because that's all he ever ate. Probably trial and error a few times." It is clear from both Donald and Henry's stories that war brides were not only expected to complete tasks within the home that they had little

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<sup>8</sup> A walleye is a type of freshwater fish that is native to much of Canada and the northern United States. In certain parts of Canada, these fish are also referred to as a pickerel.

to no background or experience with, but that the methods of learning these tasks was for the most part through trial and error. These experiences highlight the many challenges of being on your own and having to learn domestic skills in indirect ways. In some cases, the women were taught these skills by their husbands or their husband's family members. Like when Henry's mother was taught to cook by his paternal grandmother. In other instances, the war brides would learn and share with other women in their new communities, a practice that I will discuss further in Chapter Three. Even if war brides had recipes from their own upbringings, they had to work with what they had in their new homes, while also satisfying their husband's tastes.

Anne Miller also remembered how her mother, Hazel, had to deal with wild game when she came to Northern Ontario. But unlike Donald and Henry's positive memories associated with eating moose, deer, and rabbit, Anne had other thoughts on the subject:

She [Anne's mother] was telling us one time when my dad was sick, somebody had brought her a rabbit because they thought we were having a hard time.

Well we were. I mean there were times that you know, I mean you ate vegetables if you couldn't afford the meat. Well, she'd make soup or whatever and things would last. She remembered somebody bringing her a rabbit [Anne laughs] and she vowed that she would never make us eat rabbit again because she had to clean the rabbit herself and that kind of stuff, and she vowed that she would never put us through that. A lot of people would bring us wild game like partridge, and that kind of stuff to eat. It's probably why I don't eat any of that. I will eat fish, but yeah, I'm not into deer or moose or bear or any of that kind of stuff (Miller 2018).



As children, it must have been horrifying for Anne and her siblings to watch their mother skin a rabbit in their family's kitchen. For this reason, Hazel swore that she would never put her children through anything like that again. Hunting and fishing are often thought of as male occupations and have commonly been used to feed the family when money is tight or times hard. Nevertheless, some war brides did participate in hunting and fishing, especially in Northern Ontario where these activities are popular, and they were certainly expected to learn and know how to prepare the meat for their family's consumption. While some war brides learned how to eat and enjoy fish and wild game, others, like Hazel, felt discomfort and possibly even disgust with preparing and eating these types of foods. In these cases, work such as berry picking, or gardening were much more desirable. Meg Luxton describes food gathering as a predominantly female activity that "women did alone, with their children, or with groups of women and children" (2009, 123). Berry picking also played a large role in the lives and work of war brides in Northern Ontario. Donald Campbell recalled that the first thing his mother wanted to do when she arrived in Canada was pick berries:

First thing she did when she got here, she learned about blueberries. So, my dad dropped her off somewhere to pick blueberries. She come home with a couple of big pails full of berries, but they weren't blueberries, they were saskatoons. They were blue! But they just turn to mush, so you can't eat them. So that was that. She did a lot of berry picking, like cranberries and stuff. Put them all away, made jam (Campbell 2018).

If I did not know the area well enough, I could not imagine being dropped off in the bush to pick blueberries by myself. Northern Ontario's landscape is characterized by thick

boreal forests and both rocky and swampy terrain. Black bears are also something that people have to be both aware, and cautious of when in the bush, particularly while berry picking, as black bears are especially attracted to blueberry patches. In Donald's story, picking berries was not only a learning experience for his mother, who had never encountered berry picking before coming to Canada, but foraging and berry picking became a way to feed the family when money was tight (and homemade jam certainly went well with fresh baked bread). This sentiment existed for most of those children of war brides who I interviewed, including Anne Miller, who remembered picking strawberries, raspberries, and blackcurrants out of her grandfather's garden as a child. The image of picking berries in a family garden is a much more comforting and homely image when contrasted with Donald's story of his mother being dropped off in the bush to pick berries. In terms of the family garden, Anne suggested that, "We always knew we'd have a bumper crop of potatoes. You might not have meat, but you'd have a bumper crop of potatoes." Even if the family could not afford meat or other foods from the grocery store, there were always large vegetable gardens to tend and Henry even remembered his mother keeping chickens in the backyard for a time. In this way, war brides had to be resourceful in the ways that they fed their families. Things may have been different in Canada, but the women adapted quickly to their new surroundings. It is possible that the experience that war brides had with strict wartime rationing made them more resourceful, willing to try new recipes and look for interesting and creative ways to feed themselves and their growing families.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In speaking on the concept of “comfort foods,” folklorists Michael Owen Jones and Lucy M. Long look at nostalgia and the ways that food can play into our longing for past comforts and “happier times” (2017, 7). This concept certainly rings true in the lives and experiences of war bride families in Northwestern Ontario. For most of us, when we look back on our own childhoods, certain smells and tastes come to mind. As folklorist, Jillian Gould writes, “warm cinnamon and toasted almonds of my mother’s kitchen; I am sad that my children will not share these experiences. While I long for that past to meet my present, nostalgia also surrounds what has not been lost yet” (2017, 106). In interviewing war bride families, there was a sense that war brides longed for a connection to their childhood homes and the family members who they had left behind. In a small way, re-creating dishes from home kept this connection alive. Furthermore, I was struck by people’s various experiences with fishing, berry picking, and being brought up on wild game. For me, having grown up in Northern Ontario where these types of activities are common, this is quite ordinary. But, for others, I realized these activities may not be so common and could even be considered foreign. Upon arriving in Canada, many war brides had to learn how to gut fish, prepare wild game, and decipher which berries were for picking. These were all new skills that had to be learned in order to feed their families, and they were skills that were either learned by trial and error or were taught to them by their husbands’ families. In many ways this chapter centered around the newness that war brides faced in immigrating to a new country and setting up homes without the support of family and close friends. While many of these women were encouraged to assimilate into the larger Canadian society, war brides also found creative ways to remain connected to their home countries and this often came out in the foods that they cooked and the recipes

that they kept and cherished. While food evokes many of our senses, smell is especially connected to the part of our brain where memory resides. As cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan writes:

The power of an odor to cast us into the past may be related to the fact that the cortex with its vast memory store evolved from the part of the brain originally concerned with smell. For another, as children, not only were our noses more sensitive but they were closer to the earth, to flower beds, tall grass, and the damp soil that gives off odors (1974, 10).

Food has a special way of playing on many of our senses and connecting us to both our culture and our past, and so we associate certain foods with different people or times in our lives. The children of war brides now remember their mothers' cooking with fondness and nostalgia, sometimes even trying to re-create these dishes themselves. Chapter One focused on food and its connections to childhood and memories of home. In the next chapter, I look at narrative experiences about the war. Food rationing and starvation were not the only difficulties or traumas that soldiers and civilians faced during World War Two. Similarly, war brides not only passed on memories of their cooking to their children, but they also passed on their stories. These memories of "mom" are important instances in remembering who the war brides were and how their legacy continues on today.

## **Chapter Two: Silence and Stories in War Bride Families**

### **“What will by life be like here?”- Mary Ross**

Folklorist Diane Tye asks, “How do stories within families convey individual, social, and cultural meanings for the narrators’ past and present selves and for their family?” (2017, 419). As a sub-genre of oral tradition, folklorists have long been interested in family folklore (Baldwin 1976; Boatright 1958; Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Baker 1976; Rudy 2003). Close attention to family narratives can allow ethnographers to examine “important dimensions of family life and identity formation in meaningful and multidimensional ways” (Borland, Sawin, and Tye 2017, 386). Within this chapter I look not only at happy stories of home and family, but also at stories that deal with loneliness, alcohol abuse, and the traumas left over from war. These narratives give insight into how war brides adapted to their new environments, whether with ease, or with difficulty. I use linguist William Labov (1972) and sociologist Harvey Sack’s (1989, 1992) concepts of “tellability” and “untellability,” to explore traumatic storytelling. Ideas that were further examined in folklorist Diane Goldstein and Amy Shuman’s 2012 article, “The Stigmatized Vernacular: Where Reflexivity Meets Untellability.” I use these concepts as a way to explore stories of war and how both war brides and their husbands dealt with and healed from trauma. The second half of the chapter explores the struggles that war brides faced in Canada, and how their children view their mothers’ experiences of immigrating to a new country. Finally, I explore family stories and the memories that people have of their mothers. In many ways, war brides’ lives were turned upside down, both during and after the Second World War. These women met their husbands in uncertain times, and they immigrated to Canada without their close friends and family. While home is meant

to be a place where people feel safe and secure, the war changed that for these women, and in Canada, they were expected to create homes in a place that was not their own. In this way, Chapter Two highlights the challenges that war brides faced as they moved from one home to another.

### **Tellability and the Untellable**

Within my research, I frame stories of war and trauma through both tellability and its counterpart, untellability. Tellability is a concept which allows a narrator to tell their story in a factual way. Stories which are tellable are often noteworthy, newsworthy, and worth telling. The concepts of what is tellable and what is untellable can be attributed to the works of William Labov (1972), Harvey Sacks (1989, 1992), and many other scholars who have contributed to this area of study. According to Diane Goldstein and Amy Shuman, tellability is what makes a competent narrator. Even a story that is seemingly unworthy of being told can become tellable if the narrator relates their story in such a way that is both powerful and interesting to their audience (2012, 119). In the same way, stories can cross into the realm of “the untellable, unwriteable, unspeakable” (Ibid., 114). This occurs when the narrator’s experiences can no longer be told in certain contexts or to certain audiences. Just because a story is deemed untellable, does not mean that it is never told. Instead, it means that these stories are often repressed because they are deemed too brutal or disturbing to be told, either by society or the teller themselves. Untellable stories often involve some sort of inherent risk to either the narrator or to those listening to the story (Ibid., 199-120). As Goldstein and Shuman explain:

Stories become untellable because the content defies articulation, the rules

of appropriateness outweigh the import of content...or the space the narratives would normally inhabit is understood by the narrator as somehow unsafe. Narrative telling can be risky business, not just in terms of the personal discursive risk for the tale teller, but also as narration reflects on, and acts upon, others potentially implicated in narrative events (2012, 120).

In this way, stories can become untellable if the narrator feels that by telling the story they may do harm not only to themselves, but also to those who are a part of the story, as well as those who are listening to the story. This is something that I observed in my own research as my interviewees, who were largely the children of war brides, shared untellable stories that were often present within their childhood homes, which I will discuss further below. We all have stories that we tell, some over and over again, but as I sat down to conduct my interviews, I came to understand that the stories that people were telling me were not part of their usual repertoire. In this way, I came to understand these stories of war and home through the framework of the untellable.

In her article, “Falling Out of Performance: Pragmatic Breakdown in Veterans’ Storytelling,” folklorist Kristiana Willsey studies narratives amongst those veterans who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Willsey explains that civilians often view veterans as traumatized individuals and that veteran storytelling is often looked at as either disturbing and graphic, or non-existent (2015, 215-216). With these civilian assumptions in mind, veterans have to constantly manage or edit their narratives so that their stories are deemed appropriate for their given audience. In examining the fragmented story of one former soldier, Willsey writes:

Curtis is conflicted about his military career, proud of his awards yet

embarrassed by them and not sure what they should mean to him as a civilian. The false starts, hesitations, frame-breaking, and other retreats from performance reflect his awareness of the simplified roles available to veterans-- the hero, the victim, or the villain-- that an uninformed audience like myself might bring to his narrative. Would telling this story be representing himself (perhaps misleadingly) as a “hero,” or (per my question) as a “dangerous” man? (2015, 216).

It is important to note that civilian audiences in North America, are often so removed from the experiences of total war that in many cases they cannot possibly understand what the veteran has gone through or experienced. While Willsey examines tellability in narrative and storytelling, she explains that her definition is a narrower version than that of Goldstein and Shuman. Willsey states:

I define tellability more narrowly, setting *traumatic* narrative--stories in which emotional or psychological distress fragments the performance-- in opposition to *untellable* narrative, with untellability being used here to refer specifically to stories that context and audience have rendered inappropriate, irrelevant, or undesirable (2015, 225).

Willsey further explains how stories deemed untellable, based on setting and audience, are often entangled with traumatic narratives. In this way, it can be almost impossible to differentiate between a story that is not told because it is deemed untellable, “inappropriate, irrelevant or undesirable,” versus a story that is not told due to the tale teller being incapable of revisiting a traumatic event in their life (Ibid.). I use Willsey’s



framework of the traumatic narrative in my own research as a way to narrow the concept of the untellable as I look at veteran's storytelling.

My reason for looking at veteran's storytelling within the first half of this chapter is to gain a broader understanding of what life was like for some war brides in Canada. If Canadian soldiers were traumatized by what they experienced during the war than surely those traumas affected, even subconsciously if not directly, the lives of their wives and children. Looking at the experiences and narratives of other members within the war bride family can give us a deeper understanding of what war brides experienced within the space of the home.

### **Stories of War and Trauma**

Very few individuals who I interviewed during my fieldwork could recall their parents ever talking about their experiences during the Second World War. In many cases it was suggested that their stories were traumatic, so much so that they were rarely, if ever, talked about in the household. Donald Campbell, the son of Scottish war bride Elsie Campbell stated: "My dad drank quite a bit, sadly they all did in the army. Graveyards full of sixty-year-old men." When I asked Donald what he meant by this statement, he elaborated, "In every graveyard, if you look at soldiers that have died, they're all young. sixty, sixty-two, and that's the reason why. Alcohol. My dad never talked about the war very much, but it did bother him." Donald further explained that the only time his father, Ralph Campbell, ever tried to share what he had experienced during the war was when he

showed Donald a book about Auschwitz<sup>9</sup>: “My dad, the only thing he ever said to me, he used to have a big book, and someone had bought it for him. It was about the concentration camps because my dad had to go there. He had to go into these camps, and he saw all that stuff.” What is interesting in this narrative is that Donald is unable to put into words the type of horrors his father may have experienced. From what we know today, many of us have a good idea of the type of “stuff” Donald’s father would have seen in the concentration camps. While I would normally ask follow-up questions in an interview like, “What kinds of stuff did he see? Tell me more.” I did not feel comfortable in this particular situation to ask those questions. I knew that I did not want to hear the answer to the follow-up question myself, and I did not want to push Donald to answer the question either. In this way, “all that stuff” that Donald’s father had witnessed in the concentration camps was not only deemed untellable by Donald, but also, the story was most likely a traumatic narrative for his father.

Today we might question if Donald’s father, and other veterans of the Second World War, were suffering from post-traumatic stress, a disorder that was only officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 (Ballinger 1998, 100). While the narratives within this chapter do not focus exclusively on war brides, they are crucial in understanding the full experiences of the women, and what war brides’ lives were like in the post war years. Living with men who experienced such immense trauma affected the whole family, not just the individual suffering from the Post Traumatic Stress. In her

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<sup>9</sup> The Holocaust was the systematic persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime. Between 1941 and 1944, millions of Jews were deported to extermination camps, including Auschwitz. Those who were deemed racially and biologically “inferior,” as well as those who held differing political or ideological beliefs, were also targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators. To learn more, see: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust> (accessed June 2, 2019).

article, “The Culture of Survivors: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Memory,” historian Pamela Ballinger uses the American Psychiatric Association’s definition of PTSD as a:

response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with the numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimulants recalling the event (1998, 100).

In this way, veterans may have chosen not to share their experiences due to the fact that they deemed their own stories untellable, or “inappropriate, irrelevant...undesirable” (Willsey 2015, 225) to share with their wives and children. On the other hand, these men could have been suffering from PTSD. In these cases, the men might have avoided telling their stories due to the “emotional or psychological distress” (Ibid.) that could potentially have been re-lived whilst narrating their experiences. In a similar way to Donald, Henry Lewis also recalled his father using alcohol as a way to deal with those traumas that he witnessed and experienced during the war. And ultimately, the experiences of his father affected Henry and his mother as well:

I used to get my ass kicked, excuse me, when my father came home hammered. For nothing at all, so... It was kind of, abuse. A little bit. Because my father abused my mother... I guess he was taking his frustration out because of what he saw in the war. The veteran of the Second War, even the First War before, they said they had cowardice. They couldn’t go back into battle, but this was the PTSD. So that was

lingering on with my father for a long time. But he was a good man.

Other than that, other than boozing'er (Lewis 2018).

Donald's narrative is very intense. For this reason, I was unsure if I should include it within my thesis, or if Donald would be comfortable with it. Ultimately, after speaking with Donald again, I did choose to include his narrative because it illustrates what life was like for some war bride families. Re-entering society and adjusting to civilian life was not always easy for the veteran. Sadly, the traumas that veterans experienced sometimes manifested themselves as addictions and violence, that were then taken out on those people who were closest to them. Some wives and children may never have heard their husbands and fathers explicitly talk about their experiences in the war, but they did not have to hear these stories to know that their fathers' experiences affected them, and their families, in more ways than one.

In an article submitted to *Legion Magazine*, historian and journalist Don Gillmor, looks at the tolls that military service still has on veterans in today's society. As Gillmor explains, the "Armed forces needs to instill a sense of fearlessness in soldiers. Without it, the army can't be effective. The difficulty is creating an environment where the warrior can also seek help for PTSD and suicidal thoughts" (2017). While my research focuses on the experiences of World War Two war brides, it is also about those family units affected by war. While suicide is a very real issue when it comes to veterans battling PTSD, it is often preceded by other problems within the home such as alcohol and drug abuse, marital and family issues, and isolation. In another article, "Collateral Damage: Families in the Wake of War," journalist Sharon Adams looks at the effects that PTSD can have, not just on the veteran, but on the veteran's family. Adams states:

The Canadian Forces has a policy against family violence. Military Police have noted spikes in violence following some units' returns from Afghanistan. In 2005 and 2006, 39 Forces members were charged with assaulting spouses or dependents. That rose to 132 in the next two-year period. Military family violence is likely under-reported, says the federal department of justice, because victims are reluctant or unable to disclose abuse; the Forces know military spouses turn first to family and friends for help (2013).

In some cases, the horrors of war are brought into the home and they make themselves known through violence and addictions that the family unit often has to live with, usually with very little outside intervention.

During my fieldwork I interviewed ninety-eight-year-old, Ida Maxwell, who served in the Royal Canadian Airforce, women's division. Ida's first husband was also in the Canadian Armed Forces and was deployed overseas during the Second World War. Ida explained how the war changed her husband. When he came back from overseas, he was not the same man who Ida had married prior to the war. As Ida recalls:

My husband's friend was killed. He died in his arms and it was awful I guess... I couldn't remember any more than one or two letters the whole five years [that he was away]. It ruined our marriage because it was no fun when he came home. He was a different man. There was no happiness and yet I was determined because I was determined to make a go of it because I was brought up in a very religious family... I had a belief that once you marry you marry for good, and it was difficult. Over the years I always thought to

myself, I think I made a mistake. I should have looked into it more and realized that it wasn't going to be the best for even our children, who were to be born in the future. It was sad. We were together for forty-two years and then after that [we] divorced (Maxwell 2018).

Ida's story is another example of how the horrors of war are often brought into the space of the home. The traumas that veterans experienced did not just affect them as individuals, but it affected their families, including their wives and children. Sometimes married life was not what the war bride anticipated or was promised. Some couples knew very little of each other before they married, as courtships were often quick during wartime, due to deployment. In this way, beginning their married lives after the war could be difficult and challenging. Any marriage after a brief courtship is tough, but to add husbands suffering from PTSD or quietly struggling with the effects of war and its traumatic experiences can be devastating. Even if families knew very little of the details behind what their husbands or fathers had experienced in the war, these families can speak to and acknowledge "those spaces of silence" (Goldstein and Shuman 2012, 123). In regard to this, Linda Ballentine stated: "My dad [never told stories about the past]. He was in the war and he struggled with that after he came home, I think. He had some issues. He didn't do a lot of talking about the war." In those instances where speaking about their experiences was not possible for veterans, silence replaced stories within the home. Many of the children of war brides knew that there were certain topics that their fathers were not willing to talk about or could not talk about.

### **Civilian Experiences with War**

While war time experiences often focus on veterans, civilians' stories are told less often. Many war brides who grew up in countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, lived under Nazi occupation, which was often a terrifying and brutal experience. In Britain and Scotland, civilians dealt with incessant bombings, and the fear of impending invasion. I interviewed, Marion and Erik Leet, a husband and wife who grew up in England and both experienced the Second World War as children. My purpose for interviewing the Leets was to get a sense of what life might have been like during the war for war brides living in countries like England, Scotland, and even Ireland. Marion grew up in Yorkshire, in a town called Keighley, and she shared with me what her life was like during those war years:

I grew up in Keighley, it was outside of the big bombing areas, but the Nazis used to fly in from Germany over Scotland and they came down our valley in Yorkshire. And every night when the sirens went, with us living outside the city, we didn't have air raid shelters because they had run out of metal to make shelters, so we had to run to the trees. And me and my sisters slept under the trees... And that's what I did every night. Those sirens went, the Nazis came over, we went into the trees. And the reason we slept under the trees was, not that they were going to drop their bombs as they came over us... But when they were coming back, if they had any bombs left, they would get rid of them on us... When we went to school, we'd have to carry a gas mask with us. We were told, if the sirens went, if the Nazis came over and you were at school or walking, you went to the nearest neighbour, you didn't try to go home. And that was how we went on all through the war

(Leet 2018).

While Marion grew up in the country, in a town outside of the major bombing areas, Erik grew up in Stoke-on-Trent, a city in Staffordshire that was known for its mining. Erik explained that because the area that he grew up in was only twenty-five miles from Coventry, a city that suffered severe bomb damage during the war, they too got bombed regularly due to Germany's interest in taking out British industry:

We used to get it every night... We got very, very serious bombing every night. Because they wanted to destroy the industry of Britain and they just about did. We used to have a little, six by eight, air raid shelter in the backyard. It was dug about three foot in the ground. With a little two foot by two-foot opening, just corrugated metal. We used to have to jump in there and close the corrugated metal door over it. One night we all jumped in the shelter and my mother jumped in and caught the back of her thigh on the sill of the door opening and we spent the rest of the whole night holding her thigh together. She finished up with about one-hundred and forty stitches in the back of her thigh. But we stayed there the whole night holding her thigh together to stop her from bleeding to death. And when we come out of the shelter, when the all clear went off, there'd been one all mighty "bang!" when we were in the shelter. And when we come out... our house was standing, then there was a big gap. Next door to us, they had been blown right off the face of the earth (Leet 2018).

While the bombings were terrifying experiences that both Marion and Erik swear, they will never forget, they also lived under the constant fear of German invasion. When



talking with Marion and Erik they explained the concept of a “Hitler jar,” a phenomenon that they believed was popular throughout England during the war. I was unfamiliar with the term and did many internet searches to see if I could find other examples of Hitler jars, but my searches came up empty. Even my father, who is well versed in World War Two and military history, had never heard of the Hitler jar:

**Erik Leet:** As a kid you don’t forget it, because as Marion said, it’s so traumatic... And one thing that she didn’t tell you, when we first got courting, she got talking about a Hitler jar. And I said, a Hitler jar? What the Hell are you talking about? She said, we used to have a jam jar on the mantel piece. Cause in Britain at that time, to get gas...you used to have to fill the gas meter with coins and then you got that amount of gas... They had a jam jar full of shillings, so that if Hitler took over the country, her father would have toweled up all the doors, shut all the windows, turn the gas stove on and gas yourselves.

**Marion Leet:** All the girls were going to be gassed, because I had three sisters.

**EL:** When she was telling me about this, we had the same thing, only it was full of pennies, because our gas meter wasn’t as posh as theirs... And we had the same instructions. All us kids would have been gassed. He [Hitler] wouldn’t have got anything. And that, from talking to people who were over there, those experiences from our generation, that was all over England. People were determined that he wasn’t going to get anything.

**ML:** I don’t know if you’ve heard any of Winston Churchill’s speeches,

but when he used to say, “we’ll fight on the beaches, we’ll fight on the hills, we will never surrender.” I always believed that what he said, what my dad was telling me, that if Hitler landed the men would go into the hills and fight and the women would be gassed (Leet 2018).

The “Hitler jar” is both a fascinating and disturbing concept. For the most part, the British people were aware, or at least had an idea, of what was happening in other parts of Europe during the war, and British civilians lived in constant fear of German invasion. A chain of British owned islands located off the coast of France, known as the Channel Islands, were even invaded and occupied by the Nazis for most of the war (Hamon 2015, 1-2). Through learning about people’s first-hand accounts with “Hitler jars” it shows that the British people were willing to do whatever they could in order to not suffer the same fate, even if that meant being willing and prepared to take the lives of their own children should the British Isle be invaded. Pamela Ballinger explains that in the narratives of survivors, for those who have experienced traumatic or life-changing events, “Undeniably, the theme of remembrance--the necessity to never forget, as well as its impossibility--unites the literature” (1998, 109). The stories told by Marion and Erik were daily or common experiences for those people who lived in Britain during the Second World War, and they were not isolated cases either. People were plagued by nightly bombings that killed thousands in Britain and there was the constant fear of being invaded by Germany. As Erik explained, these experiences were “so traumatic” that it is something that he and Marion will never forget, and memories of those events continue to stay with them even today.

In the cases of countries like the Netherlands, invasion was not only a fear but a reality. On April 9, 1940, without warning or a declaration of war, Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands. The Nazi occupation would last for five years, and it was not until May 5, 1945, that the Netherlands was liberated, largely by the First Canadian Army (Goddard 2005, 17-18). Henry Lewis' mother grew up in Holland, a geographical region and former province on the west coast of the Netherlands. Henry explained to me that his mother and her family were not only liberated by the Canadian Armed Forces, but they were liberated, quite literally, by Henry's father. As Henry tells the story:

When they [the Canadian Army] went down their street, they were going house to house clearing. And in Holland the houses are attached together, there's eight of them, and then you go to the next unit. In the meantime, they were going down and "bang, banging!" on the door. And my mother told me, "my Opa, he heard the noise, and they all scattered underneath this little cubby hole." ... Anyway, they were hiding underneath there. So, when my dad and his friend came busting through the door, my Opa, which is my grandfather, came running out and he said, "don't schieten," don't shoot, don't shoot! And in the meantime, my mother came out right in front of her dad and she said the same thing "don't schieten," don't shoot, don't shoot! Because the Germans, what they thought were Germans, and they thought a German got killed and maybe the Germans were coming into their house, and picking them up and taking them out and shooting them (Lewis 2018).

When Henry's mother realized that these soldiers were Canadian, not German, there was great relief as the family had feared that they would all be executed. As Henry explained,

“By the time everything got cleared up...My dad must have said something to my mother and [he said] when I come back from the, Scheld, (which is another battle) I will come back to you.” The story of how Henry’s parents first met not only shows how quickly some relationships between Canadian soldiers and civilian women developed, but also, it demonstrates the trauma that many war brides experienced whilst living through times of war. The fear of living in a Nazi occupied country during wartime would have certainly taken a dramatic toll on the lives of the everyday citizen. In another instance, Henry told me about his mother’s life in Nazi occupied Holland:

When the Germans moved into their country everything went, *psh!*  
Downhill. And they had to fend for themselves and everything, and the Germans were quite mean to the Dutch people. My mother said that one time, her and her sister were going down the street in Holland and they were picking sticks up out of the bush.<sup>10</sup> She used to put the sticks underneath her coat, she had a big coat, and then the patrol of Germans came by and they said, “halt,” and “what do you got underneath your coat?” And my mother thought, oh, if they find out they’ll shoot me right here. So, my aunt said, “no, no, my sister is pregnant, we’re going home to have the baby.” So, the Germans believed them and they let them go. But by the time they got home, I think my mom said she almost peed herself because she was right there, getting ready to be shot (Lewis 2018).

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<sup>10</sup> As explained in the previous chapter, the Danish people suffered and starved under Nazi occupation. Even an action as innocent as picking up stray sticks to bring home as a source of fuel for the family’s fire was looked at as a punishable offence.

While veterans of the Second World War experienced PTSD many of the women who they married also experienced traumatic events that had effects on their lives as well. Henry explained that his mother used to share her stories only with him, as he was the oldest in the family and was close to his mother. Unlike Henry, many of those people who I interviewed rarely remembered their mothers talking in-depth about or sharing stories of what they had experienced during the war. Though, people could recall times when their mother's revealed glimpses of what life had been like for them. Rona Godin explained:

My mother was very happy to get out of London because of the bombing. She was terrified of thunder and lightning forever after that. Really, really scared of it. If some of the thunder and lightning we get is anything close to the bombing, it's not fun (Godin 2018).

In these ways, instances of trauma and war could affect life within the home. These narratives demonstrate how traumatic experiences were not isolated to the battlefields, but they often seeped their way into the everyday life of the family. By sharing stories of trauma and trying to understand those experiences that are deemed untellable, I hope to illuminate how the children of war brides view their parents' experiences during and after the war. In many cases, those who I interviewed understood from a young age how the war had affected not only their fathers, but also their mothers. Stories that are not told can come out in a number of ways and can be viewed in subtle actions or instances by those who are closest to the tale tellers. In the homes of war bride families, stories did not have to be told within that space for children to know that the war had played a large role in both of their parents' lives.

As I began my fieldwork I did not initially intend to focus on or discuss issues such as trauma, abuse, and addiction within this thesis. In fact, when I wrote up the list of questions that I had planned to ask my interviewees the only question that touched on this subject was, “Did either of your parents ever talk about or tell stories about the war?” When I decided to focus on the genre of narrative and family folklore for one of my chapters, I thought that I would be recording and collecting humorous or sweet stories about immigrating to a new country and adapting to a new culture, which I do look at in the next section of this chapter. However, what caught me off guard was peoples’ willingness to speak to those stories which were not told within their households. I was lucky to have my parents with me as I completed my fieldwork, and while driving the two and a half hours between Schreiber and Thunder Bay, we discussed in length how difficult it must have been for these women to adjust and even survive in these types of situations. War brides not only had to become accustomed to a new country and new communities, whilst dealing with homesickness and raising their own children, but they also had to cope with traumas that both they and their husbands endured over the war years. The number of stories that touched on these traumas was so prevalent within my fieldwork that I felt it was only necessary to address it within this thesis. I came to understand that war brides’ lives were turned upside down, from the time that they met their husbands during the chaos of war, to immigrating and making “home” in a country that was not their own. Home, that place that was meant to be comforting and stable, was turned on its head.

### **The Struggles of Immigrating to Canada**

The next section of this chapter examines the struggles that war brides faced in Canada and how their children have come to understand their mothers' experiences of immigrating to a new country. As well, family stories that people had of their mothers and their own childhoods will be shared. In considering her mother's decision to marry her father and immigrate to Canada at the age of nineteen, Anne Miller stated: "I don't think I'd do it. To tell you the truth, I don't think I would do it... to leave home, leave your parents. I mean it's not like you could pick up and go!" Through the stories that she told me, I understood that Anne is very much aware of the sacrifices that her mother made in coming to Canada to be with her father. While words like "risk" and "sacrifice" are not always explicitly stated, it is implicit from my interviews that the children of war brides question their mothers' decisions to leave their homes and families. Ultimately, war brides took risks by following their husbands and immigrating to a new country- often knowing very little about either.

I was intrigued by the thread of the "unfamiliar" in war bride narratives. Therefore, when I conducted my interviews, I asked each of my interviewees if they (when interviewing war brides) or their mothers (when interviewing the children of war brides) were surprised by anything upon arriving in Northern Ontario. Sure enough, the first thing that was usually discussed was climate, as most war brides were not used to sub-zero temperatures or snow banks as tall as the houses. There was also the difficulty of coming to grips with the vastness of Canada's geography. When considering her mother's experience of arriving in Northern Ontario, Rona Godin stated:

You don't often get snow in Ireland, you get a little bit, but it's gone quickly. It's not as cold, even though it's right off the ocean... And

everything looks different. It's just so big and open here. Ireland is crowded, beautiful, but it is crowded (Godin 2018).



**Figure 14** Margaret Godin poses in the snow in Schreiber, Ontario (Rona Godin's family photo collection).

In the post-war era, Northern Ontario continued to be sparsely populated and the only access to many of the small communities was by rail. While work had been on-going since the 1940s, the Northern Ontario section of the Trans-Canada Highway was not fully completed until September of 1960 (Glaser 2012, 32-33). This area of Canada was considered one of the most difficult to access due to the region's dense boreal forests, impressive geological formations, and thick muskeg and swamp, that had to be blasted and cut back to make way for the new highway (Ibid.). The sheer amount of space, and



the remoteness of many of the communities, must have felt isolating to those women who were used to the bustling cities and towns of Britain and Western Europe. In looking back at her mother's experience, Anne Miller concluded by saying, "She said she was very surprised. Very surprised. She was like-- she had no idea what she had gotten herself into." While many of the stories I heard dealt with the shock of arriving in a new country, interestingly, the risks involved in leaving home and family were sometimes told with an edge of humour. In an informal conversation with a co-worker, I learned that his mother's close friend was a war bride from Britain. He told me her arrival story in a joking sort of way. As he described: the war bride arrived in Halifax and got on the train headed to central Canada. As she settled in for the train journey, she curled up and decided to take a nap after her long crossing of the Atlantic. Before the war bride fell asleep, however, she turned to the woman next to her and asked if she would wake her up when they reached Lake Superior. This story was incredibly funny to the man who told it, as it takes approximately 30 hours to get from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Thunder Bay, Ontario by car, and traveling by train would have taken even longer. The story shows how unprepared most war brides were in immigrating to Canada, even in regard to the size of the country. In an interview with Scottish war bride, Mary Ross, and her daughter, Linda Ballentine, the following conversation ensued between the two women:

**Linda Ballentine:** Well you came off here, up north.

**Mary Ross:** Well it took days! I thought we were never going to get there.

**LB:** What happened when you reached White River? When one of your friends got off the train?

**MR:** They were all getting off the train!

**LB:** Different places? Yeah, I remember she said at White River, her friend got off the train and she went over the snow bank and she said, I never saw her again.

**Maeghan Chassé:** That must have been different, all that snow. Did you get that much snow in Scotland?

**MR:** Oh, I don't remember. Well we did at times, but I don't remember getting as much snow as we did when we came here. And I thought, oh my God!

**LB:** What did you get into, eh?

**MR:** And I wondered what kind of life it was going to be like. You know, with all that snow. I didn't expect to see that much snow.

Mary and Linda's conversation highlights both the loneliness and fear that Mary must have felt as both a young woman, and a new mother, arriving in Northern Ontario for the first time. The theme of unfamiliarity is also woven throughout the narrative and the snow, which plays a central role in the conversation, is not viewed as comforting, but rather oppressive. After our interview, Linda showed me a photograph of her mother when she first arrived in Schreiber, Ontario-- her husband's hometown. In the photograph, Mary is bundled up, wearing a coat, hat, scarf, gloves, boots, and a smile. Snow lies on the ground and covers the houses and trees behind her. Mary sticks out in her dark coat against the white, snowy background. As Linda showed me the photo, she laughed and said, "She probably never wore many skirts after that!" I laughed, too. I did

not notice before Linda had pointed it out, but Mary's nylon clad legs must have been frozen.



*Figure 15 Mary Ross poses in the snow in Schreiber, Ontario (Linda Ballentine's family photo collection).*

When conducting my fieldwork I often wondered if this edge of humour was being used as a way to counter the hardships that many people knew, or at least guessed, their mothers had endured. While many of my interviewees touched on stories of trauma, poverty, and the difficulties of adjusting to a new country and living away from their families and childhood homes, these stories were often concluded with comments like, “but she had a good life,” or “our life was good.” It was interesting to me how humour

and jokes could be mixed in with these stories. For example, Anne Miller remembered how her mother was never afraid to tackle anything on her own, from housework to electrical work:

She had to learn to do lots of stuff on her own... She had to learn to repair stuff, and she was never afraid to do anything. My mother would even tackle electrical work. I remember a [male] neighbour saying to her, “Just make sure you turn the main power off,” and she goes, “yeah, I know, I’ll just have extra curly hair [if I don’t],” cause my mom had naturally curly hair [laughs] (Miller 2018).



**Figure 16** Hazel and Reg Bailey pose for a photo in England during the war (Anne Miller’s family photo collection).

This story was told in a lighthearted way, and we laughed about it, but it also shows what a strong woman, Hazel Bailey was. Anne explained that in 1954 her father, Reg, contracted polio, so her mother had to take care of the house and children on her own, while Reg received treatment at a hospital in Winnipeg. In other words, Hazel had no choice but to learn how to do things on her own and tackle what needed to be fixed. Even so, Anne chose to frame this narrative in a humorous way. In his article “Humour in Oral History Interviews,” linguist Ned R. Norrick suggests that, “The presentation of embarrassing, painful, and even life-threatening events in humorous narratives provides compelling everyday evidence of how memories are reconstructed for a particular audience in a particular context” (2006, 85). The fact that Linda and Anne were recalling stories of their mothers’ experiences, which they were often privy to as children, also allowed for a “humorous dual perspective” (Ibid., 90). As Norrick further explains, “These dual assessments or evaluations from separate perspectives substantially enhance tellability, giving two points of view for a single story. They offer a purchase not just on the past events reported, but on the narrator’s attitude towards those events” (Ibid., 91). In this way, humour may have been used by the children of war brides as a way to convey that while life may have been difficult for their mothers or their family units, it was a good life. They did not want me, as the interviewer, to leave thinking that they were ungrateful or that they did not have a good childhood. They wanted to make sure that I understood that their parents did their best with what they had. In this way, my interviewees’ memories were not always focused on the negative or the difficult events in their lives. They focused on the memories that they wanted to remember and share.

## **Childhood Memories**

When I was conducting my fieldwork with the children of war brides, I understood that my interviewees truly loved and missed their parents, especially their mothers. Many of the stories that people shared with me did not center on the struggles or the difficult aspects of their families' lives. Instead, these stories focused heavily on feelings of love, warmth, and togetherness. For example, Henry Lewis shared the special nickname that his father used to have for his mother. In explaining the nickname to me, Henry stated: "My father used to call my mother by a lovely name, by 'Toe.' T.O.E. As in toe. What that means in Native, it means love. That's what it means. Toe means love in Ojibway." This was an especially sweet part of our interview. Just prior to telling this story, Henry had shared with me that it was hard for his mother to relate to people, as she spoke Dutch her whole life and never became fluent in English. This story shows a tenderness on the part of Henry's father, especially because he used his own native language, not English, to call Henry's mother by this name. Other stories, like the one that Linda Ballentine shared, recalled the fond memories that people have of their families and their time spent with one another:

My dad had a garden. There was always lots of stuff in the garden. And I remember we'd always have roasted potatoes... [My dad had] a big, long plank on saw horses and that's where we'd sit and eat our baked potato. And they used to...have the incinerator in the backyard. That's where you'd burn everything. But he built a homemade barbecue and he'd throw the potatoes in there wrapped in tinfoil. They were the best ever...Little bit of butter. Just a little because you didn't get much. Salt and pepper and

away you go. Yeah, it was good (Ballentine 2018).

Roasting potatoes in the backyard was a happy memory for Linda that reminded her of the good times with her family. Linda explained that her parents could not afford fancy toys or birthday parties, with there being eight children in the family, but that they made their own fun. Playing with other kids in the neighborhood was a fond memory that many of my interviewees spoke about. It was reiterated time and again that, as kids, they knew that it was time to go home when the street lights turned on. While showing me one of her photo albums, Rona Godin pointed to a picture of a number of children posing together, following a First Communion Ceremony.



**Figure 17** Children pose in Schreiber, Ontario following a First Communion Ceremony at Holy Angels Catholic Church (Rona Godin's family photo collection).

As she showed me this photograph she stated: "There were forty something of us on this street... Cause, it was a dead-end street. There were forty-seven kids. Those were the days when they had kids." Anne Miller, who grew up on the same street as Rona, also remembered the abundance of kids in her neighbourhood. Anne explained that her mother

was always generous when it came to volunteering, and it was thanks to many of the local women in Schreiber that the community was able to afford artificial ice in their arena:

[My mom] got herself very involved with the arena. I remember going out and helping fundraise. They used to do hockey pools in a square board, and it had all these holes drilled in it and then somebody would type up the scores...for every NHL game every Saturday night. Every week we would be running out trying to make money...that was our part, going out and helping, so we could raise money for the artificial ice [laughs]. It was good times. I don't think there was a kid in town that didn't run around (Miller 2018).

While it is important to look at the hardships that war brides faced both during and after the war, it is also important to acknowledge the more lighthearted stories that the children of war brides shared. War brides' lives were turned upside down because of war, and their lives were disrupted again when they immigrated to Canada. Even with everything that these women faced in their own lives, they were able to create homes and happy memories for their children.

### **Memories of “Mom”**

Ray Cashman explains that the stories that people share are “situated instances of verbal skill and intellectual labor wrought to link past events with the present situation in an attempt to sustain us in the future” (2012, 197). Over seventy years have passed since the end of the Second World War-- most people who lived through this period of history, including war brides, have since passed away or are in poor health due to their age. For



their children and loved ones, there is a desire to preserve their parents' experiences and the memories that they have of their fathers and mothers so that their stories are not lost to time. In regard to this Donald Campbell explained:

I didn't care in them days about what mom and dad did in the war...

Well, Poppy Day<sup>11</sup> was good, but as far as my interest in it went, it never really hit me until, shit, before you know it my dad's dead and how can I ever talk to him now about things?... Just sad that mom's in the shape that she's in. It won't be long before she doesn't know who I am (Campbell 2018).

Listening to the experiences of the children of war brides has given me a unique perspective into the lives and homes of war brides and veterans in the post-war era, as their stories and memories offer those "dual assessments or evaluations" (Norrick 2006, 91) that are so rarely considered or looked at within academic texts on war brides in Canada. When I would sit down to do an interview, I would go in with very general or open-ended questions, but there were also a few questions that I made sure I asked everybody. For example, towards the end of each interview I would ask my interviewee what their favorite memory of their mother was. Anne Miller's mother, Hazel, had just

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<sup>11</sup> In this quote, Donald refers to "Poppy Day," which is formally known as Remembrance Day in Canada and is celebrated on November 11<sup>th</sup> each year. It is a day in which people pay respect to those who served in the military (soldiers, nurses, doctors, ambulance attendants) and/or gave their lives in times of war. Poppies became associated with Remembrance Day as a result of John McCrae's famous poem *In Flanders Fields*. Since 1921, Canadians have worn poppies on the left of their lapel, close to their hearts, each November to acknowledge the sacrifices of those who gave their lives in war. Money made from selling poppies goes to organizations that help veterans and their families. To learn more, see: <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/after-the-war/remembrance/the-poppy/> (accessed June 2, 2019).

died when I interviewed Anne in the spring of 2018. While Anne held herself together during the course of our interview, when I asked her this question, she began to cry, and through her tears she said, "All my memories. I love all my memories of my mom. I was very close to my mom." For the children of war brides, remembering their parents through their experiences and stories is important. Not only for their own connections, but also, so that their children and grandchildren come to know these women as well. In this way, stories of war brides connect their families to their past and their history.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Stories can be powerful tools for understanding the past. By examining war bride experiences through family stories and personal narratives I explored how memories and stories are understood by families and how these narratives help to form people's identities and shape their views on family life within the home. Some of the stories I heard were traumatic, some were intense, and others were lighthearted and even funny. All of these stories offer different angles of what makes up a family and a home. While it is true that veterans experienced terrible traumas during the war, as I re-listened to my interviews it became evident that war brides also experienced traumas. This was one of the most shocking things that I discovered over the course of my fieldwork, not because I was naive to the horrors of war, but mainly because war brides are so often spoken about with an air of romance. It is easy to look at these women's lives through rose coloured glasses or read their stories like romance novels, but the lives of war brides are so much

more textured than that.<sup>12</sup> While not every woman dealt with alcoholism and abuse within their home, every war bride did survive the war, and many struggled with leaving their family and friends behind and adapting to a new country. As a result, these traumas or struggles sometimes lingered on within the space of the home and affected the children of veterans and war brides. In many cases it was the children who were there to listen to the stories and try to understand their parents' experiences with war. That said, not all of the stories that were shared focused on struggle and trauma. While war brides lived through, met their husbands, and came to Canada under exceptional circumstances, in their children's stories of them, they are often viewed simply as "mom." The vast majority of stories that I collected for this project highlighted the love that the children of war brides felt and continue to feel for their parents, especially their mothers. In my next chapter, I explore those special items that war brides brought with them to Canada and the handmade material culture that these women created throughout their lives. Feelings of love and remembrance are embodied in the items that war bride families keep, and narratives are enhanced by these special objects.

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<sup>12</sup> Anita McGee's film *Seven Brides for Uncle Sam* (1997) can be found on the National Film Board of Canada and explores the textured lives of seven Newfoundland women who married American soldiers during WWII and into the end of the Cold War.

**Chapter Three: Special Objects, Items, and Memories**  
**“That’s the only thing I got from her”- Henry Lewis**



***Figure 18** A decorative plate that hangs in the home of Ida Maxwell. The plate depicts the work that Canadian women did during the Second World War (photo by Maeghan Chassé).*

After speaking to so many of my interviewees within their homes, I quickly became interested with the objects and special items that families keep. Many people proudly displayed photographs of family and friends on their walls or mantle pieces; in other homes handmade items in the forms of embroidered wall hangings, or knitted blankets that were folded neatly over living room chairs. I came to realize that many of these items held a certain level of importance for the family to keep and display them.

The authors of *The Meaning of Things* describe how domestic objects cultivate family identity. For example, household artifacts may be “signposts of family history... [and may] preserve, vitalize, and transmit to those who will come after, the goal of family and ethnic continuity” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, 223). I learned so much from the narratives that were shared that it also became important for me learn the stories of the objects within the domestic sphere and how these items related to the people who I was interviewing. The act of making handmade material culture is passed along from one person to the next, but also of note is how these objects are reminders of the mothers, sisters, and friends who made them. Other meaningful items are not handmade but are appreciated for how they are used throughout a life. Folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls these “material companions,” which are valued for their continuity over aesthetics or usefulness, for example an old wooden spoon (1989, 330). While the wooden spoon may mean nothing to a person without any context for that item, that same spoon could be imbued with memories for another who remembers their grandmother stirring large pots of soup with it. Within this chapter I explore the material culture from the homes of my interviewees. More specifically, I focus on objects and their connections to family folklore. I look to Gloyn, Crewe, King, and Woodham’s concept of “family archiving” (2018) in order to better understand why families, keep and preserve certain objects. As well, the special items that war brides brought with them to Canada will be examined in this chapter. Finally, I will explore the act of making, particularly handmade material culture, and its place within the lives and homes of war brides in Northwestern Ontario.

## **“Family Archiving”**

Most of my interviews were done with the children of war brides, as well as other individuals who experienced the Second World War as children or young adults. As I moved forward with my fieldwork, I came to understand that the objects that people collect within their homes can tell stories in relation to family memories and personal history (Gloyn, Crewe, King, and Woodham 2018, 157). In the introduction to *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery write:

Too seldom do we try to read objects as we read books-- to understand the people and times that created them, used them, and discarded them. In part, this is because it is not easy to read history from things. They are illegible to those who know how to read only writing. They are mute to those who listen only for pronouncements of the past. But they do speak; they can be read (1993, viii).

While objects can simply be looked at as “things” which are used and discarded throughout a life, they can also be read and understood based on the memories and personal history of their caretakers. It is like the old saying goes, “one person’s junk is another person’s treasure.” There is no doubt that material objects tell stories, and while the stories may not be easy to read, and their context may not be understood right away, it is vital to look at how people display objects and the importance that is placed on these seemingly ordinary items.

The most amazing and unexpected thing that I encountered during my fieldwork was peoples’ willingness to share their family photographs, letters, and special objects with me. While I did not ask people to prepare before I met with them, almost every

person who participated in this project incorporated some sort of material object into their interview. Some interviewees went so far as to provide coloured copies of family photographs and documents, while the majority allowed me to take my own digital reproductions of their special items. People's willingness to share showed that they felt it was important to contribute to this project. There was a desire to preserve their mothers' experiences, as well as the memories that they have of their own childhoods. Anne Miller stated that her parents would have been extremely proud to have their story featured in a master's thesis. Her father had even submitted an article to the local newspaper titled, "The War Brides Who Came to Schreiber," which shows the value that Anne's family placed on the experiences of war brides. This desire to preserve seemed even more meaningful as many of my interviewees are in their sixties or seventies and there is the realization that the stories that they have of their parents could be lost if they are not shared or passed on. In this way, sharing their stories was a way for war bride descendants to preserve the experiences of these women.

In other instances, objects in people's homes were brought to my attention due to their importance. While interviewing Rona Godin, she showed me both a house blessing that hung on her wall, and a Saint Christopher medal that hung above her doorway. In doing so she told me the stories of these objects:

That house blessing on the wall is the original one for this house.

It's never come down... And you see that Saint Christopher medal above the door? It's always been there... That I think she may have brought with her... The house blessing, I have a feeling that may have come from my grandmother (Godin 2018).



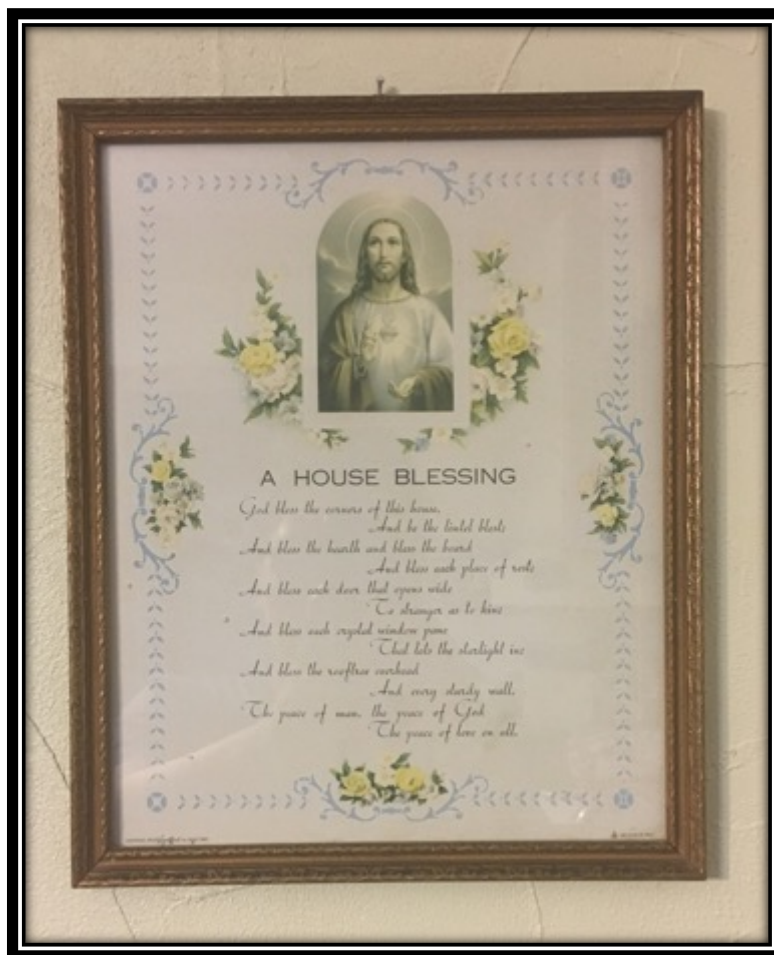
*Figure 19 The Saint Christopher medal that hangs above the doorway in Rona Godin's home (photo by Maeghan Chassé).*

The house blessing for Rona's home is a framed picture that hangs in the kitchen. The image is lightly faded, showing its age, because as Rona suggested, the blessing has remained on the wall since her parents first moved into the house. The blessing has been in the Godin family's home for so long that Rona does not know for certain where it came from, which can be seen when she says phrases like, "That I think she may have brought with her" or, "I have a feeling that may have come from my grandmother." The blessing also depicts an image of the "Sacred Heart of Jesus," that is framed by yellow and white roses. The Sacred Heart is a popular image chosen by Roman Catholics to protect the family and bless the home. A short prayer is displayed underneath the image:

God bless the corners of this house, and be the lintel blest; And bless  
the hearth and bless the board and bless each place of rest; And bless  
each door that opens wide to stranger as to kin; And bless each crystal  
window pane that lets the starlight in; And bless the roofree overhead



and every sturdy wall, the peace of man, the peace of God the peace of love on all.



**Figure 20** The house blessing that hangs in Rona Godin's home (photo by Maeghan Chassé).

The blessing sends a welcoming message to visitors, suggesting that all are welcome within the home. Rona herself is a devout Catholic, as were her parents-- who met on the steps of a church during the war. The blessing indicates to visitors that this is a religious home, but it also carries the meaning that Rona's parents were religious. Rona continues to live in the same house that she grew up in, and some of the objects are such a part of the house that she had never gotten rid of them. While Rona has had to make hard

decisions about what items to keep and what items to divide amongst family members, now that both of her parents have died, the house blessing has remained on the wall of the Godin family's home.

The relative permanence of objects means that for the most part, these items remain long after the people whose memories they hold have passed away. Unaided, the human mind is not always the best at remembering or recalling events in sequence or detail, especially when the events took place in the distant past (Csikszentmihalyi 1993, 22). Objects can then be used as a way to “remember the quality and texture of past experiences and keep in mind one's plans and hopes for the future” (Ibid.). As such, material culture allows generations of family members to interact with those who have already passed away (Gloyn, Crewe, King, and Woodham 2018, 157). During my fieldwork, it became clear just how engrained memories and family history can be when it comes to the objects that families keep and cherish within their homes. Whether or not my interviewees consciously view their practice of keeping or preserving material culture as “family archiving,” it is evident how stories can become attached to objects. When interviewing Henry Lewis, I asked him if his mother, Cathrine, had any objects that were important to her throughout her life. Without a second thought, Henry held up a crucifix that he wore around his neck and stated: “Objects? Yes. I have her-- Right here [pulls out a crucifix from around his neck.] That's the only thing I got from her. And a pair of prayer beads. But this is the only thing she had on her, in her hand, when she died.” After showing me his mother's crucifix, Henry told me the story of how his mother had died, which I will discuss further within the next chapter. As Henry told me this story, it struck me how certain objects can become entwined with such personal narratives. While

domestic or personal objects may at first seem “mundane,” once explored further, these items can reveal themselves to be “signifiers of familial identity and memory” (Gloyn, Crewe, King, and Woodham 2018, 161). Not only does the crucifix have religious significance, but for Henry, his mother’s crucifix is also a reminder of her, as it holds the story of both Cathrine’s life and her passing. Also, of note is how the crucifix no doubt had its own meanings and history to Henry’s mother. The study of material culture can be used as a way to better understand war brides’ experiences in coming to Canada. What these women brought with them, the objects that were special to them and their families, and the handmade material culture that war brides created. All of these items can tell us something about these women, what was important to them, and what they expected out of their new lives in Canada.

### **Special Items War Brides Brought with them to Canada/Pier 21**

In the summer of 2018, I visited the *Canadian Museum of Immigration* at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. My main reason for visiting Pier 21 was that I wanted to see the first place that war brides docked at before being transported by train to various points across Canada.<sup>13</sup> During its operation from 1928 to 1971, as a major entry port into Canada, Pier 21 saw over one million immigrants come through its gates. Though, according to historian Jan Raska, it was WWII war brides and their children who, “represented the single largest contiguous movement of migration to Canada, specifically

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<sup>13</sup> To learn more, see: <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadian-war-brides> (accessed March 20, 2019).

through Pier 21” (Raska, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21).<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 21** Standing outside of the Canadian Immigration Museum at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by Jane Chassé).

Upon beginning my own tour of the *Canadian Museum of Immigration*, the first thing that I noticed was a large wall displaying luggage, some with inscriptions etched into them, each belonging to someone who had taken the chance at a new life in Canada. There was a small display on war brides at the museum, but what I kept coming back to was the luggage that was displayed. I noticed that the theme of “packing a trunk” or “peeking inside” someone else’s trunk could be seen throughout the museum’s exhibitions. There was even an interactive part of the museum where visitors could write down their own family’s immigration story on luggage tags and pin them to the wall for

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<sup>14</sup> To learn more, see: <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/movement-of-war-brides-and-their-children-through-pier-21> (accessed May 16, 2019).



***Figure 22** Writing down my family's immigration story on a luggage tag at the Canadian Immigration Museum at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by Alyson Chassé).*

others to read. Suitcases and trunks are one of the most commonly recognized symbols of a trip or a journey. They are items that can symbolize excitement and new beginnings, filled with personal treasures and special memories. But suitcases and trunks can also be filled with just the basic necessities for survival. In this way, suitcases can symbolize fear of the unknown or a sense of leaving one's old life behind. Like the many immigrants before and after them, war brides would have meticulously packed their trunks and suitcases, usually knowing little about the country where they were headed or what sort of life awaited them there.

When conducting interviews with the children of war brides a question I returned to was: "Do you know what your mother brought with her to Canada?" This question was usually met with the initial exclamation of, "It couldn't have been much!" Though, when



**Figure 23** Anne Miller shows me her photo albums and some of the items that her mother brought with her from England (photo by Maeghan Chassé).

I arrived at Anne Miller's house for our interview, she had already prepared some of the possessions that her mother had brought with her from England. As soon as I walked into Anne's kitchen, I noticed a number of documents and photo albums laid out on her table. These items included: Hazel's birth certificate and passport, her "Scholar's Leaving Certificate" from the city of Birmingham stating that Hazel had finished her formal schooling, a letter from the Cadbury Brothers commending her on five and a quarter years





*Figure 24 A “good luck” token given to Hazel Bailey before leaving England (photo by Maeghan Chassé).*

of loyal service, numerous certificates from Hazel’s time enrolled in the St. John Ambulance Brigade,<sup>15</sup> Hazel and her husband (Reg’s) marriage certificate, a document declaring Hazel’s landed immigrant status in Canada, and a small horseshoe on a pink piece of thread with the words “Good Luck” inscribed on it. Hazel had kept all of these items, along with the trunk that she had brought with her from England, but when she died in the spring of 2018, Anne sent the trunk to her niece, and kept many of her mother’s documents and photo albums for her and her daughters. Speaking on her mother’s experiences, Anne, further elaborated by talking about the other objects that she believed, Hazel, had brought with her from England:

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the certifications that Hazel received from St. John Ambulance included: home crafts, nature studies, child welfare, public service, knowledge of animals, firefighting, and home nursing. Members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, women’s division, were meant to provide training and assistance on the home front, including taking over as auxiliary nurses in emergency situations (Lambert 2012, 82).

Her luggage consisted of an old wooden trunk and she basically brought her necessities over. Her memories, maybe photographs, the clothes that maybe she would need, books. She probably had a small suitcase because that trunk would probably go in the ship's haul. So, she probably had just basically, a carry-on bag to get her from leaving England to landing in Halifax (Miller 2018).

While Anne could not physically show me her mother's trunk, all of the documents, which told her parents' story, were laid out on her dining room table, along with numerous photo albums. Each of the material objects reveals a piece of Hazel's life, almost as if in sequence. From her time growing up and going to school in Birmingham, England, to the paid and volunteer work she did during the war, marrying her husband at



**Figure 25** Hazel Bailey's passport. Stamps show her landing in Halifax, Nova Scotia on September 4, 1946 (photo by Maeghan Chassé).



the age of nineteen, and then coming to Canada as a newly married war bride. The fact that Anne still keeps her mother's possessions and treats them with such care highlights not only the importance of the objects, but more importantly, it shows the special place that Hazel continues to hold within her family unit. The documents on Anne's dining room table were not just pieces of paper, they were bits and pieces of her parents' life and her own family history.

In a similar manner to Anne, when I asked Henry Lewis about what his mother, Cathrine, had brought with her to Canada, Henry, shared his own memories of the large trunk that his mother had packed in Holland to take with her on the long journey across the Atlantic:

Oh yeah, her trunks were moth balled, she put a lot of moth balls in there. Was all her... dresses and pants. Linen, that you don't see on tables now, all embroidered and everything. She brought all that. Dishes, little Dutch dishes, you know the blue ones? They're worth a lot of money. She used to pack all those. We used to go down in the basement, pop it open and see what I could find. I'd take the top off, but underneath it was all clothes, with moth balls, and then on top was her jewelry. Not expensive jewelry, but whatever she was wearing when she did modelling. Earrings, and nose, and cheeks, and eyebrows [referring to his mother's makeup] (Lewis 2018).

Both Henry and Anne have their own memories of the trunks that their mothers packed with what they believed would be needed for a life in Canada. While they could not physically show me these trunks or all of the items that were packed inside them, both

Henry and Anne gave vivid descriptions of what they remember being inside their mother's trunks, having seen them or peeked inside them as children.

Most war brides were given little notice before they were expected to board ships and set sail across the Atlantic. Melynda Jarratt highlights the chaos that often ensued in those days before leaving, "Each wife had documents to provide, forms to fill out, medical appointments to keep, and more forms to fill out before packing her luggage and finally boarding a ship" (2009, 26). In this way, many of the women were already exhausted and home sick by the time their ships left ports in places like Southampton or Liverpool, England (Ibid.). The possessions that war brides chose to pack in their suitcases or trunks can tell us a lot about these women, including the types of homes they left as well as what they anticipated their lives would be like in Canada. In discussing the *Treasures from Home* exhibit at the *Ellis Island Immigration Museum*, historian Mike Wallace writes that all items immigrants brought (and continue to bring) with them to their new countries, "evoke the difficult decisions confronting people cutting loose from their moorings" (1991, 1028). Each item painstakingly chosen and packed away represents a piece of that person's home, culture, family life, and all those things that they are leaving behind. At the same time, these items can also highlight peoples hopes and dreams for the future.

As discussed earlier, most war brides were vastly unprepared for the type of life that awaited them. The items that Henry's mother, Cathrine, brought with her to Canada were packed with the notion that she would be coming to a land of plenty, a welcoming thought after five years of war under Nazi occupation in Holland. As Henry stated: "I guess my father said different things and I think [my mother] thought the streets of

Canada were made of gold.” Though, much of the clothes, jewelry, and makeup that Cathrine had packed remained in the family’s basement, neatly tucked away and mothballed in the trunk that she had brought them in. Henry further elaborated on what his mother was told about Canada before seeing for herself what life would be like in Northern Ontario:

**Maeghan Chassé:** So, do you think she expected-- You said that she thought that she was coming to somewhere very different, right?

**Henry Lewis:** She, I guess what she thought, and what she told me... I guess my dad threw her lines, and soldiers would throw a woman a line, ‘Oh, I’ve got a big house and cattle all over the place.’ And what Erik told you was the truth on that.<sup>16</sup> But lots of soldiers said different things to enhance the girl to come and live with him in their country... That’s what I think anyway (Lewis 2018).

After six years of war and a general disruption in their lives, we can look at the material objects that war brides brought with them as examples of the excitement that war brides must have felt at the prospect of a life with their husbands in Canada. Table linens, dishes, books, marriage certificates, and immigration papers were just some of those items that surely would have been needed to start a life and set up their new homes in Canada. While other items like photographs, letters, or “good luck” tokens can point to feelings of apprehension, or fear and heartache that many women may have felt when they left their homes. Either way, like the many immigrants before and after them, war

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<sup>16</sup> In this quote, Henry is referring to an interview that I conducted earlier that day, where Erik and Marion Leet were also present. In our interview, Erik spoke of soldiers who would lie to women about their home life, positions, or place in society to make themselves seem more impressive. Upon arriving in Canada, some war brides felt as if they had tricked or fed false promises about Canada.

brides packed their trunks and boarded ships headed towards a life and a country that they could neither anticipate nor predict.

### **The Act of Making; Handmade Material Culture in the Lives and Homes of War Brides**

Similar to special objects or possessions, handmade material culture can hold special meanings and/or memories for the people who make them as well as the people who they are made for. Adriana Sandu explains that handmade material culture is an important part of the practice of homemaking, especially for immigrants, as these skills get, “carried over from one place to another” (2013, 504). Sandu elaborates by stating:

Such practice transcends time and place; it is fluid, adaptable and creates opportunities for socialization and social interaction, teaching, sharing, learning together—as other people with similar interests are sought in the process of creating the craft (Ibid.).



**Figure 26** A belt that Hazel Bailey’s made and embroidered at age fifteen (photo by Maeghan Chassé).

Like other immigrant groups, many war brides partook in activities such as crafting, knitting, and sewing, not only out of necessity but for enjoyment and/or socialization. Since these skills are transferrable from one place to another, it makes them especially important to those war brides who were not living in close proximity to their families.

Domestic crafting or do-it-yourself projects have traditionally been used as a way to “improve” or “customize” the home, whilst also allowing individuals to express themselves through their craft (Edwards 2006, 11-12). Knitting circles, quilting bees, and other types of domestic crafting are activities that have continued to bring people (most often women) together. Many of those who I interviewed informed me that they did not believe that their mothers had learned how to knit, sew, or embroider from their own mothers, as I had initially expected, but through other types of socialization or organized settings. For example, Rona Godin’s mother, Margaret, learned how to complete all household tasks and skills while going to school in her home community of Dingle in Country Kerry, Ireland. Rona explained:

The girls went to the convent at this end of the street and the boys went to the brothers at that end of the street... She started school when she was three years old... And they were taught knitting, crocheting, tatting, embroidery, all that stuff. All the household things that you would need (Godin 2018).

Similarly, when I asked Donald Campbell if he knew where his mother had learned how to knit, he stated that, “I don’t think her mother had very much to do with it.” Instead, he directed the conversation towards his mother, Elsie, and her special bond with his Aunt

Nancy.<sup>17</sup> Not only are both women war brides, married to a set of brothers, but they have known each other since they were young. In discussing the relationship between the two women, Donald stated:

My Aunt Nancy, she's ninety-two, and they were friends from Scotland. So, they come over here together [as war brides], I don't know if they came on the same boat but they probably moved to the same place, and they followed each other all over... Oh, they talk to each other like a bunch of teenagers. Every night on the telephone... they're still looking out for each other (Campbell 2018).

As Donald describes it, even today, Elsie and Nancy continue to be each other's support networks. Since both women had similar life experiences, they can better understand the struggles that the other has faced.

For those who did not immigrate to Canada with a friend from home, war brides still sought forms of friendship and support in women who they could share their experiences with. Jarratt explains that, across Canada, clubs or organizations were established by war brides in the post-war era and acted as support networks for those adapting to their new surroundings (2009, 28). For those suffering from regrets, fueled by feelings of isolation and home-sickness, these clubs offered solace and friendship (Casey and Hanrahan 1994, 240). Whether the women went to these clubs to share knitting patterns, complain about in-laws, or just to have a cup of tea, it allowed them to spend time with other women who were often faced with similar situations as themselves

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<sup>17</sup> Nancy and Elsie are sisters-in-law as they married a pair of brothers. In this way, Nancy is actually Donald's paternal aunt, not just a close friend of his mother's.

(Ibid.). While these clubs eventually began to disband as the war brides settled into their new surroundings, or became increasingly busy with children and family life, the existence of war bride clubs demonstrates how important it was to have a support network in order for war brides to adapt to new places, spaces, and communities (Jarratt 2009, 28). Closer to home, I learned of The Fort William War Brides' Club through a newspaper article published in the *Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal* (Wilson 2006, 29). This club was established in 1946 in what is now the city of Thunder Bay, Ontario. The article states that in 2006 there were eight remaining members of the club, and that the women were still getting together with one another. While, I was not able to find any more information on this particular club, and I found no mention of any other war bride clubs within the smaller communities throughout Northwestern Ontario, I have no doubt that these women met informally with one another. Many war brides would go on to make lasting friendships with other women within their respective communities, like Elsie and Nancy. In the small towns, church and community groups were also important places for meeting female friends. Many of those who I interviewed talked in depth about their mothers being deeply involved within their community, all of which was on a volunteer basis. For example, Anne Miller spoke about the role that her mother, and other women in the community, played in getting artificial ice in the Schreiber Arena. Rona Godin also talked about her mother's involvement within the community of Schreiber:

Once she [got to know] more people in the community, she got more involved. She was involved in a lot of things... We used to get the newspaper from Nipigon and she handled all that...She used to bring crates of eggs in from Manitoba and sell them... She was very involved

with the CWL<sup>18</sup> (Godin 2018).

The concept of being connected, belonging to a group or a community, was especially important when it came to reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness (Maidment and Macfarlane 2009, 18-19). As Anne Miller elaborated, “your neighborhood became your connection. So, my mother got to meet other women in the neighborhood and they all connected.”



**Figure 27** Cross-stitched birds made by Ida Maxwell (photo by Maeghan Chassé).

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<sup>18</sup> The CWL refers to the Catholic Women’s League, which is a service organization for Catholic women aged 16 years and older.



Whether they created with other women as a form of socialization or by themselves out of necessity, many war brides partook in the act of making. The majority of those people who I interviewed strongly associated skillful knitting, or other acts of handmade material culture, with memories of their mothers. These memories and associations are especially significant because again, war brides of the Second World War are either well into their nineties or have already passed away. While domestic crafting may have been used as a way to decorate their homes or clothe their children, in their old age, knitting was (and is) a hobby that they enjoyed, and a way to express themselves. In three of my interviews in particular, I talked with my interviewees about their mothers' practices of knitting. One of these interviews was with Rona Godin. When I asked Rona if her mother continued to create handmade material objects throughout her life, Rona recalled:

Yeah, yeah. She was a fantastic knitter. And she knit right up until she had her stroke. After she had her stroke she couldn't knit anymore because her brain couldn't comprehend the patterns (Godin 2018).

Rona's narrative shows that many women continued their practice of knitting until they physically could not do it any longer. While his mother is still alive today, Donald Campbell's answer to my question was also entangled with the challenges of taking care of an elderly parent suffering from dementia:

Still knitting. She knits slippers. Like she doesn't do much other than that, but she's got it down. I guess with that disease she's got, but she knows every stitch... She'll knit ten pairs of slippers probably in a month. Box

them up and take them to the legion.<sup>19</sup> Well not take, but somebody will pick them up and they sell them for ten dollars a pair and the money goes to the legion's office. If she didn't knit, she wouldn't have nothing to do.

I wouldn't want to see her sitting there with nothing (Campbell 2018).

For Elsie, knitting is not only a creative pastime and an outlet, but it is a way that she gives back to her community. Folklorists Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin look at the daily routines that older adults create for themselves explaining that these habits or rituals should not be viewed as "crutches," but can rather be understood based on their many meanings. To complete daily tasks or to create something at an extremely old age can be viewed as a success (1987, 30). Even with her illness, Donald's mother, Elsie, knits her slippers. She donates her finished products to her local legion and in turn the legion sells what she makes. There is a sense of pride and purpose in Elsie's work. In the same way, Donald is happy, even relieved, that his mother still has an outlet to keep her mind and body busy.

The act of knitting is engrained into each life, an automated practice that seems to require very little "explicit thought or reflection," until each woman can no longer remember the patterns or force her fingers to move in that habitualized way (Gjernes 2017, 2239-2240). Anne Miller similarly associates the practice of knitting with her mother, Hazel who had passed away just before our interview took place. Knitting was one of the skills that Hazel had learned from her time with St. John Ambulance during the

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<sup>19</sup> The Royal Canadian Legion plays a large role in many communities within Northwestern Ontario, especially the small towns. While legions were created to support veterans and give them a place to congregate, they now welcome all people (even if they have not served in the Canadian Military). They also host a number of community and social gatherings year-round.

war, as well as from her own mother. Though, as Anne explained, her family knew that Hazel was “forgetting” when she was no longer able to work on her knitting projects:

Oh, my mom loved to knit. My mom loved to knit. One of her last projects for all the great-grandchildren...were Christmas stockings. And they had their names all knitted right in them and what not. She was working on one of them and then we noticed that my mom was struggling. That's when we realized that she was forgetting. We would say to her, mom, are you going to work on that? And she'd go, yeah, maybe not today. So, the last stocking she was knitting was for my daughter's youngest son, he's two and a half (Miller 2018).

While knitting and sewing can be described as an embodied skill, one where the maker does not have to necessarily think about what they are doing, this type of memory or technique can become hazy with age. As sociologist Trude Gjernes explains in her study, many elderly knitters with dementia can produce “good work,” but few can actually complete a project or even have an idea of what the finished product is that they are working towards (2017, 2239-2240). In our interview, Anne continued to speak about her mother's unfinished knitting projects, and how since her mother has passed away, Anne has been left with a number of incomplete Christmas stockings:

I'm having to find somebody to see if they can finish the project for me. And since then-- I have that one and its partly finished- and then since then she's got how many new ones now? She's got [counting in her head]. I've got three more stockings after that, that need to be completed, finished, because those will be the last three great-grandchildren. So, I'm hoping I

can find somebody because sadly enough I never learned how to knit and neither did my sister. My mother tried to show us but we were all fingers and thumbs. My mother said later on in life, she said she wished she would have had more patience to pass that down and show us how to knit. And my mother was also a beautiful sewer too. And none of us know how to sew either. Yeah, we lost some of the talent along the way. It might have been us because maybe we weren't interested, but you know what? Now I wish I knew how to knit or sew but, anyways, oh well. Can't cry over spilled milk, right? (Miller 2018).

Anne's narrative about the unfinished Christmas stockings highlights the realities of caring for an aging parent and what life is like after that person is gone. Once a loved one has passed away, cherishing and appreciating their possessions or artwork becomes even more important in the process of remembering that person (Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin 1987, 44). It is hard to look at or think about those incomplete stockings without being reminded of the woman who had been knitting them. Also, of note is the regret that Anne feels in not having been able to grasp the art of knitting herself. She attributes the break in transmission to possibly a lack of patience or skill, but it is clear that Anne now wishes that she had taken more time to learn while her mother was still alive. Similarity, Rona Godin could never master knitting when her own mother tried to teach her. Rona explained, that it was only after her mother had died that she was finally able to teach herself how to knit:

[My favorite memory of my mother] is of her knitting. She very seldom sat down when she didn't have knitting needles in her hand. She was

always making something. She made sweaters, she made afghans. I have one [afghan] left. [Her grandchildren] have asked for the afghans over the years, and I gave them out, and now I'm down to one... I started knitting after she died (Godin 2018).

While skills are often taught to us in our childhood or adolescence by older relatives, some of these skills or traditions (like knitting) are not picked up again until later in life. For most people, our middle years are our busiest due to work, volunteering, and/or children. It is not until later in life when things have slowed down that we have the time to go back and pick up or “recycle” the hobbies or enjoyments of our youth and understand their importance to us and the legacy we leave behind (Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin 1987, 24-25). While knitting may not have been as important to Anne or Rona in their younger years, now that they are older and their mothers have passed away, this skill has taken on more meaning because it is entwined with the memory of their mothers.

When a loved one dies (in this case a parent), we look for ways that we can remain connected to them, even in death. We may pick up the hobbies that they enjoyed, look back on those lessons that they taught us, or treasure the objects that they left behind. In this way, people are not only connecting to their loved ones, but they are recreating those places and spaces from their childhoods (Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin 1987, 55). Many of those who I interviewed are now at an age where they can reflect back on their own lives and share their lived experiences with both their children and grandchildren. In this way, “The ship sails on. Living memory connects members of different generations in time periods that transcend the individual life span” (Ibid., 89). This is a different stage

in the story of the war bride and one that is now being carried on in the memories of those who were closest to them.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

While working on this project, the story of Bev Tosh was published by various news agencies across Canada. Tosh, an artist from Calgary, Alberta, is the daughter of a World War Two war bride, and seven years ago she began a project that would connect her to the thousands of war brides who left their homes following the Second World War (Ubelacker 2018). Tosh paints portraits of war brides that are based on their wedding pictures. Her work has led to her receiving the Meritorious Service Medal from the Governor General in 2018 and Tosh's work is currently on display at the Royal Airforce Museum in London, England and will remain so until September of 2019. Her portraits will also be used in France in 2019 as part of a commemorative exhibit for the anniversary of D-Day (Ibid.). Tosh's paintings are done in oil on near life-size pieces of wood. Each portrait depicts the image of a smiling young woman on her wedding day and Tosh displays her work so that the war brides stand shoulder to shoulder as a way to emphasize how the women often had to lean on one another for support. Also, of note is how the paintings are supported by blocks of wood that are meant to symbolize the railway ties that the war brides travelled on and are inscribed with each woman's final destination (Tosh in Ublacker 2018). While the portraits themselves are mesmerizing, Tosh does not simply paint, she also learns the life stories of the women. In an article published in *Toronto City News*, Tosh speaks to the art of telling "multi-layered stories" within her exhibits:

I wanted a sense of their strength and their frailty at the same time. They know life is uncertain. They're losing loved ones no matter where they are... They were not falling in love to go elsewhere, or even to get away. In fact, the hardest thing for all of them was to walk up that gang plank<sup>20</sup> (Tosh in Ublacker 2018).

Tosh's work points to the fact that as war brides continue to grow old and die, we are not only losing a group of extraordinary women, but a piece of our history. Though, Tosh memorializes the war brides through her paintings and re-introduces them to history as a way to teach new generations about these women. Tosh's work shows how stories can be told through objects like paintings and photographs. People view her work and in turn learn about these women. In this way, the story of the war bride is given a new perspective, or quite literally, a new frame. Throughout this chapter I have focused on the genre of material culture and the roles that it has played in the lives and homes of war brides and their families. Social historian Richard Grassby writes, "Material culture sheds light on how people understood themselves. Objects and their combinations can evoke the atmosphere of a house or room. Artifacts can convey a sensory perception of the past through sight, smell, touch, and texture" (2005, 594). Grassby explains that special objects can make a place feel more like a home. While "home" has been the connecting thread of this thesis, my final chapter explores the concept of home and how this word is understood differently by so many people.

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<sup>20</sup> A gang plank is a temporary board that is placed between a boat and a dock, so that people can more easily board the boat.

## **Chapter Four: Conceptualizing “Home”**

### **“She just wanted to go back and see the old place”- Rona Godin**

Throughout this thesis I have pondered the concept of “home”: what home is, how ideas of home are created, sustained, and passed on to future generations. The word home is an ambiguous term. Through my research I have learned that “home” does not mean the same thing for every person. As cultural anthropologist, Ruth Behar points out, “Many are unsure about where home is or what it is” (2005, ix). For many war brides, the idea of home was not simple or concrete, as their childhood homes and families were in the United Kingdom or Europe, while their husbands and children were in Canada (Kohl 2006, 28). In this chapter I further explore the concept of home, examining the challenges for war brides who continued to feel connected to “home” (where they were from) while at the same time were making a new home – with their husbands, for their children. I will also look at returning to one’s home country and how war brides and their families stayed connected to relatives through letters, and later through social media outlets, like Facebook. Finally, I specifically focus on the idea home, and how the word is understood differently by so many people.

#### **Connecting to Home: Letters, Telegraphs, Phone Calls, and Facebook**

People have long been communicating with family members through the use of the written word. In the past, personal letters were the only way for individuals to interact with family and friends when not in close proximity to one another (Attebery 2007, 14). For most war brides in Canada, letters or telegrams were the main source of communication with loved ones, well into the 1960s. As time went on and telephones



became common within households, the women could more easily talk to and connect with family and friends who were at a distance. Hearing one's voice over the telephone was more instantaneous than sitting down to write a letter and then waiting weeks or even months for a response. It cannot go unsaid that hearing a loved one's voice was also a much different experience for people, and certainly an emotional one, as most war brides had not heard the voices of certain family and friends since they had said goodbye to them. In looking back at her mother's experiences with connecting to family members in England, Anne Miller explained:

The only way she could get in touch with them was telegraph. That was the only way... And then when everybody started getting phones and what not then they would start calling...But a lot of stuff was the old airmail letters.

They wrote all the time, so that was how their keeping in touch was, an airmail. An airmail letter or a telegraph, and usually if it was a telegraph, it was either good news or it was bad news (Miller 2018).

Anne's words illuminate the struggle of living an ocean away from one's childhood home and family. The idea of the telegraph either containing good or bad news highlights the difficult position that many war brides found themselves in. On one hand, these women wanted to stay connected to home (the families that they had left), but on the other hand, they were living completely different lives in Canada and were separated from their childhood homes by both time and space. Living so far away was challenging, especially since the modes of communication were not as advanced or instant as they are today.

While letter writing is not common practice today, the use of social media, such as Facebook, to stay connected with family was brought up during my interviews. While

individuals using social media outlets, like Facebook, still use the written word to communicate with “friends” online, this connection is much more efficient and instantaneous than letter writing. In my interview with Linda Ballentine we spoke about using Facebook as a way for the decedents of war brides to connect and interact with their extended families in Britain and Western Europe:

**Linda Ballentine:** And Facebook. God bless Facebook. I’m friends with them all and now they’re having kids.

**Maeghan Chassé:** So, you still keep in touch with the family there?

**LB:** Yes, yeah. Which is nice.

Even though Linda lives an ocean away from her extended family in Scotland she still connects with her cousins through written messages and conversations, as well as by sharing and viewing photos with them on Facebook. When face-to-face communication is not possible, social media is the next best thing, especially with the creation of video chat services like Skype, Facetime, and Facebook’s own version of the video chat. Modern technology makes it simple for the descendants of war brides to continue to stay connected with their families abroad, sometimes even after their own mothers have passed away. Efficient and convenient communication strengthens family connections so that ties between extended family members remain. For the children of war brides (who now range in age from their 50s to their 70s) the value of Facebook is not necessarily in the number of “likes” that they get. Instead, the value lies in the ways that social media allows them to develop meaningful connections with their maternal family. I will discuss below how war bride families have not only remained connected through social media but have actually travelled to visit one another in person.

## **Returning to One's Home Country**

While it is true that many war brides never saw certain family members again once they immigrated to Canada, and some of the women never returned to their home countries, all of the individuals who I interviewed spoke in great detail about remaining connected to their mother's extended families. Staying connected through letters, phone calls, and packages sent through the mail was spoken about, but also of interest is how many war brides and their children returned to Britain or Europe to visit family members and the communities that they came from. During my interview with Donald Campbell, I asked Donald if he still keeps in contact with his mother's family in Scotland, even after all these years. Donald replied by saying, "Yes, yes. There aren't many left. It's the kids that are left... Yup, a few of them have visited here. Yup, nice people." Donald continued by stating that his family not only keeps in touch with those in Scotland but that his mother had in fact been back to visit:

She's been back a couple of times. I sent her over in 1985, I think.

I think Nancy [Donald's aunt] went back that same time. And I have some nieces, they were just there last week. That's why I didn't do anything last week, they came down from Toronto and had a visit.

But [my mother] will never go anywhere again. She wanted to see her sister before she died, and her brothers (Campbell 2018).

Donald's answer suggests that if a war bride did return to her home country she never knew if that would be her last time (whether that be because of expense, time, or issues related to aging). In other cases, when the war bride did return, certain family members or

friends may have already passed away. In this way, while visits often felt far too short, the time spent together was always meaningful for these women.

In her own interview, Anne Miller spoke about how difficult it was for her mother to be separated from her close-knit family in England. Even though her mother's family came to visit Canada and members of Anne's family went to England to visit, Anne suggested that her mother did not get to see her family as often as she would have liked:

Her parents came out a couple of times to Canada, to visit. Later on, her middle sister, her and her husband, they came a few times to Canada to visit. And my mom went back home a couple of times. But it was expensive to go, and plus, she was raising children of her own, so I mean it's not like you just pick up and go, and same with taking the kids over to England or whatever, it's not like going from here to Thunder Bay<sup>21</sup>... She did enjoy going back home and catching up with the old family members and what not. Her last time home was probably 1999 or 2000. I think that was her last time that she went home. You know time gets away with you, eh? You say you're going to go and then this or that, and that or this, and... And things had changed then because family members were passing on and having health issues. So, she did make it back a couple of times. But I think probably eleven or twelve years ago, was about the last time she went over (Miller 2018).

This commitment to remain in touch with family and place shows that even though many war brides quickly assimilated into Canadian culture and society, they and their decedents

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<sup>21</sup> It takes approximately two hours and thirty minutes or 204.8 km to get from Schreiber to Thunder Bay by vehicle.

still strove to feel a connection to the places and people who they came from. While time and money were often an issue when it came to travel, many war bride families made honest efforts to not only remain in touch via letter, but to actually see one another in person. The fact that war bride families went through great efforts to be reunited with family members highlights how important it was to remain connected to one another. None of the children of war brides who I interviewed came from exceptionally wealthy or well-off families. They described themselves as regular people whose families sometimes struggled with money as they were growing up. That said, they emphasized that their parents did the best that they could with what they had-- a very common sentiment for those who grew up in Northwestern Ontario in the post-war/baby boom era. Travelling to Europe from Canada was not (and is not) cheap. Even with this in mind, war bride families were still willing to travel in order to connect with family in Europe. This shows the value that was placed on these relationships because it would have been just as easy not to make the trip.

As time went on, many of the adult children of war brides and their own families made the journey to visit their extended families abroad. When I asked Linda Ballentine what it was like to travel to Scotland and visit her mother's family and community of Paisley, Linda recalled:

Well I was excited because I got to meet my-- I had met my grandmother and my aunt and uncle, they had come over beforehand. I think it was a year or two previous. But I got to meet my cousin Frank and his girlfriend Susan, but now they're married and they have three kids... it was a different experience, like just the different culture. The different routine for the day because they eat

early and everything is surrounded around going to the pub. Which we did. It was nice though, I remember it being very nice. We did a lot of walking there. And we'd go from my aunt's place and walk all the way into Paisley. And then we went and saw my grandma at her place. She lived on Mill Street and my aunt lived way up in Glenburn. So, it was a bit of a trek, but we did it! (Ballentine 2018).

Linda notes the culture as having been an especially interesting part of her experience in Scotland. She not only speaks about getting to meet her grandmother, and her aunts and uncles, but she talks about the daily routines within her mother's community of Paisley and how life surrounded around the local pub. I found this part of our interview to be intriguing because, earlier, when I asked Linda if she ever remembered her mother's Scottish culture as being part of her family's household in Canada, she replied by saying, "Not really because when [my mother] came here she just sort of embraced the whole Canadian culture." In this way, travelling to Scotland may have been a way for Linda to connect not only to her mother's family but to her maternal heritage.

Henry Lewis was also interested in meeting his mother's relatives and seeing the place that she had come from. Not only did Henry's mother go back to Holland three times throughout her life, but Henry also went to visit his mother's childhood home when he was stationed in Germany with the Canadian Armed Forces in the 1970s. Before travelling to Holland, Henry's mother told him that if he were to go to the house that she grew up in, a house that her family had lived in for over thirty years, that it would "smell like a lit cigar." Henry further explained that the house would have this distinct smell "because my grandfather smoked cigars every day until he was over ninety, or one-

hundred-and-three, I guess.” Henry spoke about his visit to Holland as being a wonderful experience for him because not only did he get to meet his extended family, but he got to see the community and the actual house that his mother had grown up in. Seeing a place and experiencing it for himself can make it so much more meaningful than simply hearing stories about that place. In speaking about Holland and the home that his mother had grown up in, Henry stated, “What [my mother] told me was exactly what I saw when I went to Europe. Exactly. Except the aunts and uncles were a little older.” While connecting with family in Holland was a positive experience for Henry, he also spoke about a sadder occasion when his mother’s siblings travelled from Holland to Canada for his mother’s funeral:

When she passed on, it was kind of hard on me...I took the full stress on myself... And it was hard for me because I phoned my aunt, but she talked half English and my uncle talked half English... She says your ‘moeder,’ that’s Dutch for mother, your ‘moeder.’ Yes, I said, she died. ‘Dood,’ means dead. And then no whatsoever and then she says, ‘we come.’ They were here in about five days... But anyway, they were here, they made it, and they had a good time while they were here. Not because of the funeral but after we buried my mother, I took them to see different places in Canada... The mosquitos, the black flies [laughs] (Lewis 2018).

While Henry described an emotional time in his family’s life, due to the loss of his mother, he also spoke about how nice it was to have his aunts and uncles come to Canada to be with his family at such a difficult time. It was not only a relief that his mother’s family could make it to her funeral, but also, it was good for Henry to show his extended

family where his mother had settled and what life was like in Canada. Even though his mother is gone, Henry still keeps in contact with his cousins in Holland and stated that, “It was good. They’re all good.”

This desire to remain connected demonstrates a lasting connection between war brides in Canada and their families who remained in Britain or Western Europe. Factors like time, distance, money, and issues related to aging often made it difficult for war brides to connect with their families as often as most would have liked. Though, the relationships between the decedents of war brides in Canada and their mothers’ families in Britain or Western Europe demonstrates a familial bond that has survived both distance and the test of time.

### **What does Home Mean?**

In her 2011 article, published in the *Journal of American Folklore*, folklorist Elaine Lawless states that, “my home and childhood created the blueprint for my own personal ‘map of the world’” (127). Lawless describes the profound impact, good or bad, that one’s childhood home can have on an individual, and how the homes we come from can work to shape our views of ourselves and the world at large. At the closing of each of my interviews, the last question I would ask the children of war brides was, “when you think of the word ‘home,’ what do you think about?” While it was not a question that I had initially considered when I set out to do my fieldwork, I became interested in the idea that no two people have the same definition of home, especially when you think about





*Figure 28 Mary and Keith Ross pose for a photo during Mary's first summer in Canada (Linda Ballentine's family photo collection).*

what the word means to you personally. As expected, the answers that I received from my interviewees were as diverse as they were. While some people described home as a specific house in a specific community (one that their immediate family may have always lived in), others described home as a feeling, a memory, or a sense of togetherness. Anne Miller suggested that home is “A smell. Seeing someone sitting in the same chair. Their voice. Pictures. Home is everything.” Anne’s statement “Home is everything” does not necessarily refer to the house that she lives in now, or the house that she lived in as a child, but to the family and memories that filled and still fill her life. To Anne, home is a number of different sounds, smells, tastes, and memories that come together to form a whole image, like pieces within a puzzle.

In her article, “Imagining Home, Nation, World,” folklorist Emily Satterwhite describes home as “a memory and an ideal,” (2008, 11) one that is, “somewhat commonplace but full of virtue” (Ibid., 31). These ideas are exemplified in Henry Lewis’ answer to my question when he stated that home is “Happiness. Loving. Peace.” Happiness, love, and peace may seem “commonplace” to some, but these words can also represent an ideal of what many aspire to fill their homes with and hope to remember when they look back upon their lives. In answering my question, Henry elaborated further by suggesting that home is:

loving your parents or your brothers and sisters...But the family together, I guess. Sometimes you can get the whole family together. But when my mother was living, all the family was together. All our family was together, there was nobody staying here, staying there. We all came together. We celebrated the events. It was good to have her. I still miss my mother [so much] (Lewis 2018).

In his answer, Henry speaks with nostalgia for the past, for a time when his whole family was together, and his mother was still alive. He credits his mother for this sense of togetherness, suggesting that she was the one to make his family’s house a home. In both Henry and Anne’s answers, importance is placed not on the where but on the who, those people and memories who filled and continue to fill their homes.

When Rona Godin answered my question, she attempted to give an answer that represented both what she thinks of when she hears the word home as well as what that word would have meant to her late mother:

Here. This is home for me. Home for my mother was Ireland, it really was.  
But this became home too... She lived here longer than she did in Ireland.

She was seventy-six when she died, and she left Ireland when she was eighteen. So, she lived longer here than she did over there, and she spent sometime in England. When we went back to Ireland, she never did call it home. She just wanted to go back and see the old place. And catch up with some of the people that she knew (Godin 2018).



***Figure 29** Margaret Godin and friends in Schreiber, Ontario. Margaret can be seen standing on the far right (Rona Godin's family photo collection).*

Rona's answer sheds light on the precarious position that many war brides held when it came to defining the word home, as their families and childhood memories were in Britain or Europe, while their husbands and children were in Canada (Kohl 2006, 28). This duality can be illustrated through cultural geographer Yi Fu Tuan's words: "I am more than what the thin present defines" (2005, 186). In this way, home is not only a

place, but it is also a series of memories, sights, smells, and objects that become connected through the past, present, and future.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As stated earlier in this chapter, the word home is ambiguous in its meanings. There is no right or wrong answer to the question that I posed to my interviewees because everyone's memories or concepts of home are their own. We could simply define home as a place or a dwelling that a person lives in with their family group (whoever that may be), but the word home is one that cannot quite be pinned down or defined in a linear or logical way. Home is imbued with emotions, ideals, and memories (good or bad) that play on our senses and can even work to shape the views that we have of ourselves and the world around us. For war brides who left their childhood homes to be with the men they married, home, was no longer a singular, stable place. Like the many immigrants before and after them, ideas of home were "often shaped by memories of past homes as well as dreams of future homes," (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 198). The living situations that war brides encountered in Canada were not always what had been promised to them by their husbands. Some war brides lived with their in-laws for a period of time, other houses were isolated, and some had no indoor plumbing. Even so, war brides created homes out of these places. In remembering his own childhood home, Henry Lewis stated: "The streets were gravel, there was no sidewalks, nothing. Bush... But I guess my mother took care of us quite well, and she did the best she could do... And you know, it was good."

### Conclusion

**“We had a good life! I think she would say she had a good life.”- Anne Miller**



***Figure 30*** A belt that her mother made, and photos from her parent's wedding day lay on Anne Miller's kitchen table (photo by Maeghan Chassé).

All too often, war bride stories end in a “happily ever after,” once the women are tearfully and romantically reunited with their fiancées or husbands in Canada. When studying the stories of war brides, it is common to see photographs of young women smiling or waving from the decks of boats, but these women's lives were a lot more textured than that. Historian Sydney Eve Matrix describes the characterization of these women as, “young, beautiful, in love, fertile, unspoiled, heterosexual, full of hope for a

bright future” (2007, 79). This popular or romantic image of the war bride is one that does not fully encompass the experiences of these women and what it was like for them in Canada as their lives were not always happy, carefree, or full of hope, but were incredibly difficult at times. It almost seems like an injustice to depict these women as merely “brides” without also recognizing the other roles or titles that they held in life. The reality of studying war brides in 2019 is that the majority of these women are no longer living and many of those who are still alive today are suffering from dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, and other illnesses due to their age. In this way, it is not enough to refer to them as brides without studying and acknowledging the other aspects and stages of their lives. They were war brides, but they were also: daughters, sisters, factory workers, nurses, members of the armed forces, mothers, immigrants, survivors, women.

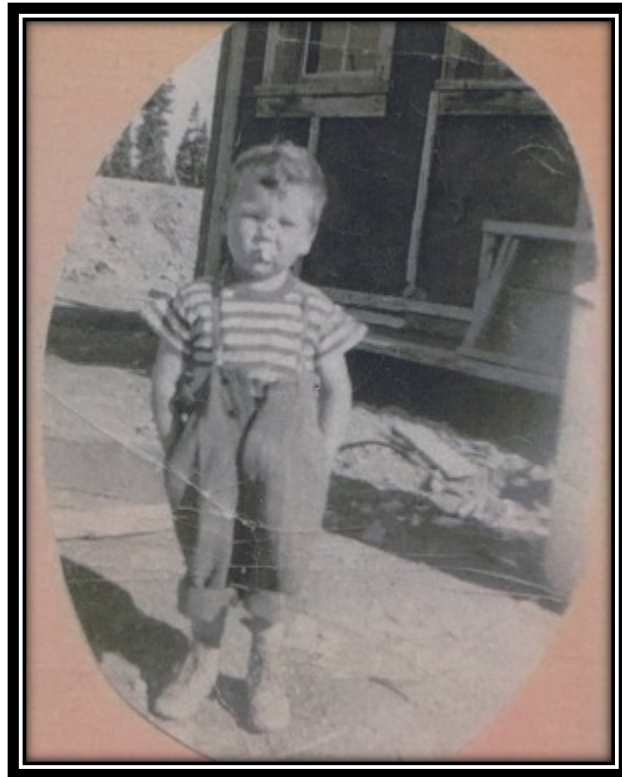


**Figure 31** Rona Godin sits on her mother, Margaret's, lap (Rona Godin's family photo collection).

As I began my fieldwork for this thesis, I knew that I wanted to explore the lived experiences of war brides. Although, I quickly became concerned that I would not meet any war brides who would be interested or well enough to be interviewed. While I did have the privilege of interviewing ninety-five-year-old war bride, Mary Ross, my dilemma led me to reach out to the children of war brides and other individuals who lived through and experienced the Second World War. This decision guided me to the realization that the stories and memories of those individuals who were closest to war brides are just as important and worth studying when trying to understand the full experience of the war brides. By interviewing family members, I was able to not only learn the stories of the women themselves, but also, I learned what it was like to grow up in the homes of war brides and World War Two veterans. The memories and stories of war bride families offer a more complete picture of what war brides' lives were like once they settled and began their day-to-day lives in Canada as those who live in the space of the home often play a large role in the experiences of an individual. In this way, ideas of home became an integral part of this study as I looked at bigger questions like *How were war brides able to create "home" in a new country so far away from their families? And, how did ideas of home get passed on to the children of war brides?*

When I presented my thesis proposal to the Folklore Department at Memorial University in the fall of 2018, I had already completed my fieldwork and was ready and excited to get started on this project. Although, during the question period, one of my professors, Dr. Diane Tye, asked if my thesis was really about war brides. This question caught me off guard because my first reaction was, of course this is about war brides! How is this not about war brides? Though, as I sat down to write, this question stayed

with me. I finally had a moment along the way where I said to myself, Diane was right, this is not *just* about war brides. My thesis truly is about the families of these women; how the children of war brides remember their mothers, how they have cared for these women in their old age, grieved when they have died, and now cherish their memories of them. All of these aspects make up notions of family and home. The homes and families each of us come from are not perfect, and some are downright dysfunctional, but they are our families and our homes. Like it or not, they have shaped us into the people who we are today.



**Figure 32** Donald Campbell as a child (Donald Campbell's family photo collection).

Many of those who I interviewed emphasized just how hard their mothers worked to make their house a home and ensure that their family was taken care of. Whether these



women were cooking dinner, driving their children to after school sports, volunteering in their communities, picking berries, mending clothes, or collecting wood to heat the house, they were always busy. Many factors go into making a place a home and the emotional labour that goes into this task is something that should not be overlooked. Telling stories, making memories, sharing photos of loved ones, and teaching life lessons to their children was just as important as housework or domestic labour. In reminiscing about his mother, Henry Lewis stated, “She was such a hard worker. Nothing stopped her. You might say, ‘Ahhh, I’ll do that tomorrow,’ but she would go right through it. Finish it off, and it was good.” While life was not always easy for these families, and was even extremely difficult for some war brides, their family’s memories and stories of them are often full of love. Memories of meals cooked, stories told, images of a loved one sitting in their favorite chair, cherished family photographs and special objects, and even an unfinished Christmas stocking are just some of the ways that home has gotten passed on to the families of war brides. While the lives of war bride families were not perfect the impact that war brides made in their homes and communities can still be felt today, especially amongst their descendants.

Within this study I have attempted to understand the war bride experience through the concept of home, what home is, how the concept is created, sustained, and passed on to future generations. As literature professor, Roberta Rubenstein, suggests, home is “Not merely a physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space” (2001, 1). War brides not only had to adapt to new spaces, places and communities, but these women were also tasked with bringing together “material and imaginative geographies” (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 198) to create homes, not only for themselves,

but for their husbands and children in Canada. In this way, “home” can be looked at through the memories that were made and passed onto the children of war brides who now keep these women alive through their own remembering.

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