

# Children of War Brides

INTRODUCTION BY MELYNDA JARRATT

THEY CAN'T TAKE MY IDENTITY AWAY FROM ME    JOE TAYLOR

'I LIVE, BREATHE AND WILL DIE A CANADIAN'    SHEILA WALSH

I FEEL BAD FOR MY PARENTS

MARION VERMEERSCH

When the Canadian government brought 44,000 War Brides and their 21,000 children to Canada between 1942 and 1948, it was understood that every serviceman's dependent automatically became a Canadian citizen upon landing at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly that's what everyone believed for the last sixty years. From the very beginning of the War Bride transportation scheme servicemen's dependents were called citizens and except for their Immigration ID card that curiously bore the stamp 'Landed Immigrant', every single document they were ever given in the course of their transportation to Canada reinforced the comforting view that they were citizens.

A colourful little brochure called *Dock to Destination* which was handed to every War Bride upon embarking at Southampton and Liverpool contained these heart-warming instructions from Canada's Department of National Defence:

As soon as the ship docks Canadian Immigration officials will come aboard. These men will complete the formalities for your entry to Canada which automatically makes you a Canadian citizen.<sup>2</sup>

Even Canada's Prime Minister, William Lyon MacKenzie King, had nothing but praise for Canada's War Brides. Sailing with a group of servicemen's dependents aboard the *Queen Mary* on 31 August 1946, he was described as giving a most encouraging speech to the group assembled before him that day:

Mr King, in a short speech of welcome congratulated the brides who won the hearts of Canadian soldiers, the men on their choice of brides, and Canada on the splendid addition being made to its citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

War Brides and their children have worked, paid taxes, voted, served in elections and some children have even had distinguished careers in the Canadian military. If they travelled they applied for and were given passports which they used to travel back home to Britain over the last sixty years.

Every now and then a story will surface from the 1950s, '60s or '70s of a War Bride who was told she wasn't a citizen and in every case, she quickly went about clearing the matter up. In 1954, Mary Dale of Mabel Lake, British Columbia was stopped at Customs when she went home to Scotland with her Canadian-born son, Gordon.

She considers herself a Canadian ... but she was surprised to learn that was not true on her first trip to Scotland when Gordon was five.

She was told she lacked a Canadian citizenship certificate and was delegated to a different line than her son. She applied for the paperwork upon her return to Canada and learned she had to pay a fee.

'I'm a \$2 Canadian,' Mary says with a great roll of laughter.<sup>4</sup>

Scottish War Bride Zoe Boone of Arthurette, New Brunswick had a similar experience travelling with her children to Britain in the 1950s, except the fee was \$5. Interestingly, English War Bride Gwen Zradicka of British Columbia was told in 1969 that since she had divorced her first husband, she was no longer a Canadian citizen!

After 24 years in Canada, Zradicka divorced in 1968. She remarried the following year to another Canadian. But when she went to get a passport for a trip to Britain, her request was denied.

Because of the divorce, Zradicka was told she had lost her citizenship ... She went through the challenging task of tracking down her ex-husband, and

getting permission to get a copy of his birth certificate. Then she had to get a copy of the British marriage certificate.<sup>5</sup>

If you ask a group of War Brides most will say they've had no problems with their citizenship, but from the small sample above we know that some have definitely been told they are not citizens – and they weren't very happy about it. When faced with the upsetting news, these women and their children dealt with it the best way they knew how; they filled out the paperwork and applied for their citizenship card. In the days before computers, the Internet, and 9/11, these applications were dealt with fairly efficiently and nobody ever again questioned their citizenship – that is, until a War Bride child named Joe Taylor came along.

Joe Taylor is the son of an English War Bride and a Canadian serviceman who landed on the shores of Normandy on D-Day. His parents' marriage did not survive the realities of post-war Canada and his mother returned to England with Joe after only a few months in Canada.

When Joe and his mother went back to England in 1946 they travelled on a Canadian passport because they were Canadian citizens. Joe always considered himself Canadian and as his story will show, he made every effort to come back to Canada in the 1970s when he was a young man, but bureaucratic bungling put a stop to that. In 2002 when Joe again started asking questions about his Canadian citizenship, he opened up a Pandora's Box that threatens the security of every Canadian War Bride and the children they brought with them to Canada at the end of the Second World War.

In a nutshell, Joe was told he is not a Canadian citizen because he was out of the country and failed to attest to his citizenship when he was twenty-four years old in 1969. When Joe challenged this obscure regulation, he was then told he isn't a Canadian citizen because he was born out of wedlock to a British woman and a Canadian serviceman.

According to the 1947 Citizenship Act, upon which War Brides and their children were given Canadian citizenship, when a child is born out of wedlock he inherits the nationality of his mother at the time of his birth. It doesn't seem to matter that Joe's parents did marry when Joe was five months old and that he and his mother came to Canada with the promise of citizenship in 1946.

Complicating matters is the heightened sense of security since 9/11 and the recent introduction of new passport regulations between Canada and the United States. Previous to the new regulations, a Canadian citizen did

not require a passport to enter the U.S. As of January 2007 every Canadian entering the U.S. by air must produce a passport and in January 2008 the same will apply to Canadians entering the U.S. by land and sea. With these new regulations in force, Joe soon found that he wasn't the only one who was being told he's not a Canadian citizen. As War Bride children started applying for passports, they started coming forward with their own tales of woe.

It's only going to get worse; most War Bride children are nearing retirement age. As they start applying for federal benefits such as Old Age Pension and Canada Pension, they'll soon find that questions about citizenship may hold up their cheques.

In May 2006 Joe took Canada's Department of Citizenship and Immigration to British Columbia's Federal Court and he won; but the Department has appealed the ruling and in so doing has raised the spectre that every serviceman's dependent who came here in the 1940s could lose their citizenship.

It's hard to believe but it's true, and as Justice Luc Martineau said in his ruling of September 2006, if the Federal government appeals his decision to the Supreme Court the impact will have ramifications beyond Joe Taylor.<sup>6</sup>

'This is not a street fight; the outcome of this goes beyond the interests of Mr [Joseph] Taylor. It has huge consequences,' Justice Luc Martineau warned Crown lawyer Peter Bell, who was representing the immigration minister.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter we will meet four War Bride children who have been told they are not Canadian citizens; two of them have lived their entire lives; one was abducted by her mother as a nine-year-old child and brought back to England; and the other is Joe Taylor himself.

## They Can't Take My Identity Away From Me Joe Taylor

Joe Taylor was barely two years old when his parents' wartime marriage fell apart in Canada and his mother fled back to England with little Joe in her arms. As a child, Joe knew little of the circumstances which led to his parents' divorce and cared even less: growing up on the Isle of Wight he was the apple of his grandfather's eye and had a childhood that most boys would envy.