

*Memoirs of a
Cape Breton War Bride
by Beatrice MacIntosh*



Dedicated to my family

Linda ~ Ron ~ Keith ~ Derek ~ Chris



Love Mom
2004

My hometown was London England. I was born in 1924 to Tom and Mary Davidson. We were a family of seven children. I had three brothers and three sisters.

I was fifteen years old when the 2nd World War broke out. The year was 1939. I had already worked a year with *Dun and Bradstreets*. I had started at the age of fourteen, which at our school was the leaving age, unless we wanted to further our education. I had started night school for shorthand-typing but school children were evacuated out of London once the war started. My two younger brothers and sister were sent away to safer places - like so many other children without their parents, and although they had an idea where the children were sent to, they never really knew for sure. The office I worked at was on the west side of London Bridge, over the Thames River, with its docks and wharves underneath, and barges and boats of every description.

The pool of London was a very busy spot and a prime target for the German bombers. Even so, life seemed very simple the first year of the war and I happily walked back and forth to work every day. I was sure I would always live in London, but war changed all that.

In 1940 I was 16 years of age. Up to this point we had suffered through a few air raids, but in September, the "Blitz of London" started. The Blitz was so named when the Germans decided to destroy London. We suffered through nine months of constant bombing, both night and day, running back and forth to Air Raid Shelters, or staying home and sitting under the wooden kitchen table, praying and hoping we would live to see another day ~ it was hell for sure. So much death and destruction. It would be difficult to write a day by day account, but it quickly became evident that the long threatened Blitz by Germany had commenced!

I continued working and at times was caught on London Bridge when the planes would swoop low to machine gun us. At work, when the sirens went off, we all trooped down to a wharf under the building and stayed there until the "all clear" sounded and then we went back upstairs to work.

The 10th of May was one of our worse nights. The Germans decided to finish London. Thousands of bombers dropped high explosives and incendiary bombs. London was

a mass of flames. There were a thousand fire engines and pumpers in London that night battling the fires. The next day it was hard to walk on the streets with hoses everywhere, but we still trudged off to work; thankful to be alive and have a job to go to.

Times were very hard and we knew the Germans were encamped across the channel, ready to invade Britain. Imagine how thankful we were when the USA declared war after Pearl Harbour and they marched into Britain. That was the winter of 1941/1942 and the war was still raging.

I was anxious to get into war work as soon as I turned eighteen in June 1942. Dad would not consent to me joining the Woman's Forces, so I decided to join the NAAFI. (Navy, Army and Air Force Canteen Service for the Troops) I was sent to Aldershot, a large military town with a Canadian Division of a hundred thousand troops, plus the British troops. It was a very busy, crowded town. I was issued a khaki uniform with a pork pie hat, blue overalls and a cap for inside. Except for the hat, we were dressed like the A.T.S. (Auxiliary Territorial Service, Army Ladies). I worked in several canteens but eventually went to Salamanca Barracks; a training barracks, and that was when fate stepped in . . .



When I first heard this was a Canadian Barracks I was very nervous. I wondered if I should run back home but I was committed, and had signed a contract. The girls there were very friendly and the supervisor, an older lady, was very strict, but fair. She had worked in the NAAFI in the 1st World War and she had been called back. There were 12 girls all together and 4,500 soldiers in the barracks. Our canteen was right in the centre of the barracks, with the canteen downstairs and our living quarters upstairs.

I met Kendrick the Fall of '42. He was a Training Instructor, training drivers for Bren Gun Carriers, which was a small armed tank. The boys would all come into the canteen at lunch time and again in the evenings for cigarettes, etc. We were very busy but we were friendly with them all.



We had a half day off each week, one weekend every three weeks and a few hours every afternoon. Normally we started early in the morning and worked till ten o'clock at night, except when there was a dance in the camp - then we served refreshments and stayed open later. The dance hall was across from the canteen. Of course, girls were scarce and we were in demand, so we cleared up quickly and were able to spend some time at the dance. The camp would send trucks out to surrounding areas to bring girls in and take them back later. They needed girls to dance with the guys.

Kendrick never danced, but he would come to the hall and we would talk and get to know each other better. Our first date was planned for New Year's Eve, 1942- 43, when I was eighteen and he was twenty-one. I was sorry to hear it was put off because they had to go on a scheme for two days. He sent a friend to apologize so then I took myself off to a New year's dance at another barracks, where I was welcomed with open arms. Girls were very few and far between. I had a wonderful evening. I walked back to our camp by myself, never worried about walking alone because there were many security guards around camps who watched us girls closely.

We finally did have many dates, and I took Ken home to London to meet my Dad and sisters. (My mother had taken my younger brothers and sister out of London to a safe area.) Dad really liked my "Scottish Canadian," as Dad had put it. He had been in the Royal Scots Regiment in the 1st World War and so anybody Scottish must be a good person.

Ken knew London well. Most of the Canadian troops would go to London, Scotland or Manchester on their weekend passes. They would stay at the Beaver Club or the Salvation Army Hostel in London, where they were always welcome. It would cost them a few shillings to stay there but they were never turned away even if they didn't have any money. I have a high regard for the Salvation Army to this day for the wonderful treatment they gave to our troops. London was a very gloomy city with all the destruction and devastation and also very crowded, with troops from everywhere. Food was scarce, but the people remained cheerful and very friendly in spite of it all.

During this time, Ken talked a lot to me about Canada and his home. I still didn't understand what it really was like, so when my darling Canadian asked me to marry him and go back to Canada with him, I really didn't know what to say. I loved him, but the thought of leaving my family and friends . . . I wasn't sure.

With the way the war was raging, we didn't dare make plans for the future. Then the year '44 entered and Germany unleashed their new secret weapon, "the Buzz Bomb," which was named by the British, "The Doodle Bug." It came from France - unmanned (no pilot) and targeted for London.

We heard it stop, (it came so fast) and then it came down. There were mostly two Doodle Bugs together, so we would lay down flat on the street, wherever we were or dodge into a doorway or whatever. Frightening for sure!

All our Canadians in our camp were then transferred up to the North of England for more training. Of course Kendrick went too - he was the Training Instructor. It was good-bye once again. Something big was happening - the British, Polish, Dutch and French troops all moved into our camp. The foreign troops etc., had escaped from their own countries once the Germans had moved into theirs, and they wanted to join the Allies to fight against the Germans.

It was at that time Kendrick and I talked about being married later in the year. Before he left Aldershot, he took me to see the R.C. Padre in the camp. The Padre wasn't in favor of us thinking of marriage, very much against it in fact, because we were of different religions. He was a French Canadian Priest and was very rude and opinionated. I had thought I would change my religion, but he didn't seem to approve of that either.



My Dad had given us his blessing when Kendrick spoke to him, although I had wondered about the Catholic side, but my Dad was impressed with Kendrick because he was in the Scottish Regiment and his people were of Scottish decent. My Dad was in the "Royal Scots Regiment" in the 1st World War and very proud of his Scottish roots.

While on one of my weekend trips to London, I decided to buy my wedding outfit. I had begged and borrowed enough clothing coupons for a suit, hat, shoes, etc., and I left them at my home in London, so sure if it all worked out for us we would be married there. I missed my darling Canadian and wrote to him every day even though I knew our letters were being censored when they left the barracks as well as any being mailed to me. A few officers of the Canadian Regiment had remained when the rest had been moved out and we had to take our mail over to them. I am sure when they read my letters, they must have had a chuckle.

We were confined to barracks and warned not to speak of anything. We knew something big was happening, as we watched the movement of troops and the war planes overhead, so we were not surprised about D-day on June 6, 1944. The British were all moved out of our camp and our Canadians were moved back in; all prepared for the big fight in Europe. Most of them were reinforcements for the 1st Division. One morning we were awakened at three o'clock to open the canteen to serve coffee, tea, cigarettes, etc. to the boys as they were leaving. It was sad to say good bye as we knew so many would never return. Kendrick did not go, as he was still training the drivers for the gun carriers.

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Then in August, I received a telegram with the sad news that my family home had been bombed and destroyed, but thankfully no one was at home at the time. The whole street was destroyed. My Dad and sister had gone to an Air Raid Shelter. Dad had tossed a coin that evening to see if he would go to a shelter or not and it came

up heads. He was so lucky! My Mother, young brothers and sister were away, evacuated from London to a safer country place. But of course, neighbors and friends were killed or injured.

As soon as I had received the telegram I was granted leave to go. Home was about 60 miles by train and bus. When I did arrive, the Air Raid Wardens were still digging out people from the rubble. The whole street was a dreadful mess and my poor Dad was in tears, glad to be alive, but so sorry for the others. So now we had no home.

It was in August that Kendrick decided we would be married in October, as the war seemed to be going our way now, and we could see a light at the end of the tunnel. Of course, I had to buy another wedding outfit as my other one had been destroyed in the bombing. I decided to change my religion and went to a charming little convent in Aldershot to receive some lessons. It was a silent order of Nuns, only one would talk to me. She was very nice. You could hear a pin drop while I was there. I still was not too sure of what I was doing but hoped it was the right thing.

We decided to be married on October 7, 1944 (almost 60 years ago) at St. Joseph's Church in Aldershot. My Dad and my oldest sister Marie surprised me and came to my wedding! I didn't think my Dad would go into the Catholic Church but he wanted to give me away to my Canadian. He still didn't want me to go to Canada. Many of the soldiers from the camp were in the church and all the NAFFI girls. From there we traveled back to London by train.

At that time, V2 rockets were the second secret weapons that Germany unleashed on us Londoners. The age of supersonic (faster than sound) had begun. The effect of the bombs was more violent. After a weekend in London with the sounds of the V1 and V2 rockets and bombs all night, we went by train to a peaceful village in Norfolk, where my mother and family were evacuated to.

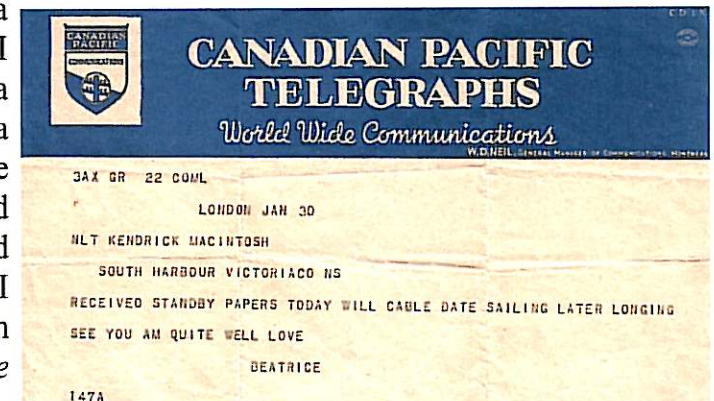


We both had a week leave and a party was held for us by my mother and sister and the other London ladies who were also evacuees. Evacuees were the ladies from London who had families, and their husbands were overseas in the forces. They had been evacuated by the Army to a safer place. They invited a few of the local airmen from the local RAF Base and even had a wedding cake for us. Between them all they had lots of food on the table. We were truly amazed as food was starting to get very scarce. The villagers were all so good to us. They hadn't known many Canadians and treated Ken like a celebrity. We had a great honeymoon and were sorry to say good-bye to all our new friends.

We returned to Aldershot, and shortly after, Ken was moved out of the camp. I stayed at Salamanca Barracks. When my mother decided to move back to London and find a home for the family, I left the service and went back to London too. It was 1945 and a turning point in the war. I moved in with my parents and went back to work with my old job at *Dun and Bradstreets*. I did clerical work for a Mercantile Inquiry Agency at the end of London Bridge in Adelaide House.

I didn't see too much of my darling husband - an occasional weekend, but a good hope for the future. Then on June 22, my twenty-first birthday, Kendrick phoned me at the office to say good-bye. He was scheduled to return to Canada. It was a very sad day for me so my co-workers gave me a beautiful bouquet of flowers to cheer me up and helped to make my day.

We were only married for nine months and I hadn't even had a chance to say good-bye in person. But I wrote to him again every day and surprisingly he wrote quite often to me, although I know he never did like writing letters. Letter writing was the only way to keep in touch since there were no phones then, like we have today. Eight months went by and I received a letter giving me a sailing date. I had already had a medical by a Canadian doctor at the "Canada House" and passed all the necessary tests. My in-laws had already been notified and had accepted me. Thank goodness! I let Kendrick know by telegram that I was sailing on the "*Isle De France*" on a certain date.



Kendrick decided to travel from South Harbour to Sydney to meet me. He assumed that the war brides for Cape Breton would be sent by train from Halifax to Sydney. It was February, mid winter, and the roads were not open. He started out by snow shoes to Big Intervale. He was joined by a local friend who also wanted to travel to Sydney. From Big Intervale they got a ride by horse and sleigh to the foot of North Mountain. Carrying the snowshoes (one pair between them) they followed a snow shoe track made by the mailman. Kendrick used the snowshoes and his friend walked

behind. They finally reached Pleasant Bay and went to a hotel, where they had a room with supper and breakfast, all for three dollars.

The next morning they gave their backpacks to the mailman (he had a dog team), left their snowshoes at the hotel and walked behind the mailman all the way to Cheticamp, crossing both MacKenzie and French Mountain. Quite a walk!

In Cheticamp they stayed a night at Aucoin's Hotel, owned by a man nicknamed "Johnny on the Spot." The following morning they took a large six passenger bus to the Strait (Hawkesbury), where they changed to an Acadian Lines bus. They had only gone a few miles when the bus had problems so the driver pulled into a hotel where they stayed that night. There was a dance in a hall close by, so the passengers all went. The bus driver got very intoxicated and couldn't drive the bus the next morning. He was fired and another driver came to drive the bus. At last, they arrived in Sydney, only to find out that I had sent a cable to South Harbour telling Kendrick that the boat I was supposed to travel on, the *Isle De France*, had been wrecked in a storm and I had to wait for further notice about another boat.

Kendrick decided to go back home and wait. This time he came the other way, via the North Shore. The mailman took his backpack to Ingonish and Kendrick walked the rest of the way home. It was a long tiring journey and he was only home a couple of weeks when he received word that I was sailing out on the "*Mauretania*."

I had no idea of the hardship I was causing my darling husband. I finally did sail out from London to Halifax (a six day voyage), at the end of February 1946. This time, he traveled with Dick Budge of Neil's Harbour, by horse and sleigh. They stayed a night at the hotel on the North Shore and then continued on in terrible weather.

It certainly was a big surprise when the train stopped in North Sydney and Kendrick boarded the train and came along to the carriage to find me. I had expected to go on to Sydney with the rest of the CB Ladies. This was the first time I had seen Kendrick in civilian clothes. I had known him only in uniform and what a difference! We went along to the Belmont Hotel in North Sydney. The owners were Mr. and Mrs. Green and they welcomed me with open arms and were so kind to me.

We didn't know how we would get home to South Harbour since the roads were not open. I met Dick Budge, the first man from down this area. He lived in Neil's Harbour. He offered to take us down by horse and sleigh but we knew I couldn't do that. One hundred miles was much too far for me to travel that way. Especially when I was a London girl and not used to this mode of travel, nor this weather.

The government had promised us home to home transportation so Kendrick thought we could travel down by the ice breaker. Unfortunately, the boat was in port and they couldn't get the order to move it out. Matt MacLean, or better known as "Silent Matt," was the M.P. but he was in Ottawa. He was called at that time. We talked to the Red Cross who were taking care of my journey and although they were very kind and sympathetic, they didn't know what to do. We stayed at the hotel for 10 days - a delayed honeymoon.

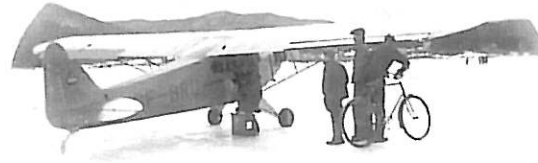
Then we heard of a pilot named Bill Bruce who owned a small Piper Cub training plane. He said that he could take one passenger at a time and land on the ice in South Harbour. Bill agreed to take us and on March 17 he drove us to Sydney Airport. It wasn't much of an Airport in those days with only a tower. Kendrick went first and I waited until Bill came back. He told me the journey went well and luckily there were no horses on the ice. It was quite common to have horse racing on St. Patrick's day - fortunately, not that day. So now it was my turn for my first plane ride. I was a little nervous. I had to ask myself, "How did I get here and where on earth was I going?" This country was all so strange to me.

They assured me it was only a short plane ride and finally I would be home with my husband . . . so off we went. We started off over the water (the ocean of course) and the pilot was not saying a word. We were flying close to the surface of the water and it didn't alarm me, but little did I know there was a reason for that. Eventually, we landed on the ice and I asked the pilot, "Are we already in South Harbour?" "No," he said, "and we can thank God we made it to Ingonish!" He had wanted to go over Smokey Mountain, but around the Bird Islands he started to lose the altitude so went around instead, and miraculously got to Ingonish safely. We would have been finished if we had hit the water. The pilot knew that it was a possibility, but understandably, did not let me know.

We had landed on the lake close to the Keltic Lodge Park Headquarters. We walked up there and were met by two gentlemen caretakers of the Lodge. They had cooked a roast beef dinner and insisted we join them. They had heard the plane going overhead earlier and were surprised to see the plane land on the lake. They were glad we had come in for dinner.

The story was told over the meal and they were amazed we had made it safely. I was nervous and didn't do justice to the meal. The men went out to check the plane and discovered water in the gas (war time gas of course). They emptied the tank and refilled it, then pilot Bill flew the plane over to another lake (Freshwater Lake) for a test run without me in the plane! By this time, I was wishing I was back in England. However, everyone was very kind to me and they treated me like a celebrity.

Several men came to take me over to the plane in a horse and sleigh. They wrapped me up in furs and really looked after me. By the time we got to the lake many people had gathered around the plane and I felt so lonesome and homesick. Mr. Bruce assured me that the plane was safe now and that the worst was behind us. We were soon landing on the ice in South Harbour. I had not stopped shaking throughout the entire ordeal.



You can only imagine how worried Kendrick had been since there was no way to let him know about our problems. There were no telephones at that time. A few people were out on the ice to greet me including my in-laws. To top everything off, I made a grand entrance and went flat on my back! I

was not used to walking on ice for sure.

Kendrick's parents, Sadie and Tom, were such sweet loving people and welcomed me with open arms which is certainly what I needed then more than ever. I missed my home and my people so much, but it was so peaceful here in South Harbour. I considered myself very lucky to be amongst so many kind people and Kendrick was happy to be back home after being away for four long years.



When I left London it was a mass of ruins, but thank Heavens it has been rebuilt and I am sure anyone who travels there now would surely fall in love with it. Ken and I talk often about the war years and how fate brought us together. We enjoyed both good times and bad times at the army camps. We were lucky to come through it all unscathed, and my family as well.

My daughter and I went back to Aldershot a few years ago. The barracks have all been torn down and army houses have been built. We went into St. Joseph's Church where Kendrick and I had been married in 1944. The Priest wasn't there, we only got to talk to his housekeeper.

While traveling to Canada on the boat "*Mauretania*," I met a Scottish girl, Winnie MacDonald, and we became very good friends. I was headed to South Harbour and she was headed to Sydney. Sadly, Winnie was killed three months later in Halifax. I visited with her mother-in-law soon after her death and she was broken hearted.

I never went home for almost 13 years. It wasn't easy to do with four children. I certainly enjoyed my holidays back home, but Canada is my country now.

I am so happy to say that Kendrick and I will soon celebrate our 60th Wedding Anniversary. It is wonderful that we have had five great children that we are very proud of, as well as our grandchildren and even great-grandchildren.





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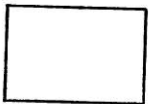
I have a Book for
each one of you.

I will keep Linda's copy
here, and send Chris his
off to him when he comes
home.

Thanks to both of you for
the beautiful card & phone calls.
I had a wonderful day, and
a great dinner at the "Seascape"
Restaurant. A lucky lady. See you
soon
Love Mom

De:

OK with r love



How you enjoy
this little book

especially for

you, and the
generation to follow.

Only a small part

of my story, but the
important part.

Not as cellant - but, ^{Olympic}