

Memories of Growing Up

**Marion Violet (Broder) Doyle
1925-2022**

Introduction

These stories were written by Marion (Broder) Doyle to relate some memories of her life. Throughout the stories she often refers to the following people:

- “Grandpa” is her husband James Doyle (1925-2021)
- “Dad” is her father Robert Broder (1887-1956)
- “Mother” is Violet (Jones) Broder (1896-1988)
- “Grandmother” is Violet’s mother, Mary Ann (Misener) Jones (1859-1945)

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The Telephone



When I was a little girl, telephones didn't have a dial on them. When you wanted to talk to someone, you picked up the phone and a lady would say to you, "number please". You told her the phone number of the person you were calling, and she would connect you to that phone line and ring the phone. If she got no answer, she would say to you, "there is no answer at that number" and you would hang up your phone. Our family's number was 386. Grandpa's family number was 3289L. The "L" meant there was more than one house that had the same phone line and number but with a different letter at the end. These were called "party lines". Each house that shared that party line had a particular "ring" such as one long ring or three short rings so you had to listen when the phone rang to see if it was your special ring. Of course you could pick up the phone when it wasn't your ring and listen in on the other family's conversation – wonderful idea if you were a very nosy person.

In those days, girls never, ever, phoned a boy. It just was against the rules of behaviour in the 1930s and '40s. And you never ever talked to someone you didn't know. I remember when I was about 15 one of the boys from my high school class phoned and didn't say who he was. He asked me to guess who it was. While I was guessing, my father came in and realized I didn't know who I was talking to. He made me hang up the phone immediately and then spent an hour lecturing me on my bad behaviour.

Christmas in California

About 1936, Father decided we should drive to California over Christmas holidays. We left New Westminster a few days before Christmas so we should have gotten to San Francisco on Christmas Eve at the latest. Driving speeds were about 35 miles per hour on the “highways” – they were two-lane cement roads with a sharp drop in the edges of the cement.

When we got to southern Washington state it started to pour rain. It rained so hard you could hardly see the road ahead at all. My brother, Stan, who had just turned 8 years old, and I sat in the back seat. The rain soaked into the car so that the back of the seat and the seat cushion got soaking wet. We sat on the edge of the seat so we wouldn't get the back of our coats soaking wet. We were so cold.

The rain meant my father couldn't drive as fast as usual either. On Christmas Eve we were on the twisting coastal highway of northern California. There were no towns to stop for supper. Finally about 9 PM we came upon a “town”. It had a gas station on the left side of the road and a motel on the right, sort of suspended on stilts over the ocean. It was called Muckleteo, California and that's where we spent Christmas Eve. Poor Stan was sure there would be no presents and certainly Santa would never find him. But he was wrong. Christmas Day dawned bright and sunny. The view of the waves smashing on the rocks around the motel was quite a sight. Later in the day, we drove through the Great Redwood Forest. It is almost gone now but then the trees were so high and so big around! Christmas dinner was in the hotel in San Francisco – turkey with all the trimmings. That was the last time we ever tried to have Christmas away from home. Stan always remembered that all Santa had left when he found Stan in Muckleteo was two little toy cars and some candy bars.

Elocution Lessons

From the time I was about 8 until I finished high school, Tuesday after school was elocution time. My teacher was Mrs Matheson. She was an English lady, about 45 when I started. She and her husband lived as companions to a retired judge in his beautiful big house. There was a wood panelled library full to the ceiling with an array of beautifully bound books and one wall was filed with Judge Howie's law books. We had our lessons in a Victorian furnished drawing room that was separated from the dining room by a pair of just sliding doors that seemed to me to disappear when they were opened – now I know that they were pocket doors and slid into a slot between the drawing room and dining room walls.

For several years, my lessons started by answering the question “what is your name?” Mrs Matheson did not like the way I pronounced my name – I made it sound like “merrion” and she wanted it to sound like “maarion”. Over the ten years with her I guess I gradually picked up a trace at least of her beautiful English accent. Sometimes there were rehearsals for a play – we put one on every year for 2 or 3 nights in a church hall. Somewhere in one of the trunks are some of my costumes – the Queen of Hearts for Alice in Wonderland, Mary, Queen of Scots for a piece of Shakespeare, etc. In spite of all the years of doing it, I never did get over being very nervous if I had to speak in public.

Besides the plays, there was also the music festival in Vancouver every Spring. Besides music competitions there were also classes for poetry recitation. It was pretty boring, but nerve-wracking, to listen to 25 or 30 other girls, your age, reciting the same poem as you had to recite. But a couple of times I won!

Besides learning to speak, we also had to learn to walk properly and move gracefully. That involved putting a leather-bound book on your head and learning first to walk, then to go up and down stairs, and finally to get up and down from a chair without the book falling off. It is a great way to learn to walk erect and not to look at the floor or the steps as you moved around. Did you know there is a “right way” to put your feet when sitting on a straight chair? If you have your feet placed properly, you can get up or sit down without using the arms of the chair for support and without losing the book on your head. We learned how to go up and down stairs in an evening dress without tripping on the skirt and how to curtsy to a judge or other important person.

She tried very hard to turn us ordinary teenagers into “proper young ladies”.



Summers at Crescent Beach, BC

When I was a very little girl, Mom & Dad bought a summer home at Crescent Beach about 25 miles south of New Westminster. The house was several years old and right on the beach. It two storeys with a big glassed-in porch on the beach side shaded by 3 big old maple trees that had a half circle bench built among the tree trunks. In the living room (it was a big high-ceilinged room) was a stone fireplace that was high enough to walk into. We burned big pieces of log from the beach in it on rainy days and roasted wieners and marshmallows over the fire. Upstairs there were 2 huge bedrooms – one for boys with bunk beds and one for girls with two big beds so as we got older there was lots of room to have friends visit. (Off the living room was the grown-up people's bedroom.) In the kitchen was a stove that burned wood to make the iron top and the oven hot, a kitchen sink with just a cold-water tap, and next to it a square, 2-foot-deep wash tub for scrubbing clothes. It also served as a bathtub until Stan and I got too big to fit into it. When we turned six, we started swimming lessons six mornings or afternoons a week for July and August. The swimming club had a floating "tank" 25 yards long where a river entered the bay at the north end of Crescent Beach. I remember how it often was raining and how cold the ocean water felt and the flow from the river meant there was always a current to swim against when going one direction in the tank. Each summer the swim club had a "regatta" and we would compete in the appropriate age group of the swimming. Somewhere around are 6 or 8 silver cups I won. When I was about 8, I won the backstroke race and the trophies that year were presented by a huge muscular man named Jimmy McLaren. At that time, he held the heavyweight boxing title for the US and Canada – we were so excited to meet him! The swimming coach thought I should also learn to dive. I did a bit of diving off the 1 metre board but when he eventually sent me up to dive off the 3-metre board I couldn't do it – he was pretty disgusted with me.

Sometimes we had bonfires on the beach. We would roast potatoes by burying them in the sand then building the bonfire over the place where we put them. In about an hour, they were cooked and ready to have with our roasted wieners and corn on the cob that had been boiled in a pot hung over the fire.

When I was grown up and married, the family still owned the house and every summer I took Faye, then Faye and Linda, then the girls and Wes to Crescent for about 3 weeks. We sold the house after Randy was born – I couldn't manage four children on the plane trip and Grandpa Jim was busy at the cannery all summer.

Grandpa's addition:

When we were about 14 and Stan was 11 the swim club had a half mile swim for a special crest. We had to swim $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, around a big marker, and back to the float. Swimming back, the $\frac{1}{4}$ mile was against a strong current so it took a lot of swimming to make any headway. Stan got tired, so he swam in near shore then walked, moving his arms to pretend he was swimming. He got caught so when he got back to the float, they told him he was disqualified for walking part way. There were lots more than him who tried it and got caught too. They were all sure mad – we got crests and they didn't. Those crests were real marks of fame among the teenagers around the beach as everyone swam and competed every summer.

Bench in the Maple trees



Swing at Crescent Beach



Back gate at Crescent Beach



Crescent Beach Swim Club



Swimming trophies



Grandma Jones

Grandma Jones was my mother's mother. She had become a widow when Mother was a little girl when her husband, Amos, died of typhoid fever. She raised my Aunt Gladys, Uncle Emery, Uncle Morley, and Mother by being a seamstress. She could cut out a dress to match a picture – there weren't "boughten" patterns in the early 1900s. They were all handsewn as she had no sewing machine until the 1930s. When Mother and Dad were married, Grandma Jones moved into their house and acted as the housekeeper while Mother worked in the cannery office as Dad's secretary and bookkeeper. When we children were born, she became our "nanny" as well. She continued in control of the house, eventually with the help of a maid, until she became too ill to do so. The last few years of her life were spent knitting and crocheting tablecloths and two lovely skating dresses for me. I remember when she got to the bottom of the circular skirt it took her a whole hour to knit around a single row. She lost a lot of her sight when she was about 80 so my most vivid memories of her are of her using her magnifying glass (which we still use) to read the instructions for the next row of crocheting, then putting the pattern book and the magnifying glass down on her card table and picking up her crocheting. I've always wondered how she managed to see the crocheting – it was so fine a cotton thread, yet there were no mistakes in the clothes. When the house caught fire while Mother, Stan, and I were away, Dad forgot about Grandma, still crocheting in the back sunroom. It was Grandpa's dad who saw the fire from next door and when he didn't see Grandma outside, he went in the back door. He found her still crocheting, oblivious to the firemen, and took her next door to their house and looked after her until we got home from Vancouver. She lived until she was 89 which was very, very old in those days.



Skating

When I was about ten, New Westminster got its first ice rink and a figure skating club was formed. The year before I had begun figure skating at the Vancouver club – it was a long drive in those days, especially if it was foggy as we drove home. The new club in New Westminster got a pretty good pro and the club grew quickly. It wasn't long till I had passed the first couple of figure tests and two dance tests. I just loved to skate and when I was about thirteen, I started pair skating. Then World War II began and the man I was training with immediately joined the navy. The next year I got a new partner, Rosie. He was six feet tall, so it took several months to get our strides to match. However, his height did make it easier for him to lift little me. In 1943, we were to skate in the western Canadian pair skating class. The only extra ice time we could get was Sunday morning from 5 to 7 AM. So each Sunday I would get up at 4, walk the half mile to the arena and be ready for the ice at 5 AM. The competition was to be in April so at the local club's ice carnival in February we skated the number. In all the years I'd been skating father had never seen me skate. That year he was in town and agreed to come to the carnival. I got him and Mom front row seats. When we came onto the ice, I was wearing a pale turquoise chiffon dress with a full, full skirt and long sleeves – decidedly modest by current standards. Dad took one look at my dress with its "indecently short skirt" (probably about 10 or 12 inches above my knees) he stormed out of the arena. He never did see me skate. My cousin Gordon Manery was taking photos – he was a professional photographer in those days. Some of the shots were very good and one was to be in the newspaper. Somehow Dad persuaded Gordon to destroy all the prints and the negatives. In April, when we were in the competition, we were doing a "death spin" where my skates were hooked behind Rosie's head. I guess I was nervous, so I didn't get my skates locked. They came unhooked and the centrifugal force sent me flying headfirst into the side boards. I was taken from the ice unconscious. I never skated pairs again and Rosie felt so terrible he threw his skates away. The next fall I was sent to a girl's finishing school a few miles up the Hudson River from New York City – skating was a thing of the past.



Finishing School

Getting to Edgewood Park, in Briarcliff Manor, NY, and spending ten months there was quite an experience for a small-town girl. But to understand how I came to go there we have to go back a year or more.

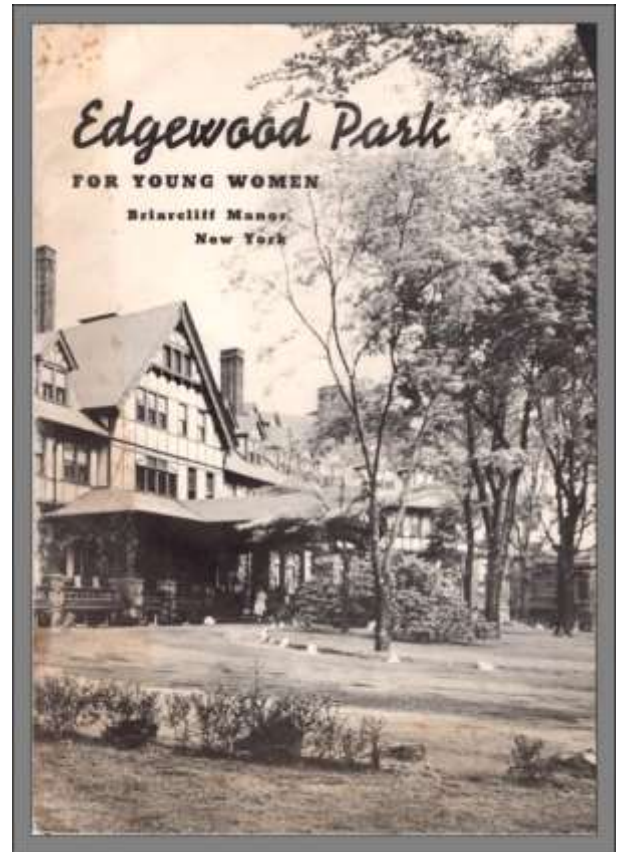
I graduated from high school with a straight A average for all four years. Fascinated by buildings and the promising new building materials coming on the market, I applied to Stanford University in Palo Alto, CA to study architecture. I got an immediate reply but it was not what I wanted to hear. The letter began with great praise for my qualifications and how they would be delighted to have me, a “foreign student”, at their university – in any of the usual “women’s” faculties. However, they had a policy of keeping architecture open only to men as architecture required too much math and engineering for any woman to be able to cope with the curriculum. I was furious! I kept the letter with my high school diploma for years though now I can’t find either one. That winter I worked as a dental assistant and took typing and shorthand (a secretary in the making? I don’t think so, but Dad did.) In the spring, after the skating show with Dad and the accident, I enrolled at Edgewood Park – they taught a two-year course in interior design which included some drafting training. I never saw the school till I arrived there. World War II had just started so I gained entry into the US only because Dad was still an American. In August, my trunk was shipped by train and in early September I was on a plane from Vancouver to Toronto. I stayed overnight with a friend of Dad’s family and the next afternoon they put me in the overnight train to New York. The last stop for the train was Briarcliff before going into “the City”. I had a compartment on the train – a small private room with a sink and toilet; the seat would unfold into a bed. While I went down to the dining car for dinner, the porter made up the bed. In the morning, he knocked to wake me in time to prepare to get off. The train was due in Briarcliff at 9 AM so I had time for breakfast. When I got off the train, there was a tiny station, immaculately kept up but about 100 years old. Parked beside the station was a limo and on the platform was a uniformed chauffeur to drive me to the school. Edgewood School was about a mile from the quaint town, up the hill in beautiful, treed country. The building had been built as a hotel for people from the city to spend a holiday away from the heat of the summer in the city. It had a huge center hall, two stories high, with a huge fireplace. The walls were all wood panelled, with a curving staircase up to the balcony on one side of the hall. Sitting very primly at a large desk was Mrs. ____ who was the social director of the school. No one could leave the school grounds/park without her permission and signing out. Anyone coming to visit a student had to check-in with her before we came down to the hall to greet them. She took me up to my room where my trunk was all ready for me to unpack. There was a single bed, a high ornate chest of drawers, and by the window a worktable/desk and chair. I shared a bathroom with two girls in the room beyond the bathroom – Barb and Gibby. Barb was from New Jersey and sometimes I went home with her on the weekend.

For the first semester, I took things like English poetry, home economics (sewing and cooking), and interior design. After Christmas holidays, I persuaded them to let me do just interior design so in the last five months I completed the two-year course of study and got my diploma. The course was really interesting as we studied French, English, and American furniture styles. We learned how to draft floor plans and do perspective drawings of rooms. Several times we spent a day at the Metropolitan Museum in New York learning to draw, measure and later design wall paneling and wood decorative trim to suit various periods of history. The museum’s top floor was filled with dozens of rooms (living

rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms) completely furnished with antique furniture. We also got to visit the Museum of Modern Art and the Citadel – an old castle built high on a cliff overlooking the Hudson River. Its old stone walls were covered with tapestries, and it was furnished as it would have been in France in the 1600s. I was impressed!

The school adjoined the Rockefeller's country estate. Each Wednesday afternoon, we rode either on the estate trails or in the riding ring building. I'd never ridden before but by Spring I'd learned to ride in proper English form. Tuesday and Thursday afternoons we learned to play golf, indoors with cotton golf balls. That went fine until Spring when we went out onto the driving range and hit a real ball – I didn't like the vibration on my hands when I hit the ball, so I spent my hour on the putting green. Monday and Friday afternoons were tennis time. After two weeks of trying to teach me to hit the ball (I was hopeless) the teacher agreed to mark me present while I actually spent my time in the interior design lab learning from Miss Frieze.

School was over in early June and Mother came out East to move me home and spend a couple of days in the city. It was 1945 and our first day in the city we went out to look at the big stores. We had just gotten out onto 5th Avenue when suddenly there was wild cheering, laughing, hugging, dancing, and the whole city stopped to celebrate. It was VE Day – the war in Europe was over! Stores all locked their doors, even the banks closed, and the population poured into the streets. It was exciting to be in New York that day, but it certainly prevented me from showing Mother the stores that day. However, in the next few days we had time to find and buy me a wedding dress for later use (there were no wedding dresses in Canada during the war or for some time afterwards as all the manufacturers were busy making uniforms).

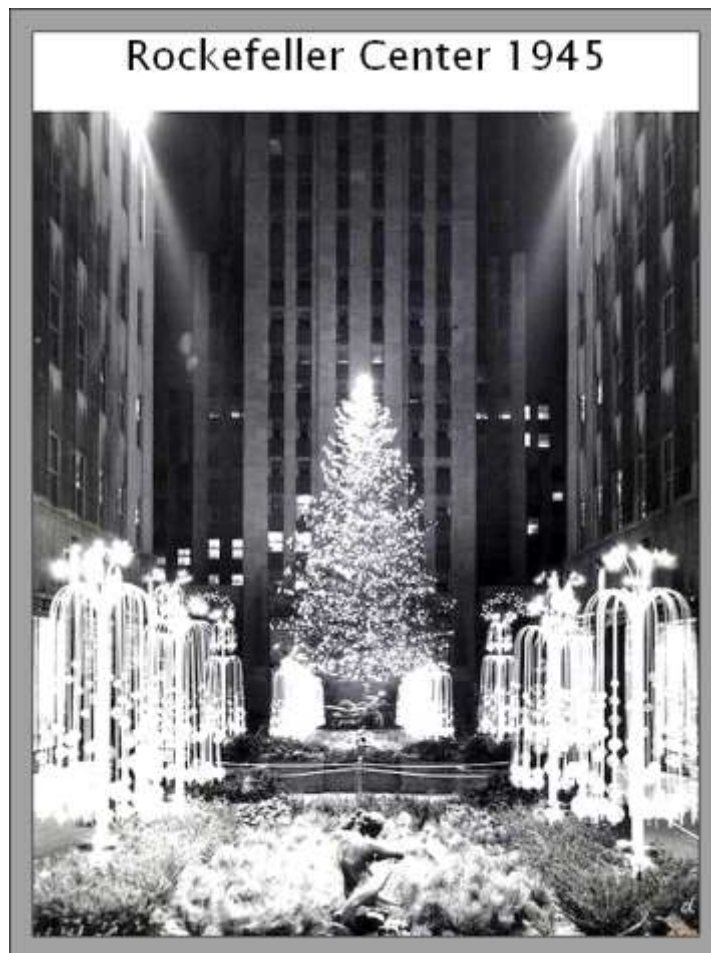


Christmas Lights in New York - 1944

When I was 19, I spent a year at finishing school a few miles up the Hudson River from New York City. One Saturday we took the train into the city so my friends could show the country girl from Canada the store windows and lights of New York at Christmas time. They intended to impress me and they certainly were successful.

The big stores on Fifth Avenue – Lord & Taylor, Macys, etc. – had all their windows filled with mannequins that moved, fancy Christmas clothes, and toys of all kinds. In Rockefeller Center there was a Christmas tree that was so tall and with so many lights with angel decorations all around the plaza and an open-air ice-skating rink in the middle. I couldn't believe my eyes. Even now I want to go back to the city at Christmas just to take in the lights and the excitement of Christmas in New York.

Later in the spring, the interior design students spent a couple of days at the Metropolitan Museum studying the decorating details of its historical rooms display but New York in February isn't like New York at Christmas in spite of the wonderful galleries that line the edge of Central Park.



Shopping in New Westminster – pre 1939

When I became a teenager, I sometimes was allowed to go and look for my own clothes. There was one nice store in town, W. S. Collister. On the main floor they had fabrics, laces, thread, etc. and upstairs there were ladies clothes. In those days there wasn't such a thing as "endangered species" so there was a variety furs as collars on suits and coats. I must have been about 15 when I got an olive-green suit with a leopard skin collar. The fur was golden with dark spots; it was so soft and silky. Later I had a pale blue flared coat with a big creamy colored fox collar – I felt so grown up in it.

The only cashier in the store was in the office upstairs at the back of the store. She was connected to the sales desks by a vacuum tube that ran overhead. There were little metal boxes that fit inside the tube. When you bought something, the salesclerk would put the purchase slip and your payment in the box, put the box into a slot in the tube and whoosh, the box went upstairs. The cashier put your change in the box and whoosh, it came down the tube to the salesclerk. No chance for salespeople to give wrong change and pretty hard for someone to rob the store. (It was "depression days" and there were lots of robberies.)

In those days, there were real alligator shoes and belts, snakeskin, elephant leather, and crocodile. Alligator shoes wore very well and for Sundays there were black patent shoes for men and women – not plastic like now, but real leather. Women wore beautiful, fancy hats to church and always wore gloves when out shopping – white gloves for Sundays from Easter to Labour Day, and above-the-elbow leather gloves in white or black if you were in a long party dress, especially if you were going dancing.



War Stamps

From 1939 – 1945, Canada was a partner with the British in the war against Germany's Nazi regime. As the war progressed, the Canadian government sold bonds to the people to help finance the war. But the bonds were too expensive for many working people. So they developed a system of "war stamps" that cost 25 cents each. You pasted them in a little book and when the book was full, you turned it in at any bank or post office and got a \$10 War Bond. The war stamps were available at the banks, but most were sold on the street on weekends by high-school girls. We wore scarlet aprons and white blouses, so we were easy to see. We worked from 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturdays all year long for about two years (1942-1944). It was a fun job and eventually we got to meet a movie star or two. I used to have a snapshot of Walter Pidgeon and two of us girls and his autograph. We were so excited to meet a famous star from Hollywood. He was Canadian and came up on a visit to help the local war effort.



The YMCA

When Grandpa was about twelve, he got a membership in the local YMCA. They had gym classes using the rings and the horse equipment twice a week. They also had to run a 2-mile course around the park to keep their legs in shape. Downstairs at the Y was a smallish swimming pool. It didn't take Grandpa long to become a junior leader/lifeguard with a special badge on his trunks and a whistle. At that point, he could dive across the pool or go the length underwater, but he really didn't know how to swim on the surface. One day while he was lifeguarding, one of the little boys slipped and bumped his head on the cement walkway and rolled, unconscious, into the pool. Before the boy had sunk to the bottom of the pool, Grandpa had dived in from his end-wall perch and caught the boy and pushed him up onto the pool walkway. He was a real hero and the next summer he learned to swim at Crescent Beach. From then on, he had a beautiful, powerful stroke. He got his ½ mile badge before the summer was over.

Another time a boy caught his arm in the hand grips on the vaulting horse in the gym and broke his arm in three places so it fell in a U shape. Grandpa was the junior leader in charge, so he had to carry the boy out to the office and get the manager to get the boy treated. He said the look of the arm was horrible, but months later the boy was back to gym classes.

The Punts

About a half block from Grandpa's home was a large park with lots of huge evergreen trees. Near the edge of the park there was a small lake with an island in the middle. We called it the Duck Pond. It was only about 18 inches deep with a squishy mud bottom.

One summer all the neighbourhood boys decided they would build boats so they could paddle around the pond. They rounded up all the bits of lumber they could find and built little flat bottom boats just big enough to hold one person. To fill up the cracks between the boards so they wouldn't leak they gathered up tar from the edge of the roads, melted it in a tin can, and dribbled it into the cracks. Grandpa's boat would let him paddle once around the lake before it got so full of water that it had to be beached and emptied. The Broder punt sank immediately – too much tar so it was too heavy to float.

Once in a while, the pond would freeze over a bit. Not enough to hold someone up if they stood still, but enough that if you ran or skated fast enough it would just sort of sway and you could get across to the island. Lots of us had to explain how we got soaking wet.

Courting

It was the summer of 1945. The war in Europe was over but not the war in Japan. Jim had been in England with the RCAF and had volunteered for the South Pacific war theatre, so he was sent home for a few weeks leave before reporting for training with the newly formed air group. I was taking Math and Physics at UBC's summer school. One Saturday, there was a knock on the back door. When I answered the door, it was Jim, dressed in his officer's uniform, asking if Stan was home. (He already knew Stan wasn't home but wanted me to see him in his uniform.) He looked so very different from when he was my "extra little brother" before he joined the air force – I was wowed. For the next few weeks, he came over, sat and read while I did my homework, then made me tea. (He's been making evening tea ever since.) Then suddenly the Pacific fighting was over too and he got a telegram telling him to stay home and await further orders. Sometimes when he came over, he would have a green onion in his hand – he'd had onions with his supper. He was very handsome. We were married the following summer and "lived happily ever after".



Grandpa and the Airplane Fire

Grandpa was a radio operator/navigator in the RCAF and did a lot of his training in southern Ontario. Some days their route was long and it got pretty boring so he would tune his radio to a local radio station and listen to the music. One day he said to the pilot, "Can you do any aerobatics?" The pilot grinned, said "sure", and put the plane into a small roll. When the plane was upside down it shorted some of the radio wiring and the cockpit started to fill with smoke. Grandpa turned off the radio, pushed back the coop top, and they prepared to bail out. Grandpa and the pilot had on parachutes and Grandpa was half out of the plane when he realized the radio had stopped smoking, so he climbed back in. They returned to base but had to explain how the radio had gotten ruined. The pilots are strictly forbidden to do aerobatics (which often burned out the radio) so it took them a lot of fast talking to keep themselves from being in deep trouble. (Irish gift of the gab) They had been listening to a program called "The Happy Gang" whose theme song was: *Keep happy with the Happy Gang; keep healthy, start your day with a bang; 'cause if you're happy and healthy, the heck with being wealthy; so keep happy with the Happy Gang.*