

Dinah Smithson

BY ELAINE PETERMANN (DINAH'S DAUGHTER)

My mother was born on 20 November 1923 in Skegness, Lincolnshire, the youngest child in a farming family. When just 17, she met my father during WW II—Alexander (Sandy) Mutch—and two years later, on 6 March 1943, they were married in Wainfleet, Lincolnshire. She had four children between 1945 and 1949. Her early life in Canada meant moving frequently, as my father went to university and had summer jobs. I'm amazed at what she lived through with four small children. Fortunately, she wrote about her life.

Dinah wrote:

My life began in the fen lands of Lincolnshire in England. I was the seventh and last child of the family. As I recall those days, I think of open fireplaces, paraffin lamps and candles, horse drawn buggies and bicycles for transportation. Any social event included a sing song around the piano.

The wartime years changed the course of my future. In 1941, I met a Royal Canadian Air Force lad and we were married in 1943. It was February of 1946 when I crossed the ocean with several hundred other war brides on the RMS *Mauretania*. At that time, our daughter was one year old. We arrived at the port of Halifax, Nova Scotia and from there we had a two-day train journey to Toronto. My first impression of my new country as I looked out of the window of that railway carriage was a Christmas card scene in reality—the countryside was covered with snow and this was the first time I had actually seen a baby carriage on runners.



**Dinah Smithson and Alexander Mutch
on their wedding day**

Source: all photos: author

Can you imagine spending two days on a train with a one-year-old and then being faced with meeting your in-laws for the first time? It was hardly a grand entrance as the first thing I needed was a freshwater bath and a change of clothing. My husband's father was a minister and they led a very formal life, quite different from the casual style of my own home. Then, of course, there was the manner of speaking and different choice of words and phrases which could lead to humorous consequences. I was fortunate to be accepted by such a family. Other girls had quite different experiences, some returning to England.

In the summer of 1951, Dinah took the children (aged 6, 4, 3 and 2 years) on a trip back home to England. She was trying to keep the children busy while waiting to board ship in Montreal when a porter came up to her and asked whether she had lost one of the children, who were all dressed in identical wine-coloured overalls and yellow shirts. Sure enough, Linda, the third child, had wandered off! The ship carried passengers and freight but did not have the amenities of an ocean liner of the time—no play area for children and spicy food that didn't necessarily suit them. Arriving in Liverpool, Dinah had to get the children and luggage onto a train to London, across London by taxi and then on a train to

Lincolnshire. When she arrived in Lincolnshire, she was exhausted, and the family sent the children to different households while she recovered. On the return journey, her brother drove her to the ship and her mother paid for first class travel on the large ocean liner.

Dinah continues:

My husband received his Bachelor of Science degree in geology from the University of Toronto in 1949 and this led us to the mining communities of Northern Ontario. We spent 11 years in the Sudbury area and then 11 years in Pointe Claire and downtown Montreal in the province of Quebec. The highlight was the opening night of Expo 67. We were so thrilled to see the “fairyland” of lights and to realize what a terrific learning experience was at hand.

We moved back to Toronto in 1972, but the move that affected my lifestyle more than any of the others was the last move to Brampton in 1979. The years prior to the move had been quite hectic. I had worked full time for 6 years and had various family problems. At this point, another move was the last thing I needed. Through various changes in choice of lot and delays in construction of our new home in Bramalea, we had to move into an apartment for 2 months, which meant storing some of our furniture and, in moving such a short distance, we were tempted to transport some of the small articles ourselves, so it was a stressful time.

In their seventies and eighties, Dinah and Sandy lived in Stittsville, Ontario, near their two daughters. The four grandchildren in Ottawa greatly benefitted from having active and healthy grandparents involved in their lives right into adulthood. The other four grandchildren who lived further afield (Australia, Northern Ontario and Winnipeg, Manitoba) were able to visit and also enjoy close bonds. Gardening was a shared pleasure for Dinah and Sandy, and both were active members of garden clubs in Brampton and Stittsville. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with longtime family and friends in 1993. The 60th and 65th anniversaries were more family centered celebrations.



Sandy and Dinah celebrating their 60th anniversary

At the time of Dinah’s death on 18 May 2009, they had been married for 66 years and had been important influences in the lives of their four children, eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Sandy lived on until he was 98 years old, passing away nine years later in the Perley Rideau Veterans Home on 15 April 2018.