

Kathleen Terrey

BY JANET WATSON (KATHLEEN'S DAUGHTER)

Kathleen Mary Terrey was born in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, on 21 May 1913, the second of three daughters, to an elementary school headmaster, William Thomas Terrey, and his wife Maude. After high school, Kathleen trained as a nurse at the Manchester Royal Infirmary and worked for several years as a hospital nurse and later as a school nurse. In early life she never travelled beyond London and occasional trips to Scotland or the seaside in North Wales.

During the Second World War, probably in late 1941 or early 1942, her sister Eileen was dating a young Canadian soldier, Arthur Renault, from Toronto. He brought his army buddy, Aaron Gusen, from Winnipeg, also a member of the RCME Corps (Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers), to the Terrey home. He and Kathleen met, were obviously attracted to one another, and so the romance began. Soon afterwards, Aaron was posted to Italy. Many letters were exchanged, no doubt censored, but they still gave a vivid picture both of life on the front line and life in wartime England.

They were married on 31 January 1943 during one of Aaron's leaves, and had time for a brief honeymoon in Devon. Their daughter, Janet, was born on February 9, 1944, and some of Kathleen's letters chronicle the ups and downs of pregnancy and of coping with a sleepless newborn. During the same period, her sister Eileen married Aaron's friend, Arthur Renault.



Kathleen Terrey and Aaron Gusen's wedding day

Source, family photos: author



SS *Letitia*

Source: forposterityssake.ca

Eventually the war ended and Aaron was able to return to Toronto, where he had recently been hired as an electrical engineer with Ontario Hydro. He had been an excellent student and won a gold medal for Engineering at the University of Manitoba, a fact his children were sometimes painfully aware of when they received less than stellar marks in a math or physics test!

After months in the queue of war brides awaiting passage to Canada, Kathleen and two-year-old Janet boarded the SS *Letitia* in June 1946 for a stormy Atlantic passage to Canada.

Janet contracted an ear infection on board and spent her first two weeks in her new country in a Halifax hospital. Aaron came east by train and joined Kathleen in Halifax until their young daughter was well enough for the return trip to Toronto.

Compared to some war brides who grew up in urban settings like London or Manchester and ended up in remote farms or villages on the Prairies, Kathleen's life was comparatively easy. Aaron had a good job with Ontario Hydro, and after spending a few months sharing a house with Arthur and Eileen in the east end of Toronto, they were able to buy a home of their own. In a way, Aaron embodied the "Canadian Dream." His parents had come to Canada as poor immigrants from the Ukraine. His father had worked as a welder and his mother had taken on dressmaking work. Their North Winnipeg neighbourhood was distinctly working class.

Over the next few years, two sons, Peter and William, were born to the young couple, but despite her comfortable life, Kathleen experienced moments of homesickness. Phone chats with her sister Eileen, commonly known as Jo, were daily occurrences and a lifeline to the old life and to her family. Decades before the Internet, people waited weeks for letters from "the old country" to cross the Atlantic. Kathleen's parents were able to visit Toronto in 1948, but later that year when her much-loved father was diagnosed with cancer, then died in 1949, she was unable to be with him since she was by then the mother of three small children. Eventually, her mother Maude was able to come and live with them in Toronto.

There were certain cultural differences to get used to, especially since Aaron came from a Ukrainian/Russian Jewish background and Kathleen's background was white Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Nevertheless, Kathleen became a proud Canadian, denouncing rather scornfully fellow English emigrées who were always complaining, "It wasn't like that in the old country"! One example of her conversion to Canadian life was her love for the cottage on Six Mile Lake, near Midland, Ontario, which they bought in 1957. Glorious Group of Seven scenery—yes—but also some stark reminders of the Canadian wilderness: outhouses, mosquitoes, and blackflies.

Although like many women of her generation, she never returned to professional life after becoming a mother, she was deeply involved in the community through many types of volunteer work. For example, she was ahead of her time in her concerns about mental health and volunteered regularly at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. She expressed her artistic side through many craft pursuits such as ceramics, knitting and crochet. She loved being a mother and later a grandmother. Sadly, she passed away quite young by today's standards, dying of cancer in 1989 at the age of 76.



Aaron and Kathleen at Six Mile Lake, about 1965

Aaron survived Kathleen by 10 years. At first, he remained in their Toronto condominium, lonely but coping reasonably well. After a few years, however, he decided to relocate to Ottawa, where all three of his children and their families were living. He moved into a retirement residence but visited frequently with his sons and daughter until his passing in August 1999. The Sunday night family dinners that started in the 90s when he arrived in Ottawa are a tradition to this day.