

## Childhood Memories

I grew up in the house my father had built when he was married to Mary Johnstone. The house was heated by a coal furnace, with coal imported from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Our meals were cooked on a wood burning stove, which also heated the kitchen. On the lawn in front of the house were chestnut and maple trees and at the back of the house were birch trees over three hundred feet tall.

My father farmed using machinery driven by draft horses, which were fed oats and hay grown on the farm. Planting usually started in May. Hay was harvested in August, and threshing was done in the fall. Local young men went from farm to farm to help with the threshing. Potatoes were dug in October.

The main cash crops were potatoes, milk sent to the cheese factory, poultry and eggs. We shopped in Tyne Valley, four miles away. Sometimes Father went to Summerside for shopping. If I was home he always took me. At that time we had to cross the Grand River Ferry. When we got to Summerside, the left me to wander around the department store the main store at that time, while he went to visit his friend, Harry Holman, who owned the department store.

Our two-story house was built when father was twenty-six. On the ground floor were the kitchen and a large hall with a staircase leading to the second floor. At the foot of the staircase was a stuffed owl. When I came downstairs in the dark, I was often frightened by the owl's eyes. (*One of my aunts also told of being frightened by 'that darned owl.'*) Downstairs there was a living room and parlor, which were both furnished with horsehair furniture. There was a cupboard where the table linen and silverware were stored. Mother polished the silver in the summer, and that was one job I hated. In the corner we had an organ.

The wallpaper in the living room was put there when the house was built and it never faded. In the parlor there was a settee and a small table in the center of the room.

Meals were served in the dining room and we always ate at the same time, with my father in charge of serving the meat or poultry.

In order to efficiently run so large a household, my mother adhered to a strict schedule. On Monday she did the washing, Tuesday ironing and Wednesday mending, Thursday cleaning and Friday and Saturday baking. She baked bread three times a week. She would make the dough in the evening and bake the bread the next day. (*My mother once told me that every afternoon, before Herbert came in for the day, Mary Jane would put on a clean dress to look presentable*).

We had chores to do. My brothers helped with the milking, feeding the animals, cutting wood for the kitchen range. The girls gathered the eggs, churned the butter and raised the chickens. Since I was the eldest girl, many of the household chores fell to me. I washed and dried the dishes, helped with the preparation of food and cleaning the house. When I

was eleven, Isabelle, my youngest sister, was taken to Prince County Hospital for surgery on her foot. I was left to care for the family. I baked bread and prepared the meals. One of the neighbors asked my brother, Cedric, who was taking care of the family and he answered, "Bea."

In the winter we had sleigh rides and snowball fights. We would walk to school and church over the snow. I particularly enjoyed the evenings when we would go for walks and see the Northern Lights. *(This had to have been during the summertime, but my mother's journal makes it seem like it was in the winter).*

**School Days:** We went to Birch Hill School, within walking distance of our home. School started at 9:00 a.m., recess at 10:30, then we walked home for lunch at noon. We walked back to school at 1:00 p.m. and school let out at 3:30 p.m. There were approximately thirty pupils from grade 1 to 10. While one class stood at the back of the room, facing the blackboard, those sitting down had problems to do. We read from our reader, recited poetry and did our spelling. In the afternoon, we stood again for arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division). I was very shy and I was embarrassed when Mary, on her first day at school, got into a fight with one of the boys.

Mother realized the importance of education and was determined that her children would be educated, but with so large a family, that was very difficult *(those who had education above the grade school level had to board in Summerside and Charlottetown, which was an additional expense, and left fewer at home to help on the farm).*

**Church:** St. James Anglican Church and Rectory were on either side of our property. The old church was across the street from the new one. Both had beautiful stained glass windows. The graveyard is around the old church. I remember being afraid to pass by at night. *(Many Port Hill Yeos are buried in the St. James graveyard, including James III and John "The Senator")*

The first rector I remember was Mr. Bamford. He and his wife had two children, Jack and Lillian.

Sunday school was at 10:00 on Sunday morning, followed by the church service at 11:00. Women and girls at that time always wore hats to church and dressed in their 'Sunday best.' The Sunday school had a small library of good books, novels and mystery stories. At home we had stories from the Bible.

We often went to the rectory to play with Jack and Lillian.

I remember a story that Mrs. Bamford told about the time she came home on the train and the conductor asked her if she wanted a seat. She said, "I have my seat, I want a place to put it." Mrs. Bamford taught me how to hemstitch and I won second prize at the Tyne Valley Fair for hemstitching a towel.

## **My siblings:**

Cedric, my oldest brother (born October 10, 1905) (*and the one my mother always spoke of with the most fondness and pride*) would fish for trout in our pond and he would dig for clams in the creek which flowed next to our property. He always loved music, except when my father sang, when he would put his hand over my father's mouth. When Cedric was thirteen years old, Uncle John (The Senator) gave him a heifer calf. He fed her so well that she became very fat. He took her to the Tyne Valley Fair and won second prize. He made his first speech at the fair. At the age of fifteen he went to Summerside High School. When he graduated he went to the Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown for grades 11 and 12.

The superintendent of the college was Dr. Robertson a tall, bony man. He wore a black suit with a starched white cloth over his shirt and a winged tie. The rumor was that he had been jilted in love and that was why he dressed that way. He taught Latin and Greek and Cedric was so inspired that he decided to take the Classics as his profession. He was never interested in sports. He did crossword puzzles.

His name was frequently mentioned in the school paper for what he would do. On one occasion, he put on his landlord's beaver hat and took his cane and walked down the street. At a school luncheon he was asked to give a toast to the ladies. He went to Mr. Raymond, the rector of St. Paul's Anglican Church and asked what he should say. Mr. Raymond told him to say: "Our arms your defense, your arms our recompense."

After Cedric graduated from the Prince of Wales College, he went to Dalhousie University in Halifax, where he received high honors and a scholarship to Yale University.

Loman, my next brother, (born January 13, 1907) was a slow learner. He didn't learn to walk and talk as quickly as most children and my father had a hard time accepting him. He did learn to read and write and help with the farm chores. At eighteen he joined other young men to help with wheat harvesting in the Prairie Provinces. He bought land in Prince Albert. He never married. Before he died he made his will. Since the people in Prince Albert had been so good to him, he willed his property to the town. (*My cousin Helen told me that when Loman was a child, my grandmother took him by foot to some relatives in Harmony and he lived with them until he was nearly grown – I thought that a very odd thing to do with one's son*).

I was the third child, born February 6, 1908.

Mary was born November 30, 1909. Mary was tall and had curly hair and a somewhat large head. He had a good memory but was unable to concentrate on problems. She helped with the housework and loved to bake cookies and other goodies. When my sister Alma went to Ottawa, Mary followed and worked in a hotel. When my parents decided they wanted to sell the farm and live in a city, Mary found a house for them in Ottawa

and with the money from the sale of their property, they were able to buy the house, Mary contracted leukemia when she was in her forties and died.

Alma was born April 12, 1911. She was five foot, three inches and had curly hair. She loved to talk and get the attention of our family when we gathered together to enjoy the evening air and listen to the frogs in the pond. She went to Summerside High School and to Prince of Wales College. When she graduated, she taught school. She met Harry McCollum, a widower with four children and they married. Her first child, Rodney, died at eight month's age, a crib death. Delyse and Betty were born next. Harry enlisted in the Canadian Army and Alma, knowing that her family did not have much opportunity in Prince Edward Island decided to move to Ottawa. Wilma and Joe were born there. She worked as a waitress. When she was in her late forties, she started work in the federal government at Energy, Mines and Resources and became an expert on superannuation. Alma died on November 2, 1998.

John, the sixth member of our family, was born September 22, 1912. He loved horses and learned to do farm work and use machinery. He said he never went to school, but he did learn to read and write. He had a horse, Dolly, who never lost a race in Tyne Valley. He worked the farm for many years, but decided to go to Ottawa, where he found work driving a truck. When my parents sold the farm on PEI, they moved into a house in Ottawa which Mary had found. John later inherited this house. *John died February 19, 2006.*

Adele was the seventh child, born January 11, 1914. My parents thought she was dying when she was an infant and they asked the minister to baptize her. She was always small – when she learned to walk, she could walk upright under the dining room table. When she finished grade school she got a job at the new Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Charlottetown. Eventually she moved from Charlottetown to Nova Scotia and then to Montreal. During WWII she found a job in a factory. *(I believe this job was the quintessential Rosie the Riveter job – at any rate it was in a factory – this was amazing to me, given how diminutive Adele was).* Adele died October 23, 2004.

Arthur was the eighth child, born February 2, 1915. He was a very active youngster. I remember him hitching his calf to a sleigh and driving down the road. Arthur also went to Prince of Wales College. He loved debates and never lost one. When he finished High School, he enlisted in the Canadian Army in the Signal Corp. When the allies entered the European continent, he was sent there and remained until the war ended. On his return to Canada, he went to Montreal to visit Adele, Nora and Isabelle. He met Anne, who was living with his sisters. They had four children: Donald (February 6 1949), Rick (September 1, 1950), Jennifer (March 13, 1952) and John (January 18, 1956). Arthur died of cancer of the liver on November 18, 1977.

Nora (born March 11, 1916). *For some reason, my mother didn't have anything in her notebooks about Nora. I find that a bit odd, since Nora lived with my mother and father for a while after she came to Washington.*

Isabelle was born December 30, 1917. What I remember most about Isabelle was her love for animals. She had a cat that was killing chickens and our father had to shoot the cat. She cried and said, "I hope that rats take over the place." She had beautiful red hair. Isabelle went to Montreal with Nora. She found work there and met Raymond Dourley. Raymond joined the Canadian Air Force and in 1940 the Canadian Air Force joined with the English Air Force (*actually that would have been the Royal Air Force*) and bombed Germany, When the war ended, Ray came back to Montreal and he and Isabelle married. Raymond died August 27, 1965. *Isabelle died April 16, 2008.*

### **My education:**

I went to Summerside High and boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Jolly. I liked the school and did well in my exams. The rector of the church in Summerside, Mr. White, invited me to play games with his children, and we always had a good time. His oldest daughter belonged to a girl's hockey team in Summerside, The team was the top team in the Maritime Provinces and even went to play in Montreal. Every Friday evening they invited me to a dinner of baked beans and brown bread.

At that time my hair was down to my waist and Mr. White always praised me for my beautiful hair, at a time when other young women were getting their hair bobbed. I decided to become modern and got a bob – after that Mr. White was not as friendly with me. (*I remember my mother telling me that she and another girl gave each other a bob. When they walked down the stairs that night for dinner, the other boarders were shocked at the change*).

When I graduated from Summerside High, I went to the Prince of Wales College and boarded at the Cundall Home for Girl Students. At school, our English teacher, Mr. Steele, had us read Shakespeare's plays, Dickens "A Tale of Two Cities" and Sir Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake." (*I believe that Cundall Home is a museum now – we visited it with my mother in 1999 – it is a fine old Victorian home in Charlottetown*).

I once told Daisy Adams, a cousin of mine, that while I was at Cundall Home there was a peeper who looked into all our rooms. Daisy told my mother that a man had gotten into my room. My mother later told me never to tell anything to Daisy as she was a big gossip and would twist the story around.

After I graduated from Prince of Wales College, I took teacher training from a professor who had studied in Denmark to learn their teaching methods. I enjoyed the class and I enjoyed teaching.