



OUR STORIES, THEIR STORIES

Captured Moments of Canadian History
Gifted to Us by Canadian Seniors

Created and Edited by Natalie Fraser
on behalf of HelpAge Canada

FOREWARD

My grandmother is one of my best friends, as is my mother, and both of them have pieces of our history in this book. Three years ago a student of mine suggested this job at HelpAge Canada to me and because of my love for the seniors in my life I pursued and got this job. In the time I have been with this amazing organization, I have met so many diverse seniors with so many interesting stories that were not being documented. I had heard from many of those story tellers that their stories didn't matter or that they had written or told them for themselves and family only. From my perspective, these stories were Canadian history being lost. The stories needed and deserved to be captured and to be handed on to future generations. So I put forth a proposal to spend one year gathering stories from Canadian seniors about their Canadian experiences.

This book shares our national diversity and uniquely Canadian flare. There are stories of immigration, war, times in history, specific places at specific times, and rituals of the past that can be recognized by many and appreciated by all. As you journey through this book, sampling stories, remember they are all true. Enjoy them all and pay them forward to those you love and know.

If you are inclined, send me a story of your own or gather one from one of the elders in your life and pass it in for next year's edition. There are so many isolated and marginalized seniors with stories to tell. I know the stories I gather from my family gives me a sense of belonging and reading all these new stories gives me a proud rooted feeling of being lucky to be Canadian. The authors in this book helped build define and protect this country. HelpAge Canada is doing their part to help locally and globally. They are giving the proceeds from these books to help seniors in Canada and all over the world live comfortable, safe and dignified lives.

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Our Stories, Their Stories

National organization publishes book that unites Canadian seniors across the country



From left to right: Janet Beers, Norma Beers and Natalie Fraser reading *Our Stories, Their Stories*. Image courtesy of Natalie Fraser.

HelpAge Canada, a national organization dedicated to reaching isolated seniors, is releasing its first publication, *Our Stories, Their Stories*. All proceeds from the book, containing over 70 stories from 35 Canadian authors, will go towards HelpAge Canada continuing to perpetuate its domestic and foreign programming. Among the stories featured in the book is “Broken Threads”, submitted by 95-year-old Norma Beers.

Through preemptive programming, the non-profit organization strives to reach vulnerable older who are not socially connected; it is dedicated exclusively to combatting these issues in Canada and internationally. Factors that contribute to the isolation of seniors include living alone, mental or physical health issues, loss of a spouse, a

shrinking social network and a lack of transportation. HelpAge Canada strives to reach vulnerable seniors before they become isolated, mitigating the issue and its implications.

In 2011, Natalie Fraser, private contractor and community programs officer for HelpAge Canada, developed a seniors theatre program called Spect-ACT-cular that inspired her concept for *Our Stories, Their Stories*. The volunteer group of older persons from the Ottawa area has performed more than 135 interactive variety shows about the aging process for seniors at community centers, retirement residences, hospitals, hospice care, malls, conferences and at events. “No one is required to have any skill except for courage!” Fraser laughs. “Most members come and they never leave.”

Inspired by the seniors she encountered through the Spect-ACT-cular program, Fraser developed the concept for *Our Stories, Their Stories* in the summer of 2013. “So many of (the seniors) said, ‘Oh, well (my story) doesn’t matter,’” said Fraser, “and I’d say, ‘Oh my gosh! Yes it does matter!’” Fraser compiled, recorded and transcribed stories over the span of one year, beginning in September 2013. “These stories were Canadian history being lost,” writes Fraser in the Foreword of the publication. Although they initially experienced difficulty finding male contributors, once men began writing they couldn’t stop, said retired teacher Janet Beers, Fraser’s mother. Janet also said that once contributors realized that they could write free-flow, more stories were received.

“There’s a raw element to it,” said Fraser, “it makes it delicious that you can sometimes hear dialect.” Fraser sought the help of Janet and her husband when editing. The women emphasize that with the exception of grammatical editing, they preserved the authors’ voices and dialects. Within the Beers-Fraser family, *Our Stories, Their Stories* is

the product of three generations' participation. "I don't think there's a person who wouldn't enjoy reading it because it's so personal," said Fraser.

Our Stories, Their Stories features pieces contributed by Fraser's grandmother, Norma Beers. Fraser selected her grandmother's story from a collection of more than 100 stories Norma had written since childhood. At 95-years-old, Norma says that she "doesn't remember even writing (her stories) at all," however she remembers the stories as she reads them. *Broken Threads* eloquently details Norma's memories of childhood adventures with her brother Karl, dates, dances and fond family memories:

"Karl was a tease! He played jokes on Mother, Dad, my sister Jean, brother Ross and me...If my Dad was on the phone with a business client, Karl would pile hats on his head and coats on his back. Dad never let on but finished his business and then shrugged off the coats and hats— but he always had a smile on his face. At the dining table Karl teased me constantly by referring to boys that I knew. He could always make me blush."

Although Norma's stories capture memories of her family during a specific time in history, the sentiments and family characteristics resonate with audiences of all ages.

Not all Canadian seniors are as fortunate as Norma who remains closely connected with her family; Canada is home to over five million seniors aged 60-years or older. Twenty percent of these older persons, approximately one million of them, "have indicated that they are not socially connected; they are feeling that they don't have anyone to turn to in times of need," said Marjorie Milloy, Canadian programs manager for HelpAge Canada. While organizations such as HelpAge Canada provide social programming that are crucially helpful for some seniors, these services are not suitable for all vulnerable older persons.

Our Stories, Their Stories is a unique means for uniting isolated seniors across Canada for whom volunteering and community programs are not well suited. The organization's vision manifests itself in the book; older persons across Canada are brought together by sharing pieces of themselves and their contributions to Canadian history with other seniors whose stories are similar to their own. "The stories will generate some really wonderful intergenerational conversations with grandparents, parents and children," said Fraser. In addition, she hopes that authors and beholders alike will share a sense of national belonging and pride in the country's diversity and human history. *Our Stories, Their Stories* provides the authors a vessel for imparting personal stories and their legacy. With the exception of Janet and Fraser, Norma shares that her family has not demonstrated an interest in her stories. "It's quite thrilling to me that other people will be reading my stories and quite possibly living them with me," shared Norma. The publication is symbolic of HelpAge Canada and ultimately their mission to reach isolated seniors and improve as well as maintain their quality of life and social connectedness.

"It's important (to share these stories) because it makes one realize that in a small lifetime like mine, I've really gone through many changes," said Norma. "For instance, I remember making ice cream with my dad and churning it," she laughed. "It was a big treat! Now, we can have ice cream just by walking into any store. It teaches us that change is always there and maybe it helps you realize that what you have today makes you very fortunate."

The publication is coloured with stories and poetry about immigrating to Canada, memories about growing up in both rural and urban landscapes as well as recollections

about families coping during the Great Depression and supporting the allied forces during WWII.

In addition to helping her daughter edit the book, Janet submitted stories of her own. "I've written all of my life," she shared, "however I never published anything so this is pretty exciting!" Janet's piece titled "Ottawa" illustrates her "relationship with (the) glorious city" describing it as a 64-year "rollercoaster ride." Janet shares that her contribution to the book has inspired her to pursue having further pieces published. In *Our Stories, Their Stories*, Janet shares childhood, adolescent and adult memories, explicating how her love for Ottawa grew simultaneously with herself. Janet's story enwraps readers in the "chaotic" explorations, experiences and memories a Canadian girl shared with her family and "gang of girlfriends".

Readers experience a male adolescent perspective shared by many young men through Earl Lytles' story, "Extra Gang Summer". Lytles describes his experiences following high school graduation and beginning work on the Canadian Pacific Railway during the summer of 1957. His story is characterized by many specific details, which illustrate the unique Canadian life at the hamlet of Wilkinson, Ontario. A member of the "Extra Gang", Lytles discusses working for 10-hour-long days for 80 cents an hour alongside several ex-cons, farmers and immigrants. Lytles experiences are captured through tales of serious injury on the job as well as reminiscent memories of camaraderie and brotherhood.

Our Stories, Their Stories will be released on Sunday, Dec. 7, 2014 with HelpAge Canada holding a special reading of the book following a Spect-ACT-cular performance. The organization plans to hold an official book launch in January 2015, said Fraser. The

details have yet to be finalized; however, the organization is hopeful to hold the fundraiser at the [Canadian Museum of History](#). The publication will be available for \$20 through the organization's office (located at 1300 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, K1Z 7L2), on Amazon.ca and [SmashWords](#) for \$20. All proceeds will support HelpAge Canada in continuing to operate its domestic and foreign programming Fraser shared that she has already begun collecting stories for the second volume.

OTTAWA

by Janet Beers

My relationship with this glorious city has been a roller coaster ride for the last 64 years. My life began in Halifax in January of 1944 when my mother rushed pregnant from Huntingville, PQ to NS to allow my father to see me before he shipped out to serve in WWII. He actually went AWOL to see me and then ended up in the brig. Suffice to say my life has never been boring. As with many Canadian veterans my Dad got to finish school on the DVA plan and then landed a job with Boy Scouts Canada here in Ottawa. By that time I was in grade 1 and settled into a new school with new friends in what was then Eastview with my parents and my 3 year old brother. Looking back now I certainly had a great deal of freedom as I walked to school alone along the canal and up Montreal Road. I also went to afternoon matinees at the local theatre on Montreal Road with friends and once ran away to the Circus at the local park - I have always loved carnies!

Just when I had a handle on my new life my parents bought a house in the west end of Ottawa in a new subdivision. We were the first house on the street and directly across the road was The Experimental Farm land. As I grew year by year more houses arrived and my life was full of family (including eventually 3 younger brothers), friends, school, pick up baseball games, music lessons, ice skating on the rink that Dad built on our side lawn every winter and cross country skiing at the Mackenzie King estate.

My Mum was a stay at home Mum and whenever we got home we called out "Mum" and always got an answer. Dad played guitar and mouth organ and sang to us before bed. Our holidays were accompanying Dad to Scout Jamborees across eastern Canada. Most of the adult entertainment, because nobody had much money, were house parties right in our neighborhood with lots of eating and dancing and the children were included or put to bed in one house with an older child babysitting, lots of chaos as I'm sure you can imagine.

By the time I was in grade 5 we had a gang of girl friends who went everywhere together. We were never in the house except to eat or sleep. The only rule was that you had to be home for supper and then back in after supper in time for bed. Because we had freedom to roam at will my Dad would whistle his great loud whistle and if we weren't back in 10 minutes we were grounded. As we got older we learned to read the sky and start home so we'd be in range and then of course it taught us to run!

My father was always great with the threats. His famous one for grounding was that you are grounded for the rest of your life or until I lose interest. Fortunately he had a reasonably short attention span. Some parents who couldn't whistle used bells or various sirens.

One of our yearly initiations, to prove that we weren't chicken, was to wade through a huge discarded culvert beside the railroad tracks which eventually became the Ottawa Queensway. One year there was a dead cow in it and we still all waded through. There were also pools beside the tracks where we went swimming, well actually skinny dipping, until one of our parents found out and put an end to that as there was a polio scare that summer. The boys our age had a similar gang and by grade 6 we combined forces to build a fort with only an underground entrance. One of the boys was a HAM radio guy so we got to talk to people from all over the world.

Flash forward to teenage years. The boys have cars, and anyone can get one on the road for \$50.00. In the beginning it was wonderful! We still had very little supervision except that we were now becoming aware of the insidious net of children checking that our parents had set up while we were asleep at the switch. It turned out that there was nowhere that I can go where someone of this network wouldn't see me and without the internet or Facebook - God they were brilliant! "OTTAWA THE BORING!" said every teenager but guess what? We figured out that Hull was just across the bridge and now we had wheels!

Oddly enough, guided by our parents, we discovered that Ottawa wasn't boring. It was next door to some of the most famous stars of the time playing venues we could afford to go to and learn something new.

Jump ahead to my adult years. After wanting to escape from boring Ottawa I found the man I loved and he worked in Ottawa. I almost ran but guess what this was, and still is, the most beautiful place to bring up a family. We moved out to Kanata, the new suburban idea created by the brain of Bill Teron, and set up our family in the first registered condominium in Ontario. I tried to remind my children how lucky they were to live in a city where you can be in the wilderness in an hour but can hear and see the most beautiful works of art that you can see anywhere in the world. Now that we are such a wonderfully multi-cultural city we can savour the foods of the world and make friends with people of every race, religion, and sexual orientation without fear.

The rest is history. This is not a fairy tale. There have been divorces, tragedies and yet we all stay connected. I myself have survived cancer and am now married the most amazing man in the world who accepts me with all of my warts and all of my extended family as I do with his. We're lucky to have each other and live in the most beautiful city in Canada.

BROKEN THREADS

by Norma Beers

Standing in front of the high swing out window in my bedroom, I could see the old mill, the Salmon River, and the dam whose falls lulled me to sleep each night. It was the window to which I carried all of my happiness and my disappointments. This night I was disappointed and angry because our parents had forbidden me and my younger brother Karl to attend the Friday night barn dance. Often they came with us, as is the custom in the country, but this no one was to go - no explanation.

Suddenly my bedroom door opened and it was Karl, who at 6 ft. 3in. to my 5 ft. 4 in. towered over me. Even though I was a year older, I felt I had lost my first born position because he could control me. "Are you going to let them tell you what to do all your life?" he said. "Come on, we're going." I was hesitant, used to obeying my parents, but he was adamant. So I followed. We crept out of the sleeping household and took Dad's car. Neither one of us was old enough to have a driver's licence but Karl had no problems driving. We went to the dance and met many of our friends. We were both good dancers and therefore we each had many partners. Karl seemed to be having a ball but I was not truly enjoying myself. Guilt for what we had done lay heavily on me.

We went home after the dance and crept quietly in. The house was silent, almost too silent. I felt sure that Mother and Dad knew but they never said a word, which was a far more effective approach than a severe reproach. We'll never try that again!

My mother and father were strong, secure parents of four children, 2 girls and 2 boys, all born within 6 years. They had a set division of duties. Mother ran a spotless house with daily domestic help and generally set the rules of discipline for us. She was a caring mother but demanding and expected us to respect her wishes. She worried constantly about what the neighbors thought and instilled that idea in our heads. It helped create guilt. I really thought the neighbors were going about their own destructive mayhem and didn't give a damn about us but still I complied. Mother always welcomed our friends and an extra plate at the dinner table or a sleepover were common events. She was also always pleased if I were going out.

I was nearly 17 by then and in University so there were many tea dances and formals to which I was invited. As a matter of fact, at that moment dates and dances were far more important to me than academics. Mother never sets a curfew which delights and puzzles me. I was the envy of my friends. I thought that she trusted me but I knew that if I broke that trust she would be very disappointed so I was very careful not to act out.

Dad, a most caring and quiet man, ran his mill business from early in the morning until suppertime six days a week, rang the church bell every Sunday for our weekly service and tended his large vegetable garden nightly. We had a prodigious number of fresh vegetables during the summer plus potatoes and all root vegetables stored in the root cellar for the winter. The depression was still hanging over all, but we ate well and I was proud of my Dad, who rather than cut back on workers in the mill, cut our level of family income to theirs to keep everybody working. One day as mother was sweeping the front steps leading down to the road, the wife of Dad's teamster walked by and stuck her foot up to show a hole in the bottom of the shoe. "See what your husband makes me wear!" she said. My mother struck her own shoe up to show similar wear. "

DEPRESSION ERA

We're all in the same boat, Marion," she said and so we were. Tramps came to the door quite frequently. Dad said we must have been marked as a good place to stop. They came at noon hour, which was our big meal, and Mother or Dad would always invite them in to eat with us. I was a little nervous and I noticed Yvonne, our hired girl, sitting on the edge of her chair which made me feel safer. She was a big, hefty girl who once, when Karl stepped on her newly polished floor, picked up all 6 ft. of him off the ground and heaved him over verandah rail. I felt she could handle the tramps if the need arose. Sometimes my mother packed lunches for a hungry tramp. Once we watched a man check his lunch and then throw it in the river. I guess he didn't like sardine sandwiches.

Karl was a tease! He played jokes on mother, Dad, my sister Jean, brother Ross and me. He called mother, whose name was Alice, Alice MacKenzie. It always seemed to please her. If my Dad was on the phone with a business client, Karl would pile hats on his head and coats on his back. Dad never let on but finished his business and then shrugged off the coats and hats - but he always had a smile on his face. At the dining table Karl teased me constantly by referring to boys that I knew. He could always make me blush. One time I threw a boiled potato at him. It missed him and hit the wall behind him. My mother reprimanded me for making a mess.

Practical jokes can be fun but also a pain at times, I thought to myself. That day I excused myself from the table and went to my room - but I was smiling. I was in university and Karl was in his last year of high school. I had established my sibling priority temporarily. I opened my diary and recorded this small triumph.

All is well in our world as I write in my diary on Sept. 15, 1935. World War 11 began in 1939 and Karl, who had never liked school, enlisted in 1940. As he said, "If I don't go now, how will I ever see the world?" He was in a bomber as a wireless air gunner when he was shot down over Sicily in 1941. He was reported missing and my parents went through a whole year of hoping that he was still

alive before the whole crew was declared dead. Years later I remember my mother, who in the last days of her life telling me that when Karl was declared missing she caught a case of the wrinkles and never recovered. I have missed his teasing for the rest of my life.

A Journey Across Canadian History Through the Eyes of Canadian Seniors

**HelpAge
Canada**

age helps

Our elders are our teachers. They have much wisdom to share, gained from the experience of their lives.

*HelpAge Canada is proud to present **Our Stories, Their Stories** to give our seniors an opportunity have their voice heard. This collection contains truly Canadian stories about overcoming obstacles and surviving difficulties. There are tales of tragedy and triumph from war and the Depression era, which demonstrate how valuable community is to every generation, and about coming to a new land, Canada, to have a fresh start.*

*The stories are about learning and growing, how things have changed, and yet stay the same. Traveling through time, you will be delighted with stories that make you laugh and make you think. **Our Stories, Their Stories** are captured moments of precious Canadian history, as told by those who have lived them.*

HelpAge Canada works to improve and maintain the quality of life of vulnerable older persons and their communities in Canada and around the world through building networks that support the interests of older persons affected by poverty, injustice, and discrimination with the view to help them lead dignified, secure, and healthy lives.



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