

HFX SUNDAY - LIFESTYLES & TRENDS



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In love, in a dangerous time

Melynda Jarratt's War Brides chronicle of unique generation of Canadian women

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War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved Melynda Jarratt Tempus Publishing. 288 pages.

Melynda Jarratt is furious. "Don't even get me going," says the Fredericton-based author and historian. "I will not sit by and watch while someone is being treated so poorly by my country."

As the country's resident expert on the subject of war brides, Jarratt is weighing in on the recent ruling by the Federal Court of Appeals to revoke the citizenship of the nearly 45,000 women - and their offspring - who came to Canada during the Second World War.

"I am astonished that the courts and the government believe they can just rewrite history," she fumes. "They're saying there was no such thing as Canadian citizenship in 1945, when the Privy Council gave war brides and their children citizenship. Their argument is that since there was no such thing as citizenship, the MacKenzie King government made a mistake. I mean, if these people weren't Canadian, then what were they?"

"I don't have to go to Hollywood for ridiculous stories about (the Second World War)," she adds. "I can find them right here in my own backyard."

As the sole and unwavering force behind the most authoritative source on the subject, Canadianwarbrides.com, Jarratt knows better than anyone the fantastic and romantic tales that emerged from the era.

"The story of the Canadian war brides and their journey to Canada is a beautiful and vital part of our history and heritage," says Jarratt. "These young women came from all over Europe, sharing only the common bonds of meeting and marrying a Canadian soldier overseas, leaving their homes by transatlantic ship, crossing this country by train, settling into new homes, raising families and adapting to a new culture, language and religion."

Like many babyboomers, Jarratt has been witness to the effects of armed conflict upon the lives of those around her.

"I come from a family where nearly every able-bodied man and woman had done some sort of war service," she says. "And so naturally I had an abiding interest in the subject. I also worked for three summers at the Herman J. Good VC War Museum in Bathurst and it was there that I became quite interested in Canada's participation in the Second World War as a general area of study."

After years of detailed research - including thousands of hours spent sifting through miles of microfilm - Jarratt has pieced together the definitive retrospective on the topic of emigrant love in her new work *War Brides; The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved*.

"I was inspired to write the book after meeting a delightful Scottish woman some years ago who had settled in Minto, N.B. after World War Two," says Jarratt. "I was just so touched by her story, and I thought; what an amazingly strong woman to have left behind her home, her family and everything that was familiar to her in order to come to Canada --for love."

Last January, Jarratt sent out a call for material through her network of fellow War Brides researchers. Within a few short months she had received hundreds of submissions.

"In the mail came everything from hand written, personal letters with original photographs carefully tucked into envelopes, to full-length books in CD format, unpublished and privately published manuscripts, biographies and even some television interviews."

Sorting through the sheer mass of material quickly became a challenge in its own right.

"The most rewarding part was the letters that I received from the war brides themselves and their children telling me that being a part of the book had given them a new lease on life," she says. "These ladies, most of whom are in their mid-to-late 80s, have never sought any personal public attention for their sacrifices - their husbands and families came first - and many of them truly believed that they had been forgotten. For them, just to have been considered for inclusion in this project was both a validation of sorts and a vindication for years of being overlooked."

That recognition, Jarratt believes, is long overdue. "The sad fact is that, up until now, almost nobody with any real authority here in Canada has ever really cared about these women's history," she says. "This book was written to acknowledge the sacrifices made by these courageous individuals, and to honour their role in our history. Each and every one of them, no matter how 'ordinary' they claim their lives to be, have something important to tell Canadians about who we are as a people and as a nation."

"To know that that I have made some sort of a difference in their lives is the most wonderful feeling in the world," she adds. "I'd like to think that with this book I am speaking for all of us across the country by saying to them 'you are one of us and you always have been - you belong here and we will never forget you.'"

For more information please visit www.canadianwarbrides.com.

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