

## Lettres\Letters

This being a nice cool day, compared to the heat wave we have been going through, after I finished lunch I decided it was too nice a day to work, so I re-read the June issue, which Martin Rossander gave me; I liked it even better after second reading, so I am sending my membership dues; \$15.00, as I was born in 1921. However, I do not call myself "under-employed" because I have slowed down considerably in the last five years, so even though I have less work to do, it takes twice as much energy to do it!!

I was raised in a small community, ten miles south of Montréal; most of my friends were first-generation Canadians, as was the case with me; it seemed that all the parents came from somewhere else, so we seldom heard Canadian stories, as our elders told stories of their childhood and youth elsewhere. It seems that nobody migrated eastward, so I never met anyone from the prairies, and the only tales I heard of the west came from my father, who went on the Harvest Excursions in 1912 and 1913—he would have been 17 in 1912, a city boy—from Glasgow, Scotland. He liked the west, and one ambition, which was to go to BC, but the first World War changed that. He joined up, got shipped to England, and on his first leave, looked up my mother (whom he had been courting before coming to Canada), and they immediately got married. After that war was over, he and my mother came to Montréal, and in 1920 they settled in the country house just south of Montréal; that area is all built up now; it is part of St-Hubert. He never forgot his dream of going to BC, but things didn't work out that way.

In the '50s I started going to the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, where I met prairie people for the first time, and took a subscription to a farm magazine—I think it was based in Winnipeg; it was there that I saw (reading the magazine) that prairie people saw everything in a very different way from me, and I found it interesting. Most of my friends were French-speaking, and they say *everything* differently from any other group; some of them were tenth generation: their family farms had three-hundred year old stone houses.

Both my parents liked to sing and had good voices, especially my father; he played mandolin for accompaniment. When I was about five years old, they acquired an old organ, the type where one pumped the air into the bellows, so my mother got a used lesson-book on how to play the piano and taught herself, as she could not play by ear. I, naturally, was interested, so she taught me to read music and play the organ also; then our sing-songs became more interesting! I soon memorized all the music we had and added "by ear" pieces also. My father picked up any second-hand music books he saw, so we had quite a choice—Scottish folk songs, "Old Favorites" (you probably remember those books?), hymn books, light classics, &c.—I played them all.

I did not start to play outside of our home until I was in my twenties; then sometimes I would play piano for my

cousin's jam sessions, which would be a mixture of the current hits and old-time stuff. I also became organist for our church and played piano there for socials. However, I was always attracted to folk music and fiddle tunes, especially Scottish ones. The only time I played for dances was in Montréal where I played for the Saturday night Legion dances. They didn't pay, but would keep the pianist's glass full all night! I didn't drink, so I would take one glass and keep it on the piano! I tired of this, as I realized I would have to make an effort to keep up with all the latest tunes (being naturally lazy, this effort did not appeal to me!), and I didn't like the drinking, so I quit.

Then I met some people who liked *real* country music, and I was in demand to chord for the fiddler. I really liked that and learned quite a few tunes that way. All the houses did not have a piano, so I bought a used accordion and accompanied the fiddler on that, as well as playing bagpipe tunes as solos. When Rock and Roll came out, I couldn't stand it, and round that time I moved to another locality, so that ended most of my playing, except for playing in church. I also knew quite a few French Canadian tunes, but have forgotten them.

When I was 44 I married a French-speaking man who was five years older than me; I was then working in Senneterre (near Val d'Or) and had bought a small farm for myself, as I liked space, even then!! He was a logger, but soon tired of being away so much, so we began farming my land. That was a busy time, working full-time and also helping on our farm; I had no time for music, except to play the piano in church on Sundays. I found that hard, as I had been playing since I was six.

Then my husband had an accident, which put an end to farming *and* logging, so we had to think of retirement. He had been in Vancouver in 1959, liked it, and always talked of going back. So he got in touch with the members of his family who were in BC and found they were in Powell River. We decided to come see the place, liked it, and moved here in 1979, when I took early retirement from the CN.

Here I found that the people saw things differently from everybody else—very interesting! Here I found that people of my age were mostly people who came here as young children, plus a few who were born here; it was like my childhood place—elders were from every country of Europe as well as from the USA and other parts of Canada, yet they didn't have the same slant on things as Eastern people I knew in childhood; it sure proves that the only *constant* is *things change*!!

For me, music has always been very important. As a teen, when I would get upset (frequent occurrence!), I would play the piano and get back to proper mental functioning again. Later, music always was important; when I left home, I had my accordion and often played it when I was alone—usually went out to a beach to do it!

Only during the twenty years in Senneterre did I stop playing. I was too busy and couldn't seem to make time available; I have since regretted this, as I lost much of my dexterity and most of my memorized music, so now I have to really work at it. I strongly advise anyone to keep in practice because it is very hard to "come back" in old age!

I typed this, as my handwriting is hard to read—my fingers do not want to do what I want them to do! It's the same with music; if I'm tired, I hit wrong notes—nearly drives me up the wall! But I'm happy doing it, music was always my relaxation, it was what I did if I was upset about something, and *always* fun; that is why I enjoy playing with the Enjoyment Band here. They are not critical of the wrong note we all hit from time to time, and we have the satisfaction of bringing pleasure to those for whom we play; no money in the world could equal that!

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*[We met Lapointe in Martin Rossander's account of the Enjoyment Band in the Bulletin 29.2.1*

The recent meeting of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music was, for me, a weekend well worth the travel to get there. To meet the likes of Edith Fowke and Phil Thomas made the weekend worth it, but the very fact that there was such a diverse representation of Canada's various folk and ethnic communities showed just how important the role of traditional music and culture is and points out the important, vital role such a group as the CSTM plays in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Three papers that were presented deserve special mention: Edith Fowke's on traditional folk music in literature, Peter Narvaez's on songs created from the plight of Newfoundland fishermen, and Jacquelin Lavalley's on the role of music in Ojibwa society and her use of such songs in teaching.

I was unable to attend the Sunday night Flying Cloud concert of Society members, but if reports I have are accurate, it went well and was enthusiastically received by those in attendance. Thanks to Judith Cohen, David Warren, and all those who truly made the 1995 meeting a success and a fine weekend: a friendly atmosphere, excellent papers.

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