

Deliciously Detailed Narratives: The Use of Food in Stories of British War Brides'  
Experiences

by

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BA, University of Alberta, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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### **Supervisory Committee**

Lynne Marks, Department of History  
**Supervisor**

Annalee Lepp, Department of History  
**Departmental Member**

## Abstract

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During the Second World War, tens of thousands of Canadian soldiers stationed in Britain met and married British women. The majority of these British war brides and their husbands settled in Canada, where these women had to quickly adjust to Canadian customs. Based on interviews with fifteen British war brides currently living in the Victoria area, this thesis analyzes the way in which these women recount stories of their lives and experiences as war brides through recollections of food-centred narratives. Their recollections of the pre-war years, the war years and the post-war years often revolved around memories of food. This thesis will show how war brides make use of such food-centred narratives as a comfortable medium through which to express their emotions regarding the past and to relate their stories, be they joyful, traumatic, nostalgic, somber or elegiac.

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## **Dedication**

For my Dad,  
who first inspired my interest in history.

## Introduction

Between 1945 and 1965, over two million immigrants settled in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Around forty thousand of these were British war brides, accompanied by their twenty thousand children.<sup>2</sup> Having met and married Canadian servicemen stationed in Britain during the Second World War, these women traveled across the ocean, away from family and friends, to be reunited with their new husbands. The influx of this group into Canadian society resulted in numerous negotiations and compromises for both sides as these women settled in the country and began to call it home. Although most of the marriages took place over sixty-five years ago, the term ‘war bride’ is still used today to describe this group, indicating the desire to maintain an image of the woman who was “young, beautiful, in love, fertile, unspoiled, heterosexual, [and] full of hope for a bright future”<sup>3</sup> as part of Canada’s national mythology.<sup>4</sup>

Many war bride narratives describing life before, during and after the war years revolve around memories of food, be they written memoirs or orally conveyed stories. War brides across the country can frequently describe with great detail the food they ate in Britain as children, memories of scrounging together supplies during days of wartime rationing, and becoming sea sick after eating heaps of much-missed fluffy white mashed potatoes and thick steaks on the way to Canada. Based on fifteen interviews with war

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<sup>1</sup> “Editor’s Introduction” for Franca Iacovetta’s “From Contadina to Worker: Southern Italian Immigrant Working Women in Toronto, 1947-1962,” *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, eds. Mona Gleason and Adele Perry (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997): 337.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Granfield, *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes: Stories from Canada’s British War Brides* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2002), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Eve Matrix, “Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belongings: Canadian War Brides and the Fictions of Naturalization,” *Topia* 17 (Spring 2007): 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

brides living in the Victoria area, this thesis will consider how these women recount memories of their lives before, during and after the Second World War through food-centered narratives. I argue that war brides make use of food as a medium through which to relate memories of their experiences—be they joyful, traumatic, nostalgic, somber or elegiac.

## Literature Review

While much has been written on the war bride experience in Canada, little of this has been academic work. Many of the sources on Second World War British war brides were written by women who actually lived this experience—war brides themselves. Included in this category are Joyce Hibbert's *The War Brides*,<sup>5</sup> and Peggy O'Hara's *From Romance to Reality: Stories of Canadian War Brides*,<sup>6</sup> published in 1979 and 1983, respectively. Both of these edited collections include information on the editors' own experiences as war brides, but also the experiences of other war brides. Aside from a short introduction by Mavis Gallant in Hibbert's book, neither of these texts makes any serious attempt to develop a broader analysis from the words of the women who have contributed to them. It must be noted, however, that Gallant's introduction does include some critical analysis of the topic, questioning the name 'war bride' given to these women, considering Canadians' feelings towards this group, and presenting war brides as real people who made mistakes, and did what they had to in the context of their times. These were not only brave women who tearfully yet dutifully left their families behind in

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce Hibbert, ed. *The War Brides* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Peggy O'Hara, ed. *From Romance to Reality: Stories of Canadian War Brides* (Colbalt, Ontario: Highway Book Shop, 1983).

England to live in Canada. Some women arrived in Canada who were “giddy, or silly, or who wanted to get away from home, who were emigrating for a lark, who had married too young and too fast.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike Gallant, Hibbert and O’Hara provide little critical analysis of the war bride stories contained in their collections. What both of these texts do provide, however, are words from the women who actually lived this experience and were willing to describe in detail the minutia of everyday life that may have otherwise been lost in the wealth of information on ‘big picture’ events of the war era. Also, these women are able to convey both the emotion they felt while actually living the experience, and the emotion they feel upon recounting it. Being war brides themselves, O’Hara and Hibbert have a clear understanding of this experience, and everything that it entailed.

Popular Canadian cartoonist Ben Wicks also produced a book on the war bride experience in Canada, titled *Promise You’ll Take Care of My Daughter: The Remarkable War Brides of World War II*.<sup>8</sup> With a very brief foreword by well known Canadian historian Pierre Berton, Wicks’ book includes snippets of war brides’ words sandwiched between his explanations of the experience. What makes this book unique is that Wicks has chosen to include the words of war brides’ husbands as well, in a chapter titled “Our Husbands—God Bless ‘Em’.” It is most often women’s accounts of meeting, courtship, marrying, and settling in that are described in stories of war marriages, so it is refreshing to hear the story from another point of view. While Wicks’ book does not include scholarly analysis, it succeeds as an entertaining and educational text intended for a general audience.

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<sup>7</sup> Gallant, Mavis “Introduction,” *The War Brides*, ed. Joyce Hibbert (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1979), xv.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Wicks, *Promise You’ll Take Care of My Daughter: The Remarkable War Brides of World War II* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992).

Linda Granfield's *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes: Stories from Canada's British War Brides*<sup>9</sup> is a compilation of stories told by British war brides, including pictures and quotes from two published sources: *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides* and a *Welcome to War Brides* pamphlet. Here Granfield brings together a variety of stories from English war brides who discuss different aspects of their experiences, some women focusing on courtship and marriage, others describing in detail their journey to Canada. Although the inclusion of so many primary sources adds a unique and interesting touch to Granfield's book, she does not engage in any critical analysis of these sources. In a similar way to Granfield, Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence, daughters of war brides and editors of *Blackouts to Bright Lights*, have used their book to compile stories from over thirty women who married Canadian soldiers.<sup>10</sup> While most were re-written by the editors, five narratives have been left untouched and are included at the back of the book. Through this book, the reader who is new to the topic gets a better understanding of the full experience of war brides—from courtship and descriptions of life during war times to settlement in Canada.

Melynda Jarratt's *War Brides* is one of the more recent contributions to the field. Jarratt, who also wrote a Masters thesis on the experience of war brides who settled in New Brunswick, is known as Canada's leading expert on the topic. In this book she provides little scholarly analysis, instead creating a text more attuned to general audiences. Dividing the stories of war brides regionally according to where in Canada they settled, rather than temporally—as most other writers on the topic have done—

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Granfield, *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes: Stories from Canada's British War Brides* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2002), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence, eds., *Blackouts to Bright Lights* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press Ltd., 1996).

Jarratt provides readers with a better understanding of the importance of place in influencing war brides' experiences. Jarratt also allows space for the more unusual experiences, including war brides who came to Canada to live on a reservation,<sup>11</sup> war widows who came to Canada even though their husbands were no longer living, war fiancées who were not yet married upon entering the country, and the children of war brides who have recently discovered that their citizenship as Canadians may be in question. To her credit, Jarratt also includes a chapter describing the military service of war brides, emphasizing the importance of these women's roles not only as wives to Canadian husbands, but also as British women providing valuable contributions to the war effort. Through her discussion of all these topics, Jarratt is able to speak to war brides' diverse experiences. She also mentions but does not address various debates such as the definition of what a war bride is—did war fiancées count?—and questions of citizenship and what it means to be Canadian. While Jarratt's book is wonderful for a popular audience, providing basic information on the war bride experience, with a deeper degree of critical analysis this work would have added to the little scholarly literature which is currently available on the topic of the British war bride in Canada.

Sidney Eve Matrix's article, "Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belongings: Canadian War Brides and the Fictions of Naturalization," is one of few scholarly analyses of the war bride experience in Canada. The focus of this article is on race and nationality, specifically in terms of war brides' understanding of themselves as Canadian citizens. Matrix questions the role of the press in shaping public opinion towards British war brides, which in turn swayed government action and discourse surrounding citizenship.

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<sup>11</sup> Melynda Jarratt, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009), 36.

Here Matrix displays the paradox of how war brides both represented the model—or mediated, as Matrix defines it—new citizen, but at the same time were encouraged to assimilate into Canadian society quickly, “rather than maintain their ties to each other and their country of origin.”<sup>12</sup> By questioning and complicating the war bride experience, Matrix contributes to the scholarly literature on this topic, opening up new questions in ways that less scholarly work does not do.

Renowned Canadian historian C.P. Stacey and archivist Barbara Wilson together produced *The Half Million: The Canadians in Britain 1939-1946*,<sup>13</sup> a book about the Canadian presence in Britain during the war years. Included in this text is a chapter dedicated to women’s roles, titled “Lonely Canadians, British Women,” Unlike most of the other work discussed above on British women and war brides in the Second World War, this analysis examines women from a top-down perspective. Heavily reliant on statistical analysis, Stacey and Wilson’s discussion of British women focuses predominantly on technical aspects of these unions, such as the formalities required to get married, figures indicating the number of marriages, the government’s role in orchestrating war brides’ transportation to Canada, and other groups’ involvement in these moves. This text is unique in that it considers darker aspects of British-Canadian unions that other sources have not mentioned, including the persistence of venereal diseases among couples and rates of bigamous marriages.

Most of the aforementioned literature is intended for a general audience, and falls into the category of popular history. While there is much debate on what counts as

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<sup>12</sup> Matrix, “Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belongings,” 78.

<sup>13</sup> C.P. Stacey and Barbara Wilson, *The Half Million: The Canadians in Britain 1939-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1987.

historical fact, most of the experiences relayed through these sources convey only personal experience, recounted many decades after the actual event. It is also significant that most of these books were written by war brides themselves, or someone who has very close ties with war brides, such as their daughters.

There seems to be more scholarly analysis of the American war bride than there is of her Canadian counterpart. This being said, many articles and books on the American war bride experience which are intended for a more general audience do still exist.<sup>14</sup> Autobiographies and memoirs are also popular and can provide both the general public and the historian with interesting and useful information.<sup>15</sup> Jenel Virden, a history professor and daughter of a British war bride, does scholarly work in the field of British war brides who settled in the United States. Virden relied upon correspondence, questionnaires and interviews to compile information for her book, *Good-Bye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America*.<sup>16</sup> This type of book on the war bride experience—one which includes pieces from many women's stories—is popular both within American and Canadian war bride literature.<sup>17</sup>

Literature on the American war bride experience includes women from a variety of backgrounds—British, Australian and German—although much scholarly work has

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<sup>14</sup> Elfrieda Berthiaume Shukert and Barbara Smith Scibetta, both daughters of British war brides wrote the book *War Brides of World War II* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988). Annette Potts and Lucinda Strauss wrote *For the Love of a Soldier: Australian War-Brides and their GIs* (Crow's Nest, Australia: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1987) based on a film with the same title.

<sup>15</sup> Leni Grehl, *Love, War and Curling Irons* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2008); Annelee Woodstrom, *War Child: Growing up in Adolf Hitler's Germany* (Fargo, North Dakota: McCleery & Sons Publishing, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Jenel Virden, *Good-Bye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press), 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Granfield, *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes*; Ladouceur and Spence, eds., *Blackouts to Bright Lights*; Shukert and Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*.

focused on analyzing the Japanese war bride experience.<sup>18</sup> The establishment of American military bases in Japan after the war led to an estimated 46,000 marriages between U.S servicemen and Japanese women.<sup>19</sup>

Other scholarly works on the topic of war brides who came to America have centered on media representation of these women. Raingard Esser's "Language No Obstacle: War Brides in the German Press, 1945-49,"<sup>20</sup> and Barbara Friedman's *From the Battle Front to the Bridal Suite: Media Coverage of British War Brides 1942-1946*<sup>21</sup> are two such examples. Esser's study considers the political implications of war bride representation in the media, concentrating on how images of the modern, loyal German woman published in British and American zones were intended to foster stronger alliances between former enemies. Friedman's work, on the other hand, examines the transformation of American media's first impressions of newly arriving war brides as immoral and dangerous women to their portrayal as ideal wives and mothers. Esser and Friedman add to the existing literature by presenting academic analyses which deviate from the popular portrayal of the American war bride as solely a romantic figure swept up in a story that ends happily ever after.

There is still much to be written on the war bride experience in Canada, specifically in terms of scholarly work. This thesis attempts to bridge the gap that

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<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Debbie Storrs, "Like a Bamboo: Representations of a Japanese War Bride," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21 (2000): 194-224; Rebecca Lopez and Mamiko Yamazato, "On Growing Old in America: Perceptions of the Okinawan War Bride," *Journal of Women and Aging* 15.4 (2003): 17-31; and Rogelio Saenz, Sean-Shong Hwang and Benigno E. Aguirre, "In Search of Asian War Brides," *Demography* 31.3 (August 1994): 549-559.

<sup>19</sup> Lopez and Yamazato, "On Growing Old in America: Perceptions of the Okinawan War Bride," 18.

<sup>20</sup> Raingard Esser, "'Language No Obstacle': War Brides in the German Press, 1945-49," *Women's History Review* 12.4 (2003): 577-603.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Friedman, *From the Battlefield to the Bridal Suite: Media Coverage of British War Brides, 1942-1946*, (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

currently exists between work that simply offers experiential stories with little to no scholarly analysis, and that which offers an analysis of numbers and statistics without the inclusion of personal narratives, as in the case of Stacey and Wilson. My project will seek to weave together the stories of British war brides with an in-depth critical analysis of their experiences. In doing this, I hope to address the tension that exists around what historians are to do with narrative, the break between understanding narrative as black and white—either story or truth.

## **Methodology**

Much of this study is based on information collected through fifteen interviews I have conducted with British war brides currently living in the Victoria area. Ranging in age from eighty-three to ninety-eight, these women came from Scotland, England and Wales to settle in different locations across the country—from Toronto to the town of Hanley, Saskatchewan, and, of course, Victoria. These interviews lasted around two hours each and were led by questions I had formulated regarding life growing up in Britain, the war years, meeting and marrying their husbands, the journey to Canada, and adjusting to life as a mother and/or wife in their new Canadian homes. Sometimes respondents guided the interview themselves, spurred on to tell the story of their lives from my initial question: “Tell me about life growing up in Britain.” Other times, I referred often to my question sheet to keep the interviewee talking. Although most of the women followed the general trend of meeting and marrying a Canadian soldier, coming to Canada and adjusting to a new life, variations in these stories speak to the diversity of their experiences. While some women were simply swept off their feet by the Canadian soldier they married, others admitted that they were not madly in love. Some developed a

wonderful relationship with their in-laws, while others did not. Most stayed in Canada, while a few returned home to England.

One common trend that appeared within these women's narratives was their propensity to talk about their experiences in relation to food—foods that they ate, foods they wanted but were unable to obtain, incidents and events when food was present, and memories of people or places that they closely associated with certain foods. Although several of the questions I asked interviewees were food-specific, many war brides arrived at food narratives unprompted. Memories of their lives seemed to be filled with vivid recollections of the tastes, smells, sights, textures, and even sounds of food. My analysis examines how British war brides express their memories through food. How does a sense of nation and citizenship affect these women's memories? How do memories vary when recounting different time periods (before, during and after the war)? What role does gender play in relating memories of food in the past? What do these memories indicate about the way these women present themselves and the way they want their pasts to be understood?

As food is so central to this study, current literature on food and immigration greatly informed my analysis. Similar to Marlene Epp's "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," I examine how war brides use food narratives portraying either abundance or scarcity to discuss both difficult times and happy memories.<sup>22</sup> Epp's chapter "Re-Creating Families," in her book, *Women*

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<sup>22</sup> Marlene Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 314-340.

*Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War*, is also useful when considering the link between memories of family and food.<sup>23</sup>

Franca Iacovetta's work on post-war immigration and food also influenced my analysis. In her article, "Recipes for Democracy? Gender, Family, and Making Female Citizens in Cold War Canada," Iacovetta considers the way that female immigrants entering Canada around the time of the Cold War adjusted to Canadian society, though not always smoothly.<sup>24</sup> Like Epp's chapter, "Re-Creating Families," Iacovetta's article takes into account the strong link between food and family for immigrant women. Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek's "Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: Gender Politics of Food," also speaks to the topic of food and immigrant women, incorporating a gendered analysis which gets at the heart of power issues, which are anything but latent in food narratives.<sup>25</sup> Iacovetta's book, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*, is also helpful to my analysis for background information regarding female immigrants and food.<sup>26</sup>

This project offers a living history, or a history of the present. While war brides that I interviewed provided me with knowledge about the past, their position in the present is also relevant, as "[p]ast events after all are very much situated and represented

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<sup>23</sup> Marlene Epp, "Re-Creating Families," *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 139-164.

<sup>24</sup> Franca Iacovetta, "Recipes for Democracy? Gender, Family, and Making Female Citizens in Cold War Canada," *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, eds. Mona Gleason and Adele Perry (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2006):299-312.

<sup>25</sup> Franca Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek, "Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: Gender Politics of Food," *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 190-230.

<sup>26</sup> Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006).

in present-day society.”<sup>27</sup> The understanding of history as something that is not static, but fluid and constantly changing significantly problematizes history with a capital “H”—a history concerned only with uncovering the “facts” of the past. Always open for contestation and revision, dependent on a variety of viewpoints and positions, this form of history allows for a much more vibrant understanding of the past, open to the production of new meaning and creative analysis. This messy understanding of the past, complete with its gaps and inconsistencies, multi-vocality, misunderstandings and transformative nature may seem unsettling to defenders of history with a capital “H,” yet within it lies the potential for a greater way of understanding and looking at the past.

As a medium through which previously muted voices have been given the opportunity to be heard, oral history has played an important role in our understanding of history. The fact that oral history relies so heavily on human interaction and a reciprocal dialogue between interviewer and interviewee speaks to the necessary complexity of this field. Added to this are our changing conceptions as to what the discipline should entail and how we as historians should work within it. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, the role of memory and the quest for truth, and the way in which things are said are all elements of the interview that the oral historian must take into consideration. These methodological issues have been examined by oral historians such as Pamela Sugiman, Alessandro Portelli, Lorraine Sitzia, and Valerie Yow, among others.

It is inevitable that oral narratives are shaped by their audience, as Pamela Sugiman has explained, demonstrating how memory “is formed and presented with a

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<sup>27</sup> Pamela Sugiman, “Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women’s Life Stories,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29.3 (2004): 364.

reading of this audience, one that may hear or dismiss, listen or ignore, accept or punish.”<sup>28</sup> The historian’s role as either an insider or outsider in relation to his/her informant can determine what is said (or not said) in an interview. Similar or dissimilar age, gender, ethnicity, social class, or life experiences can affect the dynamics of the interview and how experiences are constructed. Alessandro Portelli compares two of his own interview experiences—one in which he was an insider and the other an outsider—concluding that the outcome of the interview is affected by the interviewer’s position: “narrators will assume that a ‘native’ historian already knows the fact, and will furnish explanations, theories and judgments instead.”<sup>29</sup> Pamela Sugiman and Michaela Di Leonardo have both conducted interviews with women of their own ethnic background. Despite this shared ethnicity, both scholars discuss feeling like outsiders, or being uncomfortable with the people they were interviewing.<sup>30</sup> Commonalities between interviewer and informant do not guarantee an instant or open relationship between two parties, as Kenneth Kirby explains: “informants do not necessarily respond better to interviewers of the same class, gender, and race.”<sup>31</sup> Although it is difficult to determine to what degree my role as interviewer—with shared gender but dissimilar age, ethnicity, social class and above all life experiences—shaped the outcome of our interviews, it is important to keep in mind that the same story told to a different audience may be constructed differently. This does not make it any less true. The fact that stories change

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<sup>28</sup> Sugiman, “Memories of Internment,” 364.

<sup>29</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Sugiman, “Memories of Internment,”; Michaela Di Leonardo, “Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter,” *Oral History Review* 15 (Spring 1987): 17.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Kirby, “Phenomenology and the Problems of Oral History,” *Oral History Review* 35.1 (2008): 23.

depending on context speaks to historical truth as a contested terrain—therein lies its exciting potential.

The age gap between my interviewees and myself also affected my perceptions of them, and likely theirs of me, influencing what was said by each party during the interviews. Cultural anthropologist Michaela Di Leonardo<sup>32</sup> describes her experience of finding herself “playing ‘daughter’ to middle-aged informants,”<sup>33</sup> while Lorraine Sitzia also realized that her own emotional needs resulted in her envisioning an informant as the grandfather she never had.<sup>34</sup> In a similar way, I sometimes could not help but think of the elderly ladies who offered me tea and cookies as we talked as grandmother-like figures, and because of this may have felt less able to push difficult topics or critically question their responses. As the illusion of closer bonds is formed, or imaginary relationships are built between historian and informant, the nature of the discussion will likely change. At the base of this change in relationship is a shift in the balance of power. Di Leonardo explains how acting as a daughter-figure to her informants was one “strategy” she used to “tip the power balance.”<sup>35</sup> While my feelings towards my informants were not intentional—at least not on a conscious level—they likely did affect our discussions.

The historian’s role in shaping an oral interview is closely related to conceptions of power and authority. Here, feminist theory has called for a re-configuration of the

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<sup>32</sup> Although Di Leonardo and various other scholars examined in this paper are not historians, their work still has relevant implications for historians who also conduct oral interviews. Di Leonardo, “Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter,” brings together both history and ethnography and proves useful for examining both fields.

<sup>33</sup> Di Leonardo, “Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter,” 12.

<sup>34</sup> Lorraine Sitzia, “A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?” *The Oral History Review* 30.1 (Winter/Spring 2003): 96.

<sup>35</sup> Di Leonardo, “Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter,” 12.

model that traditionally cast the “historian-as-authority and informant-as-subject.”<sup>36</sup> As Daphne Patai, Alessandro Portelli, Kathleen Blee and other scholars have shown, the balance of power between historian and informant will affect what is said in the interview.<sup>37</sup> Feminist theory is a useful lens through which new conceptions of authority can be rearticulated: “...feminist researchers using the in-depth interview were concerned with how the dominant position of the researcher—who knows all the questions to ask and by implication all the answers—can subdue the narrator.”<sup>38</sup> Incorporating a model of shared authority—where the historian and informant work together to produce the final narrative—is a potential solution to this problem.

Prejudices that scholars bring into an interview can determine how they act towards their informants and in turn how the interview will progress. Katherine Blee writes about her experience interviewing former Klu Klux Klan members in her article “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan.” Blee describes coming into the interview “prepared to hate and fear” her informants; however, despite her initial feelings, she soon discovered how “ordinary” the former KKK members that she interviewed were.<sup>39</sup> Assumptions held by the interviewer can lead to a negative relationship between informant and interviewer, and can also greatly determine how the historian chooses to represent the interview data in his or her final work. While Blee describes the negative feelings with which she approached her interviews, the

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<sup>36</sup> Katherine Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan,” *Journal of American History* 80.2 (September 1993): 596.

<sup>37</sup> See Alessandro Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (New York: Routledge, 1998): 23-45; Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan”; and Daphne Patai, “Ethical Problems of Personal Narratives, or, Who Should Eat the Last Piece of Cake,” *International Journal of Oral History* 8 (February 1987): 5-27.

<sup>38</sup> Valerie Yow, ““Do I Like Them Too Much?”: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” *The Oral History Review* 24.1 (Summer 1997): 67.

<sup>39</sup> Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan,” 604.

opposite is possible as well. Valerie Yow discusses the danger of being too positive about a person or event, resulting in the historian's reluctance to push difficult issues or further question informants on negative experiences. She refers to Carl Ryant's term "goodwill advocacy" to describe this phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> The scholars' suppression of information to encourage a certain view of the informant is also an example of goodwill advocacy. Entering into interviews with elderly women who have agreed to meet with me and discuss their life stories, I found it difficult to delve further into questions which could have raised difficult memories or stories of hard times. To address this problem, I did my best to question their responses while at the same time respecting their right to privacy. Providing these women with the mundane topic of food as a way to express some of these difficult memories potentially allows war brides a more indirect and comfortable outlet through which to relate such emotions.

Another theme that is discussed within the field of oral history is the historian's ability to shape interviews not only through their prejudices, but also by searching for pre-assumed findings, or "hunting for memories." As Alessandro Portelli has shown, "both subjects bring to the interview an agenda of their own, which is constantly renegotiated in the course of the conversation."<sup>41</sup> Searching for imagined memories while disregarding actual memories both affects what the informant will say, and also how the historian will later present this information. While I was most interested in the way that war brides relate their stories through food narratives, I tried not to push interviewees too hard to talk about their memories of food, and some were less interested in talking about

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<sup>40</sup> Valerie Yow, "Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research," *The Oral History Review* 22.1 (Summer 1995): 55.

<sup>41</sup> Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 10.

this topic. However, in many cases, their own tendency to describe memories of the past through recollections of food was more prevalent than I had originally anticipated.

In examining the words of war brides, I would like to question how we understand our sense of self through the stories that we tell. The way in which we construct these narratives is shaped by how we see ourselves, as Laura Quilici discovered when interviewing Italian women for her article with Alexander Freund titled, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives: Italian and German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1947-1961.” After illustrating how Italian women who, due to economic need, kept boarders, often referred to themselves in terms of their strength, Quilici explains that “the myth of the ‘strong lady’ served to empower housewives with boarders. It gave them a sense of autonomy in a situation that might have proved victimizing.”<sup>42</sup> These “strong” women were responsible for making meals for all boarders plus their own families, cleaning and repairing clothing, keeping the house clean, grocery shopping and gardening.<sup>43</sup> Presenting themselves as poor, meek and financially unstable would only serve to belittle these women’s experiences, discrediting their lives. In a similar way, I would like to question how British war brides construct their identities through their own narratives. Do the women who I interviewed make use of myth, or other such devices?

Post-modern influences have also caused many historians to question the ability to derive truth from their sources, leading to a re-understanding as to what value oral history has for us. Many scholars today agree that oral history has the ability to tell us much about ways we remember, our own self-perceptions, and how we construct our

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<sup>42</sup> Alexander Freund and Laura Quilici, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives: Italian and German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1947-1961,” *Oral History Review* 23.2 (Winter 1996): 41.

<sup>43</sup> Freund and Quilici, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives,” 36.

stories. It is becoming increasingly rare to encounter scholars who believe that oral history actually has the capability to tell us the actual truth of what happened in the past—especially not in its entirety. Despite this, many historians have come to accept information collected in oral interviews as versions of truths of the past. Kenneth Kirby discusses truth in his article, “Phenomenology and the Problems of Oral History.” Here, Kirby attempts to walk a fine line in regards to the historian’s ability to know. Attempting to breakdown the distinction that places Truth with a capital “T” on one end and perspectives on the other, Kirby suggests the possibility of multiple truths. While avoiding being labelled a relativist by insisting that the existence of multiple truths does not negate the idea of truth altogether, Kirby is reluctant to admit that any of our knowledge can ever be considered complete: “given the unavoidable subjectivity of all human perception, all conclusions have to be considered tentative, all disciplines open to further understanding.”<sup>44</sup>

The great amount of work that has already been produced on oral history, as examined above, is of central importance to my project. Similar to Kirby, I would like to propose a messier understanding of our ability to uncover truth within oral narratives. Oral history does provide us with a form of truth, truths which are not solid or static, but rather truths that reflect the reality of human experience—full of diversity, shifting, morphing and changing over time. The war brides that I interviewed may have had difficulty remembering the exact facts of events which occurred many decades ago, but this does not discredit what they have to say. Although memory of past events is bound to be riddled with mistakes, inconsistencies and gaps, that does not mean that we cannot

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<sup>44</sup> Kirby, “Phenomenology and the Problems of Oral History,” 26.

learn anything from personal narratives. As a fluid entity, memory “reflects personal and historical transformations, ideological shifts, changing relations of power, strategy and struggle.”<sup>45</sup>

This project will rely upon oral history to unearth multiple truths around war brides’ attitudes surrounding memories of food, with the hope of providing insights into these women’s emotional feelings regarding different periods in their lives. The first chapter will focus on the way war brides discuss their pre-war lives through narratives interlaced with vivid memories of much-missed foods their mothers prepared. In the second chapter, war bride memories of food and dealing with life under the rationing system in Britain during the war years will be discussed. The third and final chapter will consider war brides’ use of food narratives to describe their experiences in Canada and their attempts to adjust to life as Canadian citizens.

The truths that we learn from the stories of these women are at the same time in contention, multi-layered and multi-vocal, intersecting on numerous planes rather than a single, solid line. This is the reality of our existence, and thus our representations of that reality follow similar patterns. Although the historical truth of what happened in the past can never be fully represented, our attempts at this representation prove to be significant ventures, and are a part of what it means to be human.

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<sup>45</sup> Freund and Quilici, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives,” 19.

## Chapter One: Sunday Roast and a Side of Comfort: War Bride Memories of Food in Pre-War Britain

The 1930's—the years of the Great Depression—brought difficult times to the people of Britain. In 1932, the term 'Hungry England' began to be used, as many British citizens struggled daily to get enough to eat.<sup>1</sup> Despite this time of great scarcity and desperation, many war brides, while reminiscing about what they ate as children before the Second World War took hold of Europe in 1939, excitedly recalled fond memories of warm meals shared with loving family members. Carefree childhood days of roaming through fields and county lanes to pick wild berries,<sup>2</sup> or helping father with his milk run<sup>3</sup> were joyously related by war brides who over seventy years later can still taste the tartness of the fruit and feel the weight of the milk bottles in their hands. Memories of food in the pre-war years were prevalent in many of the interviews I conducted with war brides. Although some of the questions I asked were directly related to food they consumed as children, even without my guidance<sup>4</sup> women that I interviewed frequently relayed stories of childhood which were interlaced with memories of food. Despite the hardships associated with the Great Depression, the mental link which connects food with family, security, comfort and love is strong for many of these women re-telling stories of their childhoods. War brides' narratives provide us both with information about what

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet From the 1890's to the 1990's* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2003), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 0:00:17. All women interviewed for this project chose to use their real names rather than pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 16:20.

<sup>4</sup> While in some interviews I had to rely heavily on my list of questions to keep the interviewee talking, in others I hardly got the chance to ask any questions at all.

happened in the past, as well as the meanings these women ascribe to events of this past.<sup>5</sup>

In remembering and portraying food of their childhood in a certain way, these women infuse it with meaning.<sup>6</sup>

### **Memory and Nostalgia: Examining the Sensual Past**

While adding to our understanding of what life in pre-war Britain was like, war brides' stories of food also open a window for questions regarding the nature of memory. Since the basis of this study rests on information collected through the far from infallible human memory, a discussion of the advantages and limitations of relying upon this source is called for. As scholars such as Alessandro Portelli, Pamela Sugiman, Paul Thompson and others<sup>7</sup> have shown, it is necessary for the oral historian to question the role of memory in order to present a truly well-rounded and thoughtfully researched study. The past can never be perfectly replicated or remembered; it is far too complex and multi-dimensional. However, this does not mean that war bride memories of childhood are necessarily without truth or value to the historian.

Many war brides interviewed about their life growing up before the onset of the Second World War paint pictures of cozy homes filled with loving families and the smells of baking. Relaxed days of childhood are represented in their stories of licking the

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Freund and Laura Quilici, "Exploring Myths in Women's Narratives: Italian and German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1947-1961," *Oral History Review* 23.2 (Winter 1996): 23.

<sup>6</sup> Jillian Gould, "Toronto Blueberry Buns: History, Community, Memory," *Material History Review* 57 (Spring 2003): 38.

<sup>7</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Pamela Sugiman, "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29.3 (2004): 359-388; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Emily Honig, "Getting to the Source: Striking Lives: Oral History and the Politics of Memory," *Journal of Women's History* 9.1 (Spring 1997): 139-157; Linda McDowell, "Cultural Memory, Gender and Age: Young Latvian Women's Narrative Memories of War-Time Europe, 1944-1947," *Journal of Historical Geography* 30.4 (October 2004): 701-728.

spatula when mom was making pudding, or feeling the heat of the oven on their faces as the Christmas turkey was pushed in. Mavis recalls trying to help her mother with jam that they had made together: “I remember one time we had about twelve lots of jam and we were putting them up in the cupboard like that [*raises her arms above her head*], I was up putting them up, and I dropped the lot! [*Laughs*]”<sup>8</sup> Hilda remembers her attempts to avoid eating a much dreaded steak and kidney pie: “We would feed the little dog under the table, because we had to eat all of our food and then we’d say, ya we’ve eaten it, and it’s gone! [*Laughs*]”<sup>9</sup> In the retelling of these stories, childhood is often “associated with fond memories of food and festive meals: reminiscences of those culinary delights that brought them such warm feelings of pleasure, security and even love as a child.”<sup>10</sup>

This sort of nostalgic reflection is closely linked to quaintness, as studied by Daniel Harris, a way of understanding the past through atmosphere and sensation rather than knowledge and fact.<sup>11</sup> Like nostalgia, quaintness “reproduces the past selectively, editing out its discomfort, inconvenience, misery, stench, and filth and concentrating instead on its carnal pleasures, its ‘warm and homey feelings’.”<sup>12</sup> This is largely a memory of the senses—the body’s memory of the past. Catching the scent of a favourite dish from one’s childhood can instantly cause a rush of memories and emotions, an intense feeling of both nostalgia and longing—a quaint memory of the past.

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<sup>8</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 55:42.

<sup>9</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 7:47.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald LeBlanc, “Food, Orality and Nostalgia for Childhood: Gastronomic Slavophilism in Midnineteenth-Century Russian Fiction,” *The Russian Review* 58 (April 1999): 245.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Harris, “Quaintness,” *Salmagundi* 120 (Fall 1998): 159.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

Harris' understanding of quaintness provides a useful lens through which to view the narratives of war brides, who often relayed such quaint memories of the past. While Harris' theory of quaintness is interesting to consider within the context of this project, the fact that he defines quaintness as an aesthetic which necessarily de-intellectualizes history is problematic.<sup>13</sup> Joy Parr's understanding of a sensuous history, similar to quaintness, speaks to the possibility of using this kind of knowledge of the past as reliable sources for intellectual work. Although sensation-focused history may have, in the past, been considered un-academic and relegated to the stories of childhood that women exchanged with each other, more historians, like Parr, are now seriously considering the benefits of studying such a history. In her article, "Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth Century Canada," Parr explores the possibility of Canadian historians delving more deeply into a sensuous history, emphasizing how a sensuous understanding of the past opens up new ways of knowing for the historian. This sort of history places human beings at its centre and questions not only "what happened?," but also "how did people experience it?" As Parr explains, most historical information has been gathered solely through the sense of sight—recorded eyewitness accounts of events, places and time periods. The result of this single-sided way of representing the past is a disconnection from it: "A historical body in a time dominated by the eye sees but does not feel, loses touch with other sensuous resonances and, by oversight, marginalizes them."<sup>14</sup> The sensual history that war brides contribute to when recalling the texture of their

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<sup>13</sup> Harris, "Quaintness," 160.

<sup>14</sup> Joy Parr, "Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth Century Canada: The Timely, the Tactic, and the Material Body," *The Canadian Historical Review* 82.4 (December 2001): 736.

grandmother's biscuits or the sweetness of cakes they ate before the war provides us with valuable information about both the past and the present.

Going further than Harris' analysis of quaintness, Parr questions the way in which these memories can be related, explaining that not all experiences can be expressed through words.<sup>15</sup> Parr makes this point through the example of trying to teach a child to ride a bicycle by telling them how it is done.<sup>16</sup> Muscle memory and lessons learned through experience are difficult—if not impossible—to communicate through language. Knowing, for instance, how much flour must be used to form a good dough, how long to knead it for, and how long to let it rest, is knowledge that must be learned through experience—recognizing how the dough should look, feel and move, through sensory observation—rather than information that can be passed on through a recipe. The belief that only lessons which can be expressed through language qualify as knowledge devalues the importance of this kind of tacit or inarticulate knowledge. The body sometimes knows that which the mind consciously does not.<sup>17</sup>

Although Parr's work offers an analysis more suited to this study, Harris' article provides a useful stepping stone from which to understand what is meant by Parr's sensual history of the past, largely by providing examples of it. Harris must be lauded for his ability to creatively express his own work in a very sensual way. Relaying a scholarly analysis through descriptive and poetic language which in itself displays the very way of representing the past that he discusses—a representation concerned more with

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<sup>15</sup> Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory," *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. Nadia Seremetakis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 6.

<sup>16</sup> Parr, "Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth Century Canada," 721.

<sup>17</sup> Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses," 16.

atmosphere and sensation rather than knowledge and fact—Harris deftly demonstrates his point. Such skilful writing can be seen throughout this article, which is filled with vivid and eloquently composed descriptions, such as this phrase, depicting the twentieth century housewife: “...her lank hair dripping with sweat as she pummelled bread and cranked clothes through the wringer washer.”<sup>18</sup> This kind of language ignites inspiration in its captivating descriptions, and in itself contributes to a quaint representation of the past, one that emphasizes the aesthetic over the analytic.

Emotion can also play a major role in how we remember and represent the past. Psychologist Donna Orange describes a pre-symbolic and non-representational knowledge that she has termed emotional memory.<sup>19</sup> This way of remembering is always filtered through past relations, and is therefore strongly linked to feelings that were associated with previous experiences.<sup>20</sup> For instance, Nancy, as a child, was given a bit of money each week to buy a piece of toffee from the Gillmore Sweet Shop.<sup>21</sup> It may now be the case that every time she has toffee, she is reminded of the feelings and emotions—which are largely inexpressible through language—that surrounded memories of enjoying this treat as a child. This sort of emotional memory, as Orange describes it, is valuable in that it “teaches us to presume that all experience has meaning and history, even—or especially—when it cannot be adequately articulated.”<sup>22</sup> Like Parr, Orange recognizes the importance of such information about the past which cannot easily be communicated.

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<sup>18</sup> Harris, “Quaintness,” 161.

<sup>19</sup> Donna Orange, “Emotional Memory,” *Emotional Understanding: Studies in Psychoanalytic Epistemology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995): 111.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 15th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording 1, 31:25.

<sup>22</sup> Orange, “Emotional Memory,” 116.

In a similar way, war brides' memories of the past, and their emotions surrounding those memories, were sometimes expressed through facial expression, body language, tone of voice, speed of speech, pauses, and use of noises rather than words. Ida, when recalling a pub that her uncle owned in England, relied upon some of these non-linguistic tools to tell this story from her childhood: "We used to go as kids, they had big grains [*looks up and motions with arms to indicate the impressive size*] and...stables...and an orchard and we'd get...we went for holidays there and it was lovely times! [*quietly contemplating*]...Ya [*nods while looking straight ahead*]."<sup>23</sup> Although the story itself indicates memories of joyous days, Ida's body language and occasional pauses communicate a sense of mourning for a lost past, sadness over the thought of good times gone by.<sup>24</sup> As can be deduced from the non-linguistic messages communicated through Ida's re-telling of the past, truth "is extra-linguistic and revealed through expression, performance, material culture and conditions of embodiment."<sup>25</sup>

War brides' memories of food also sometimes implied an emotional relationship between parents. Indicating the strong bond of love and commitment between her mother and father, Audrey recalled with a sense of pride in her voice: "mother packed him a lunch *every day*. Yes. [*nodding*]"<sup>26</sup> Elaborating on this daily ritual, Audrey explained how her mother would make wine which she would include in her father's lunches: "she always sent a little thing of wine for him to have in his lunch and made him

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<sup>23</sup> Ida Prette, Interview with Author, July 7, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:12:54.

<sup>24</sup> Jillian Gould describes how memories of food can be linked to a yearning for the past in "Toronto Blueberry Buns," 31.

<sup>25</sup> Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part I," 6.

<sup>26</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3rd, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 5:37.

sandwiches!”<sup>27</sup> The tone with which Audrey conveyed these memories of her parents’ relationship speaks to her understanding of their relationship as one infused with reciprocal commitment, love and care. While the actual nature of the relationship between Audrey’s parents can never be fully known, her portrayal of this relationship indicates the closeness between her mother and father—be it real or imagined—and demonstrates the strong family bonds that the imminent Second World War would eventually disrupt.

The close link between food and emotion is also considered by Ellen Ross in her book, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*. Here, Ross displays how important a woman’s ability to provide food for her husband and children was to maintaining her own sense of “emotional equilibrium.”<sup>28</sup> Being able to feed her family—providing them with the most basic of everyday needs—represented for many women feelings of success in their roles as wives and mothers. Conversely, an inability to satisfy her family’s hunger resulted in many women’s feelings of failure in fulfilling their expected roles, and could lead to emotional upsets and thoughts of suicide.<sup>29</sup> In maintaining the normalcy of everyday life through habitual food rituals—such as the Sunday roast—British women in the early twentieth century were able to balance their own emotions, reassuring themselves of their abilities as wives and mothers.

Although nostalgic memories such as those presented by war brides have frequently been criticized for distorting the past by whitewashing over its negative aspects, such memories do provide us with truths about that past. One of the

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<sup>27</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3rd, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 5:37.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

contributions of these reflections is their ability to provide us with a sense of atmosphere, as Harris suggests.<sup>30</sup> The facts may not always be correct, but a sensual history is not as concerned with the facts as it is with questioning what the experience was *like*. Description of atmosphere, relying on metaphoric representation not reducible to discrete facts, points the historian to how meaning circulates within the telling of stories. When describing the difference between pies in Canada and England, Nancy confuses her facts, yet the truth remains—over seventy years later, she can still taste the pies of her childhood: “And they’d [Canadians] make lovely pies, deep pies, not like the English—or smaller pies, ours were deep pies, deep apple pies.”<sup>31</sup> The memory of pie is what is significant about this story rather than the fact of place. Despite the discrepancy, Nancy’s memory is no less valid, as it was the recollection of difference which stood out most to her.<sup>32</sup> Relying upon all her senses to compose the memory of such a treat—the sight of a steaming apple pie, the aroma she inhaled while eagerly waiting for it to cool, the texture and warmth of the filling as she chewed, the twinge of cinnamon on her tongue, and perhaps even the telltale creak of the oven door as her mother pulled out the much loved pastry—Nancy’s story represents a very sensual, and therefore highly memorable, experience. The warmth and comfort implicit in Nancy’s description of Britain’s deep-apple pies contributes to the atmosphere that war brides frequently represent through memories of childhood foods, one that exudes safety, stability, and strong family bonds.

If not valorized for their ability to tell us truths about the atmosphere of days gone by, nostalgic memories of the past speak to truths about the present, since how we choose

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<sup>30</sup> Harris, “Quaintness,” 159.

<sup>31</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording 2, 20:50.

<sup>32</sup> David Sutton and Michael Hernandez, “Voices in the Kitchen: Cooking Tools as Inalienable Possession,” *Oral History* 35.2 (Autumn 2007): 70.

to represent the past is influenced by our present situations.<sup>33</sup> As Pamela Sugiman explains, memory is both selective—“we remember what we need to remember, what is safe to remember, that for which we have the cultural tools to express”—and influenced by its audience.<sup>34</sup> Rather than being labelled as true or false representations of the past, war bride memories should be “problematized as one of many possible tellings of a woman's life story and not the source of her single, ‘true’ experience.”<sup>35</sup> Nostalgic memories of the past tell us truths about how these women want themselves and the stories of their lives to be perceived in the present.

### **Days of Plenty or Poverty?: Recollections of Food in Pre-War Britain**

Memories of food war brides ate in Britain as children were frequently relayed through either narratives that illustrated abundance, or stories which indicated shortages. Although the majority spoke more about the former, attention paid to the latter is interesting to consider. Life in England during the 1930's was difficult for the majority of the population, many of whom fell under the category of working class. Daily reminders of inadequate food supplies in the early Depression years could be seen in the faces of thin children who became accustomed to imbalanced yet inexpensive high starch and low protein diets.<sup>36</sup>

Most war brides were young children<sup>37</sup> when the Great Depression first began to be felt in Britain; however, the lean 1930's were still remembered by some. Although she

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<sup>33</sup> Honig, “Getting to the Source,” 142.

<sup>34</sup> Sugiman, “Memories of Internment,” 364.

<sup>35</sup> Honig, “Getting to the Source: Striking Lives,” 156.

<sup>36</sup> Ross, *Love and Toil*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Of the 15 war brides I interviewed the youngest in 1929 was two years old, and the eldest eighteen. The majority, however, fell between the ages of five and eight.

may not have been as acutely aware of her parent's monetary situation at the time, Muriel now reflects on the hardships faced by her mother and father: "When I was about four the Depression started and things were pretty...tough, you know, bringing up five children on such a small salary."<sup>38</sup> Many war brides who talked about the Depression years focused on its effect on the food supply. Jackie's family was quite well off, yet she recognized the disparity of the 1930's: "I don't know if you realize how harsh the Depression was. And I think we got maids—we had three maids, three women maids—and I think that they came just in order to be fed."<sup>39</sup> Narratives indicating the difficulties caused by the Depression are also expressed through their contrast with memories of better times. While reminiscing about her responsibility of helping prepare dinner as a child, Nancy paints a picture of wholesome and abundant foods, a change from the Depression years where such luxuries were often not available: "And there were fresh eggs, and you know, chickens, and just then, you know, England was picking up after the Depression."<sup>40</sup> Jackie makes a similar comparison between Depression and post-Depression era food when describing the meals provided for servicemen and women in camps: "Then in the air force ... you know, they'd been in Depression, so many of the people in the air force were probably lucky to ... they'd never had it so good."<sup>41</sup>

Although I questioned war brides both about food they ate before and during the war, their emphasis tended to focus on the war years and memories of rationing, making do, and doing without. It is important to consider how memory plays a role in these recollections that pay relatively little attention to the lack of food in the 1930's compared

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<sup>38</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 0:00:12.

<sup>39</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 14:50.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, July 8th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording 1, 35:20.

<sup>41</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 14:45

to food scarcity during the war. One possible explanation for this could be the age of war brides throughout these two time periods. Since most war brides I interviewed were in their mid-teenage years<sup>42</sup> at the start of the war, they were likely more actively involved in—and therefore remember more clearly—such domestic duties as food preparation during these years than they would have at younger ages when Britain was still in the midst of the Great Depression. Their tendency to talk about positive memories of food before the war—plentiful supplies, good quality, and caring company to share it with—rather than the negatives that they highlight during the war years may indicate their view of this time as a relatively happy yet fleeting period, soon to be upset by the chaos of war.

While some war brides recalled the difficult times they and their families experienced during the 1930's, others described vivid memories which link the pre-war years with warm hearty meals and a sense of family cohesion and stability—things which would later be dramatically disrupted with the onset of the Second World War. During the war, many British families were broken up. Schools were evacuated, frequently separating children from their parents, older siblings often enlisted in the services and lived in camps away from home, and parents were sometimes called up to do war work in factories around the country. Since many war brides left Britain after the war never to return again, the pre-war years stand out as a time they represent with a heightened sense of family cohesion, the last moment they were able to identify with the ideal of the close-knit family before the chaos of war interrupted traditional family structures. Memories of food provide a locus for the representation of positive, innocent times and in this way can be very symbolic. Beyond utilitarian meaning—providing us with energy necessary to

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<sup>42</sup> Ten of the fifteen women I interviewed were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen when the Second World War started in the fall of 1939.

function—food is also frequently invested with other meaning—symbolizing, for instance, nurturing motherly love, feelings of belonging, or a sense of being home.<sup>43</sup>

The link between food and memories of home was strong for many war brides. Upon asking Hilda if there were any foods that she missed from her childhood in Britain, she excitedly replied, “Oh ya, cockles and mussels!”<sup>44</sup> Having grown up in Swansea, a coastal town in Wales, fresh seafood was something Hilda became accustomed to at a very young age, and remembers vividly: “we had a market in Swansea, you know a big Swansea market and all the cockles women came into the market to sell all the fresh stuff out of the ocean.”<sup>45</sup> One of her favourite Welsh foods, laverbread—a traditional dish made from seaweed gathered right from the nearby ocean—stands out clearly in her memory: “it’s not a bread but they call it laver—it’s made out of seaweed and it’s black!...But it is quite flavorful and that with bacon and eggs it’s delicious! So I missed that.”<sup>46</sup> In recalling these memories of locally available foods that she cannot get in Canada, Hilda draws a clear link between her sense of home, place, family and food. Perhaps her real craving is not only for the fresh seafood that she remembers from the past, but also a hunger to return to the carefree days of childhood, her family, home, and town in which she grew up.<sup>47</sup>

Memories linking abundant quantities of food and time spent with the family in the pre-war years were especially vivid for war brides describing meals prepared and

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<sup>43</sup> Miriam Meyers, *A Bite off Mama’s Plate: Mothers’ and Daughters’ Connections Through Food* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 95.

<sup>44</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:10:04.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:09:54.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:09:45.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Matt, “A Hunger for Home: Homesickness and Food in a Global Consumer Society,” *The Journal of American Culture* 30.1 (March 2007): 16.

consumed on special occasions, chief amongst them Christmas. Mavis describes the typical way her family celebrated pre-war Christmases, which centered on food preparation and consumption, and closeness of family members:

Wonderful days of singing and eating with a family of twenty-four, aunts, uncles and cousins. Every plate piled high with turkey, breadsauce, sausages, stuffing, brussels sprouts, carrots, turnip, mashed potatoes and gravy. Everyone had second helpings and was quite ready for Christmas pudding with silver coins in every helping and topped by globs of gorgeous golden custard.<sup>48</sup>

Mavis' link between food and family becomes especially stark when she later describes her first Christmas in Canada, framed by a sense of loneliness, isolation and scarcity: "My husband and I were living in Lachine, Quebec and were alone on the great day. I was about to cook a meager chicken for our festive feast when a neighbor phoned for us to come over."<sup>49</sup> Mavis' memory of her first Christmas in Canada symbolizes her strong mental link between food and family. Christmas in Britain is represented by images of heaping plates, warmth, and emphasis on family, while in Canada, with only her husband to keep her company, Mavis' memory focuses on the "meager" chicken she was going to make, representing her disappointment with both the meal and her lack of loved ones nearby on this holiday.

Nancy also describes a Christmas scene from her childhood of a holiday tradition she shared with her father:

I can remember buying the turkey on Christmas Eve, going to the big market with my dad and you chose your turkey and the man with a hook stick would unhook it and drop it in the bag, you know, it was waaaayyyy... [*motions with her hands to indication that the turkeys were hung high up*] you know, everybody laughed! And then coming through the market the ladies would shout, you know, 'Thyme! Lemon! Parsley!' And they had big skirts and they could only stand at the

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<sup>48</sup> Mavis Butlin, "Play it Again Mavis: An Anthology of Memories," Unpublished Document, October 19, 2001, 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

entrance of this market, they couldn't come inside, and now and again you would see the policemen—the bobbies—chasing them! [*Laughs*]<sup>50</sup>

Through this narrative, Nancy uses a memory of food—the Christmas turkey—to tell a story about time spent with her father. Like Mavis, she also portrays the merriment of the season through in her fond memories of family and food in the pre-war years.

### **Memories of Mom and the Predominance of Women in the Kitchen**

While Nancy's story of getting the Christmas turkey raises memories of her father, war brides' narratives that unite food and family often centre on recollections of mothers, who were primarily responsible for domestic duties such as cooking and food preparation in the pre-war years. When I asked Betty to tell me a bit about food she ate before the war, she excitedly described her mother's remarkable culinary skills:

Oh, she used to make...like a sponge pudding that would float in the air! And her panclets—pancakes! We called them panclets. And all the men in the neighborhood would say Mrs. Cole, how about making us some panclets? But my mom was a really good cook.<sup>51</sup>

In recalling her mother's sponge pudding, Betty is relying upon memories that contribute to a sensual representation of the past, vividly describing the light texture of her mother's famous dish. Much of the way Betty remembers her mother is through food. Several times throughout our interview, she reflected upon her mother's cooking skills: "My mother was a fantastic cook,"<sup>52</sup> "I ended up being a good cook. Maybe not as good as my mother; my mother was *exceptional*."<sup>53</sup> The enthusiasm with which Betty described the food her mother made indicates her strong memories of her mother as the provider of

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<sup>50</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 15, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording 1, 35:33.

<sup>51</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 13:37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:14.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 13:33.

both delicious and nurturing meals for the family. In these nostalgic memories of the past, “the figure of the mother offers not only psychic regression to maternal plenitude but also a temporal and spatial return to the secure past of childhood and to the private world of the home.”<sup>54</sup>

While mothers were frequently in charge of most kitchen-related labour, many war brides I interviewed mentioned chores they were responsible for performing when it came to helping prepare and clean up after meals. Although these women often talked about memories they had of watching their mothers cook, few were given the responsibility of doing this themselves, likely due to young age and inexperience. Edna remembers watching her mother in the kitchen from afar: “She was a very plain cook, good cook, but a plain cook. And if she’d caught me watching she’d tell me to go into the other room.”<sup>55</sup> Since she was too young to help with the cooking herself, Edna was not allowed in the kitchen for fear that she would get in the way. Despite the fact that many war brides were too young to cook by themselves during the pre-war years, an admiration for their mother’s ability to put together meals for the family with grace and skill surfaces through their memories. As Mavis notes,

She went to college and did domestic science so she really knew about food and how to do fires and everything but they do it in a white overall, you know, do a dirty old fire...wood fires or coal fires and she learned to do all those and never make herself or anybody...you know, there weren’t clouds of smoke around everywhere, she did it beautifully.<sup>56</sup>

The expertise with which Mavis’ mother could build a fire for cooking is admired by this war bride over half a century later.

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<sup>54</sup> Judy Giles, "Narratives of Gender, Class, and Modernity in Women's Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain," *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 28.

<sup>55</sup> Edna Eddy, Interview with Author, September 28th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:07:16.

<sup>56</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:23:07.

British women's roles in the pre-war years were frequently limited to duties within the home; however, almost all war brides that I interviewed portrayed their mothers as graceful yet strong and hardworking women who should be lauded for their ability to raise a family before modern conveniences became readily available: "I don't know how she did it really now when I think about it because there were no washing machines in those days and no dishwashers and all that sort of thing, you know. It was all hard work."<sup>57</sup> Ida expressed a similar sentiment while musing over all her mother's responsibilities in the family's home: "When I think of...how she managed. Wow. Ya...work was hard for women at that time."<sup>58</sup> Recognizing the physically, mentally, and emotionally draining duties her mother performed, Ida marvels at her mother's ability to make do. Early-twentieth-century British women's only defense against this reality of hunger and hard work often came in the form of their creativity, allowing them to successfully navigate these difficult times through their ability, like Ida's mother, to make do.<sup>59</sup>

Although many mothers of this time period are portrayed by their daughters as possessing an underlying strength by their daughters, their feminine side is often simultaneously represented, keeping their "acceptable" degree of womanliness intact: "She was a strong women but she absolutely adored my dad, even though he was sick all of the time, but she was the disciplinarian too—that is why we loved our dad so much [*Laughs*]."<sup>60</sup> By presenting mothers as strong yet feminine—in that they followed

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<sup>57</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 10:00.

<sup>58</sup> Ida Prette, Interview with Author, July 7, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 44:37

<sup>59</sup> Ross, *Love and Toil*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 9:47.

socially prescribed gender roles of the time—war brides valorize their mothers while at the same time casting them as “appropriate” women.

Class differences between families in pre-war Britain resulted in a diversity of experience between different war brides and their memories of their mothers—along with their own—roles in the kitchen. While lower-class women in early-twentieth-century Britain frequently struggled day-to-day with the task of ensuring their families’ physical survival, life was quite different for the upper classes.<sup>61</sup> Doris’ childhood experience in England was one fraught with memories of barely managing to get by: “We didn’t have very much when we were growing up, [laughs] but we survived.”<sup>62</sup>

Jackie and Marjorie, on the other hand, both grew up in wealthy families who each had their own live-in cook, yet each of these women emphasized in their interviews how poor they were when they came to Canada. When I asked Jackie to tell me about food she ate as a child, she immediately mentioned the cook. Unlike other war brides who have fond memories of helping mom in the kitchen, Jackie remembers being banned from even entering this area of the house: “We weren’t allowed in the kitchen at home, the cook wouldn’t have allowed us.”<sup>63</sup> Likely due to this distance between herself and the food prepared for the household, Jackie’s memories of food she ate in the pre-war years seem vague. Her disassociation—rather than the engagement some war brides expressed—with the meals she and her family ate is evident in her recollections of their weekly menu, which remained relatively constant:

KH: What sort of foods did you have? Did the cook make?

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<sup>61</sup> Ross, *Love and Toil*, 222.

<sup>62</sup> Doris Michaux, Interview with Author, September 16th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 4:30.

<sup>63</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 14:40.

JD: Pretty solid...roast beef on Sunday, cold roast beef on Monday...uh... something different like steak and kidney pie or liver on Tuesday, fish on Friday, lamb on...absolutely...you knew what you were going to have.

KH: So every week it would be the same?

JD: Absolutely the same! *Always* roast beef on Sunday.<sup>64</sup>

While other war bride talk excitedly about memories of foods from their childhoods, Jackie's distance from the food that was prepared and served within her household leads to her detachment from such memories. Since the family had a live-in cook and she and her sister were not allowed in the kitchen, Jackie did not have the opportunity to watch her mother peel potatoes or sauté onions. Jackie only has memories of her mother's duty of consulting the cook to discuss the menu.<sup>65</sup> Although most war brides were too young to hold any substantial responsibilities in the kitchen, many still had the opportunity to help with lighter tasks, and were therefore able to spend time watching their mothers prepare food for the family. They may have been too young to be taught specific cooking skills, yet by observing their mothers they did learn about gender roles.

Despite the lack of involvement with the cooking process in her childhood home and her apparent boredom with which she described their weekly menu, Jackie later carried on the trend of serving roast beef on Sunday to her own family in Canada.<sup>66</sup> The centrality of a Sunday roast in the lives of even lower-class British families in the early twentieth century was an important weekly ritual. Although many families struggled with little else to eat during the rest of the week, a large Sunday dinner complete with a good sized cut of meat was recognized even in the poorer families, indicating the social

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<sup>64</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 7:30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:00.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 46:20.

significances of such a meal.<sup>67</sup> Meat—a tough, hearty food that required much preparation before it could be easily eaten—symbolized independence. Mushy foods, on the other hand, such as oatmeal or gruel, represented degradation and dependence.<sup>68</sup> By maintaining the Sunday dinner tradition poorer families were able to think of themselves as respectable, if only for the day.<sup>69</sup> An important aspect of this respectability came in the form of social roles which were carried out by each member of the family. Fathers would most often be responsible for carving and serving the meat, indicating their importance in providing the meal that sat in front of each family member. Mothers would take charge of the shopping, cooking, fire building and so on, while children would frequently be required to sit still at the table, quietly eating.<sup>70</sup>

After they were married, many war brides maintained this tradition of a Sunday roast that they had known since childhood: “I would cook a roast on Sunday. You always had a roast on Sunday.”<sup>71</sup> The habitual bringing together of family over a carefully prepared Sunday meal is represented in these war brides’ memories: “Loved his—he had to have roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and all that, two vegetables, and that was a Sunday dinner all our life, you know, we used to with the family...my son remembers that, ya.”<sup>72</sup> In choosing to serve their families the same meals that they themselves were used to having on Sundays, these war brides both helped maintain their sense of Britishness, while at the same time encouraged a sense of family cohesion, perhaps to

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<sup>67</sup> Ross, *Love and Toil*, 39.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13th, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 1:05:30.

<sup>72</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:01:00.

make up for the dislocation and disruption of this tradition that the Second World War caused. In an effort to replicate the memories of family, warmth, stability and comfort that acted as a side dish to the Sunday roasts of their childhood, these women, like their own mothers, devoted most of their Sundays to the careful preparation of a ritual they had known since they were young.

Through their memories of mothers who could frequently be found in the kitchen, expertly mixing cake batter while keeping an eye on the casserole in the oven, war brides provide a character sketch of women who epitomize an ideal mother figure of the time. This woman, largely through her link to food, its preparation and service, represents safety, familiarity, stability and comfort, a stark contrast to the war years when all these ideals would be upset. Reflecting upon this time period from the present, war brides have the advantage of hindsight. It is difficult to speculate on how their memories of mothers who whisked, broiled and baked their way to family happiness would be different if not contrasted with the instability that the war years later brought on.<sup>73</sup>

Memories of grandmothers in the kitchen were also raised by some war brides reflecting on their childhood years before the war. These women represented a wealth of sensual knowledge which allowed them to know exactly how thick a finished pea soup should be, or the proper color of a roast duck. This wisdom that comes from years of experience in the kitchen may explain stereotypical representations of “the Italian grandmother’s skill with pasta and sausage, the Jewish mother’s reputation as latke-

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<sup>73</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, “The Way to A Man’s Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology And Cookbooks in the 1950’s,” *Journal of Social History* 32.3 (Spring 1999): 546.

maker, and the Ukrainian Baba's deftness with perogies."<sup>74</sup> In a similar way, the British grandma's skills in creating her infamous Yorkshire pudding or Cornish pastries which were so loved by her family, were perfected after decades of preparing them. Vera, who lived with her grandmother through some of her childhood, remarks on the necessary skill that cooking required in the pre-war years: "Grandma that did all the cooking, but it wasn't done for us like here. If you had...a turkey or something, you had to pull all the innards out yourself."<sup>75</sup> Her grandmother's ability to manage the hard work involved in preparing meals for her grandchildren is admired by Vera who contrasts the difficulty involved in meal preparation in the past with the ease of cooking today. Mavis also has fond memories of her grandmother as the provider of food: "Grannie had made hot cocoa which we gulped down accompanied by shiny, sticky currant buns."<sup>76</sup> Beyond providing sustenance, the food Mavis' grandmother served her grandchildren is remembered by Mavis as a delicious treat. Through this memory of hot cocoa and sticky buns, Mavis portrays her grandmother as a loving figure and a symbol of warmth, comfort and security.

The gendered division of labour in Britain during the pre-war years meant that in most war brides' families, females were responsible for domestic duties—cooking, cleaning, childrearing—while males frequently worked outside the home. The fact that the kitchen was frequently considered a female space can be seen from Audrey's

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<sup>74</sup> Marlene Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 315.

<sup>75</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 17:03.

<sup>76</sup> Butlin, "Play it Again Mavis," 8.

recollections in which she refers to “my mother’s kitchen.”<sup>77</sup> Joyce clearly remembers the work that she and her mother did in the house while her father took part in activities outside the home:

I basically remember it was chicken and fish. And usually on a weekend, because she wasn’t working, she’d make a big meal, and my dad would go to the football match and he’d always say, ‘Now Joyce, you do the front room, clean it up.’ And I’d get on my hands and knees and polish the front room. And she’d be busy cooking and it was very hard work.<sup>78</sup>

Gender roles were firmly entrenched in pre-war Britain, as a story that Hilda told demonstrates. Her husband Lew’s grandma Elsie,<sup>79</sup> who lived in Wales where Hilda grew up, divorced Lew’s grandpa before the First World War. After leaving her husband, Elise moved across the street from him, taking the children with her. Lew’s grandfather, who was now living alone, would sometimes call over Lew’s mother—a young girl at the time—and ask her to bring her mother a roast. Elise would then cook the roast and send half back to her ex-husband.<sup>80</sup> Even though they were no longer married, this couple continued to carry on this deeply engrained gendered division of labour.

### **Remembering Fathers Through Memories of Food**

Although most war brides I interviewed indicated that their mothers took primary responsibility for food preparation in Britain during the pre-war years, there were exceptions to this trend. Because Hilda’s father had been injured while serving in the First World War, her mother often had to work in their family-owned pub, leaving Hilda

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<sup>77</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3rd, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 33:40.

<sup>78</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 55:23.

<sup>79</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>80</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:46:12.

and her siblings in charge of organizing meals.<sup>81</sup> Doris' father was a chef, and so he often cooked for the family.<sup>82</sup> Both Nancy and Audrey described the vegetable gardens that their fathers tended before the war.<sup>83</sup> Like memories that linked their mothers to food and a sense of family, some war brides also have memories of their fathers that are evoked through food. Although Nancy and her family moved around England frequently before the war, she vividly remembers living in Ilford, Essex, where her father kept a vegetable garden and taught her about different plants:

And then we went down to Ilford and I suppose I must have been maybe...six or seven. And that's when I remember living in a new house...it seemed...you know, it was something like our new houses now, you know, there'd be two or three together and we all had long gardens and that's when my father started to show me about different plants, and what to pick and what not to pick.<sup>84</sup>

Through this memory of her father's garden, Nancy is able to mentally map the time period that she is describing. The strongest memory that she has of the new house relates to food, linking the time and place with memories of her father. Further on in our interview, Nancy again shared with me a strong memory of her father though a link with food. Although the place has changed—they were now living in Liverpool—Nancy is still able to situate this memory around a dish that her father would prepare for her when she returned from her weekly trip to the gym:

And when I came home Friday night my father would always have a boiled onion on the fire boiling away, a big boiled white onion. And then he'd make the sauce, had the white sauce. And he would pour that over and it would have cloves in it. And Liverpool was very cold and damp, typical sea port; and because I had a tendency to bronchitis...this was one of the remedies that was good, you know, for colds. And he would then tell me—my mother would like to read and would

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<sup>81</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 9:40.

<sup>82</sup> Doris Michaux, Interview with Author, September 16th, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 4:29.

<sup>83</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 17:10.

<sup>84</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 15, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording 1, 25:32.

go to bed early—and my father would then tell me all about the First World War and about different things, and about Liverpool and its trade.<sup>85</sup>

Nancy speaks about this weekly ritual she shared with her father with a great deal of excitement and happiness. Through the story of her father's boiled onion, Nancy allows us a glimpse into their relationship and her obvious love and respect for him.

While memories of their mothers were much more commonly reiterated by war brides discussing food in their childhoods, these few references to fathers' links with food illustrate the ways in which both parents could be remembered though their connection with food. In contrast to the image of the hapless father—frequently found in American advertisements of the 1950's<sup>86</sup>—who is well intentioned but ultimately ill-equipped to handle the “female duty” of food preparation,<sup>87</sup> these war brides' recollections of their dads indicate their admiration for men who were skilled gardeners and cooks, and through these activities are remembered as loving and caring fathers.

### **Conclusion: Memory as Symbol and Emotion**

Memories of pre-war days in Britain were frequently relayed by the war brides that I interviewed through recollections of food—its acquisition, preparation and consumption. Upon asking Stella about who was responsible for the cooking in her childhood home, she quickly replied, “Oh ya, my mom did all of it. You know, we were just the three of us, a close-knit family.”<sup>88</sup> In her response, Stella, like many other war brides, draws a clear link between her mother, food, and a strong sense of family

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<sup>85</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 15, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording 1, 29:39.

<sup>86</sup> Ellen Ross does briefly discuss similar comical father figures in *Love and Toil*, 129.

<sup>87</sup> Chris Dummitt, “Finding a Place for Father: Selling the Barbecue in Postwar Canada,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 9.1 (1998): 209-223.

<sup>88</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 11:42.

cohesion. The portrayal of this time period, through war bride's discussions of food, sheds light not only on a particular truth of the past but, importantly, on how memory works in the present. Representing food as a symbol for emotions linked to their childhood days, war brides' narratives speak to a sensual history of the past, one that—because of its reliance on feeling—cannot be easily defined or expressed. Providing us with the tools to further question the ways we remember, our own self-perceptions, and how we construct our stories, these narratives offer versions of truths of the past. War brides' stories provide valuable contributions largely due to their telling emotional overtones which situate their narratives within spaces where understandings of memory, representation of the past, and our role in that representation, can be further examined. Memories of the Sunday roast ritualistically prepared by mothers all over Britain in the pre-war years may be more telling than originally anticipated.

## **Chapter Two: Powdered Egg and Canned Milk: War Bride Memories of Britain During WWII**

As war brides' recollections of the past indicate, the onset of the Second World War greatly affected all aspects of life in Britain. Being evacuated or bombed out of one's home, losing loved ones, leaving family to join the war effort, and entirely changing life plans and goals in order to accommodate the reality of wartime were all part of growing up in Britain for many women. It was not only the major aspects of life that were compromised, however. The war's effect on food supply, a daily consideration, was also significant. In interviews with war brides, the topic of food was frequently raised by these women, be it in a passing reference, or an entire story revolving around an experience with a particular food item. Regardless of this distinction, the fact that food proves to be a medium through which war brides are able to discuss their experiences—both banal and profound—is evident through their consistent references to food when reminiscing about life in wartime Britain.

The changes to daily life instigated by the rationing system had implications regarding traditional gender roles and family structure in wartime Britain, along with individuals' understandings of nation and their roles as British citizens. The increasing government presence in the private home, suggesting ways in which the homemaker could adjust her wartime kitchen and menu plans, represented the politicization of the housewife's duties. No longer was she responsible for simply feeding her family, but now was given the extra burden of upholding national public health and morale through her

nutritious home-cooked meals.<sup>1</sup> War brides' memories of this time and how they and their families managed to cope with and survive within the stringent boundaries defined by this period speak to their understanding of themselves, their families, and their pasts.

Much of the literature which examines women's roles in Britain during the war focuses predominantly on women's paid labour outside of the home. Penny Summerfield's *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, for example, focuses much more on the work women did in factories, offices, and in the services than their roles in the kitchen. Tessa Stone's "Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity" also considers female roles outside the home, paying specific attention to the women's auxiliary air force in Great Britain during the Second World War. In a similar vein, Harold Smith, in "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," confines his study of work performed by women to paid labour, largely that which is carried out in the public domain.<sup>2</sup> James Hinton's *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War* differs from these other publications in that Hinton's focus is on women's volunteer work during the war, specifically with the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS). While Hinton emphasizes the domestic roles women took on in the public sector while volunteering in this organization—such as providing tea and emotional support for air raid victims—he

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<sup>1</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Tessa Stone "Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: The Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War," *Women's History Review* 8.4 (December 1999): 605-624; Harold Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," *The Historical Journal* 27.4 (December 1984): 925-945.

pays little attention to women's domestic duties and unpaid labour within the private sphere.<sup>3</sup>

Pushing further in this direction, contemporary literature has started to question the roles women played within the home, frequently emphasizing their importance as contributions to the war effort which have, in the past, been all too often overlooked. Juliet Gardiner's *Wartime* includes a chapter titled "The Kitchen Front," where she stresses the importance of women's domestic work during the war: "Women were in the front line, their kitchen front represented as being critical to victory as they fought to feed their families against the odds of shortages, absences and uncertainties."<sup>4</sup> Norman Longmate also has a chapter titled "The Kitchen Front" in his book, *How We Lived Then*, through which he, like Gardiner, explains how British housewives successfully managed to keep their families fed in war time.<sup>5</sup> In her article, "Fighting for the Idea of Home Life," Susan Graysel discusses the emotional labour that women were instructed to perform during the war, both inside the home and out. Graysel argues that the idealized mother and wife promoted in this time period contributed to the success of the war by maintaining a cheerful attitude. She exercised thrift, a sense of calm and steadfastness without neglecting her femininity.<sup>6</sup> This persona that the wartime woman was encouraged to adopt—the chipper yet astute woman who boosted the morale of the nation—represents a form of emotional labour. Phil Goodman's article, "Patriotic Femininity:

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<sup>3</sup> James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166.

<sup>4</sup> Juliet Gardiner, "The Kitchen Front," *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004), 156.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Longmate, "The Kitchen Front," *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War*, (London: Hutchinson & Co. LTD, 1971): 140-155.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Graysel, "Fighting for the Idea of Home Life," *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain* eds. Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 139-156.

Women's Morals and Men's Morale During the Second World War," also focuses on how women were encouraged to maintain their femininity as a way to boost morale. By ensuring that they were always 'properly' made up—by putting together an emergency air raid makeup kit,<sup>7</sup> or by painting their legs with gravy browning to replace nylons<sup>8</sup>—women could maintain a sense of composure that would reassure others that despite disruptions caused by the war, consistencies still remained. Goodman also refers to the fact that women were presented as the “custodians of the values being fought for.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, women were charged with the duty of maintaining these values, despite their new roles of taking on labour outside of the domestic sphere. Few scholars have turned their attention to this form of women's work during the war years; therefore, there is still much to be written on this fascinating and understudied field.

In recent decades, academics have started to increasingly question the history of food, producing literature on everything from origins and social habits surrounding food to its production, distribution and consumption. Much of the earlier work on food in wartime Britain tended to employ a “big picture” perspective, looking at, for instance, government policy and food production, economic considerations, caloric intake levels and so forth. These studies were primarily informed by quantitative data frequently presented within the texts as charts and graphs. Included within this body of literature is J.C. Drummond's *The Englishman's Food*, published at the beginning of the Second World War. Taking a heavily scientific approach to nutrition, Drummond's book emphasizes the advancements in scientific knowledge around food in the twentieth

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<sup>7</sup> Phil Goodman, “Patriotic Femininity: Women's Morals and Men's Morale During the Second World War,” *Gender and History* 10.2 (August 1998): 280.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

century, glorifying the idea of a rational reaction to the problem of diet inadequacies and proposing that proper education would lead to the resolution of such problems.<sup>10</sup> It is significant to note that after publishing this book, Drummond was appointed to the position of Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Food, making clear his own involvement with the government's food policy and practice during the war.<sup>11</sup> Mancur Olson Jr. takes a similar approach to Drummond in his book, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, relying heavily on quantitative data to present his top-down view of the food situation during Britain's wars.

Recent literature tends to take a more social-historical approach to food, considering how food issues during the war years affected people on an individual level. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's *Austerity in Britain*, for instance, includes discussions of how the food situation in Britain during the Second World War affected women as mothers and wives. Taking her readers right into the homes of those who managed to make-do or do without in difficult times, Zweiniger-Bargielowska uses a bottom-up approach that contrasts greatly with the work of earlier academics writing about Britain's culinary history, such as Drummond and Olson. Zweiniger-Bargielowska's work is especially useful when taken alongside Drummond and Olson's: while the latter two have provided the outlines, the former supplies the details. Colin Spencer's chapter titled "Food for All" is also notable in its ability to colour in the specifics.<sup>12</sup> Including the

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<sup>10</sup> J.C. Drummond, *The Englishmen's Food*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958).

<sup>11</sup> John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day*, (London: Nelson, 1966), 323.

<sup>12</sup> Colin Spencer, "Food For All," *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 293-327.

words of people who lived through this experience, Spencer is able to provide his readers not only with answers to the question, ‘what happened?,’ but also ‘what was it like?’

Drawing information from all three of these bodies of literature, this chapter seeks to present and consider war brides’ memories of food in Britain during the Second World War, examining how their tendency to focus on food-centered narratives when recounting memories of wartime experiences allows these women the opportunity to use the familiar and mundane topic of food to ground deep and emotional stories of the hardships, sorrows, and heartbreak that the Second World War caused for so many.

### **Living off Rations: Eggless Sponge Pudding and “Macaroni...Minus Cheese”<sup>13</sup>**

In January of 1940, five months after war had been declared, rationing began in Britain. During interviews, war brides recalled the rationing of foods such as eggs, meat, fats, cheese, sugar and preserves. Although quantities of different products permitted per person varied throughout the war, more than one war bride was able to call to mind a list of ration amounts:

You got four ounces of meat per person per week. You got two ounces of butter...But you got four ounces of margarine. One egg per person per week.<sup>14</sup>

[W]e only got two ounces of lard, two ounces of butter, per person per week, which wasn’t very much. I think we got four ounces of sugar.<sup>15</sup>

[T]his is for each person per week: two ounces of butter, two ounces of margarine, two ounces of lard...And the meat was rationed, I don’t know how much we got but you could get like liver and hearts and all.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 2, 10:50.

<sup>14</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 34:49.

<sup>15</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 14:56.

<sup>16</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 13:52.

As is evident from these recollections, the quantity of food available was drastically reduced from the pre-war years. Ida, who worked for the biscuit manufacturers Huntley & Palmers throughout the war, explained that due to wartime shortages the company went from producing around two hundred different kinds of biscuits to producing the ten most basic.<sup>17</sup> Decreased quantities of food resulted in housewives' familiarization with "queue culture,"<sup>18</sup> as they frequently spent hours waiting in line for supplies, sometimes in vain, as Joyce remembers: "I'd line up because my mother was at work and I'd come home from school and I'd line up, and by the time we'd get to the end of the line there wasn't anything left."<sup>19</sup> Jackie also referred to the habitual act of standing in queues to receive rationed goods: "We were so used to lining up, we lined up for everything."<sup>20</sup> Despite the drudgery and inconvenience of this way of life, war brides recall stories of themselves and their mothers at this time in a way which portrays them as strong women who made sacrifices for their families.

Along with quantity, the quality of many foods also deteriorated during the war years, a time when compromises had to be made. The minimum meat content of sausage and other processed meats, for instance, shrank to only thirty percent from its pre-war eighty percent.<sup>21</sup> Vera remembers having an argument with her sister-in-law upon first arriving in Canada over how to cook sausages—with oil or without: "But it was because I guess in England the sausages didn't have fat in them; gosh knows what was in them."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ida Prette, Interview with Author, July 7, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 19:32.

<sup>18</sup> Derek Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet From the 1890's to the 1990's* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 30:43.

<sup>20</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 30:30.

<sup>21</sup> Spencer, "Food For All," 317.

<sup>22</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 49:27.

The amount and quality of food rationed around Britain varied depending on time and place.<sup>23</sup> While most war brides who grew up in England remember the war years as times of great scarcity, Betty, who was living with her family in Wales during the war, recognized that food supply differed around the United Kingdom: “I think down in Wales we were a little bit better off than the people up in England...we weren’t as closely monitored as the ones up in England.”<sup>24</sup> But the end of the war did not mean the end of rationing for the British people, as Mavis explained:

Actually it was much worse—the rationing—was much worse just at the end of the war and after the war, but I’d left by then so I was over here living on a pig’s back, you know, I didn’t have any difficulties, but I think that for a lot of people it was very dingy and dirty and grey and nothing was anything.<sup>25</sup>

It was not until 1954—fifteen years after rationing had first come into effect—that it finally ended.<sup>26</sup> After she had settled in Canada, Hilda would mail requested supplies that were difficult to get in Britain, such as food, clothing and household items, to her friends and family at home.<sup>27</sup> The mid to late 1940’s were known in Britain as “The Age of Austerity,” due to the strict rationing still in place and the inability of the country to get back on its feet after the dislocation engendered by the Second World War.<sup>28</sup>

Life was difficult in Britain after the war years, but 1939-1945 also presented numerous hurdles for the homemaker. The scarcity of food available meant that compromises had to be made, and people would frequently have to either make-do or do

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<sup>23</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time: Food Control 1939-1945*, (London: Published for the Ministry of Food by H.M Stationery Off., 1946), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:11:33.

<sup>25</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:00:00.

<sup>26</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 168.

<sup>27</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:15:17.

<sup>28</sup> Spencer, “Food For All,” 318.

without, as Nancy recalls: “it was amazing what we ate really, macaroni...minus cheese.”<sup>29</sup> Not only were quantity and quality of foods lacking, but materials used for food preparation were also affected. Mavis remembers helping to cook dinner over a greatly reduced gas flame and washing dishes in tepid water.<sup>30</sup> In the face of such adversity, people did their best to make-do with what they had; however, there were possible alternatives. Some people stocked up on non-perishable items when they could see that war was imminent.<sup>31</sup> Others relied upon the black market to get goods which were unattainable through other means.<sup>32</sup> When her aunt gave her some food obtained through the black market, Vera worried about the possibility of getting caught: “We went down to visit her and I had a little suitcase and she put a little...a bit of sugar and I forget...a few raisins and a few things we needed. I was terrified, I thought if it fell open on the bus we’d go to jail probably!”<sup>33</sup>

Rationing did not stop war brides and their families from celebrating special events such as weddings with food. Although negotiations often had to be made, most war brides celebrated their weddings complete with some sort of reception meal—be it tea and light snacks, a luncheon, or a catered dinner—and with a cake. Often, the food served at weddings was the result of a joint effort. Families, friends and neighbors coming together to help with a wedding dinner was not uncommon, as Muriel remembers. For her wedding day dinner, she and her husband managed to get new potatoes for the feast and with the help of her family and friends were able to serve a

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<sup>29</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 2, 10:50.

<sup>30</sup> Mavis Butlin, “Play it Again Mavis: An Anthology of Memories,” Unpublished Document, October 19, 2001, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 144.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>33</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:53.

small meal: “We got enough little potatoes for my mom to cook, she had a cold plate and other people were good enough to help with tomatoes or whatever.”<sup>34</sup>

Help was also often needed for getting together a wedding cake during the war years. Because she had worked at the British biscuit factory Huntley & Palmers for ten years, Ida was provided with a complementary wedding cake paid for by the company.<sup>35</sup> Although this wedding cake, unlike most others, was covered in icing, the actual cake contained no butter, due to war time restrictions.<sup>36</sup> Such restrictions did not necessarily mean that fancy ingredients were entirely omitted; Hilda’s wedding cake was covered in icing sugar obtained from the black market,<sup>37</sup> while Nancy’s mother made her daughter’s wedding cake from raisins, nuts and fruits she had stashed away just before the war started.<sup>38</sup> Muriel’s mother also saved fruit during the war to make her daughter’s wedding cake, which she then passed over to a friend of hers who was a baker to add the finishing touches: “He iced it and made it look beautiful, really, really did. And it was just a real wedding cake.”<sup>39</sup> The fact that Muriel comments on the cake looking like a “real” wedding cake, indicates that many wedding cakes of the time—lacking icing, butter, or decoration—did not qualify as “real” wedding cakes.

Lack of supplies did often mean that a bit of imagination was called for. Stella laughed as she remembered her wedding day: “There was a cake covered with white

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<sup>34</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 50:30.

<sup>35</sup> Ida Prette, Interview with Author, July 7, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 18:01.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 18:11.

<sup>37</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 26:30.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 2, 6:40.

<sup>39</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 30:05.

paper! It was not a fruit cake, it was something made with powdered eggs!”<sup>40</sup> While Stella’s improvised “icing” was actually inedible paper, Vera’s aunt attempted to make her own icing sugar for her niece’s wedding cake: “she had a white cotton pillow case and she boiled it to make sure it was absolutely clean and dried. And she put the finest sugar she could get and put it through the mangle again and again until it made it smaller.”<sup>41</sup> Although the improvised icing sugar was not a complete success, Vera recalls that it was “a lovely little cake.”<sup>42</sup> The memory of aunts, mothers and friends’ attempts to make war bride weddings into memorable and happy times, despite the ongoing war which limited the extravagance of these days, is fondly recalled by these women who reminisce about their pasts, an indication of how important memories of these strong women were for war brides.

### **“We Never Went Hungry,” Memories of Women’s Roles in the Wartime Kitchen**

Although women were still primarily responsible for creating nourishing and appetizing meals for their families during the war years, this did not mean that the social structure which encouraged women to stay in the kitchen while men worked out of the home remained unchanged. War brides that I interviewed served in the air force, army and navy.<sup>43</sup> Others volunteered through groups such as the Red Cross or the Women’s Voluntary Services (WVS), or were called up to do war work. Rather than staying home, war brides—along with their mothers—were told to get out of the house to do their part

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<sup>40</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 27:03.

<sup>41</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:32.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 15:38.

<sup>43</sup> Edna served in the army, Doris, Nancy, Edith and Jackie served in the air force, and Mavis was in the navy.

for the war effort. This new sense of duty which encouraged women's work outside the home resulted in a shift in traditional gender roles and also in the family structure. For instance, families did not always live together during the war years. Nancy's mother worked as a nurse in Kendal during the war and therefore had to live away from her husband and children who were in Liverpool, while Mavis' younger sister was evacuated with her school during the war and also had to live away from her family.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the disruptions that the war caused, people still tried to maintain some sort of stability in their lives, and traditional meal patterns were one small way in which they were able to do this. In her study of Mennonite refugee women, Marlene Epp argues that "[t]he regularity of eating is a fundamental rite that maintains the structure of daily life even when there is disruption in other aspects of routine."<sup>45</sup> The reality that this mindset was indeed dominant in wartime British society is evident through the Emergency Feeding Systems established during the war, which catered to victims of air raids who were suffering from emotional shock.<sup>46</sup> For those who had lost their homes, or had experienced utility failure, Emergency Meal Centers provided a cooking facility where one could go to prepare meals. The Queen's Messenger Convoys were also an essential part of air raid aftermath. Immediately after an air raid this group would arrive with tea and light snacks for the victims; contributing both psychological and material aid.<sup>47</sup> The reality that food could bring about a sense of normalcy, a feeling that despite the chaotic confusion of war, there was still something sturdy to fall back on, is strongly

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<sup>44</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 9:37.

<sup>45</sup> Marlene Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History* eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 324.

<sup>46</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

indicated through these services. In this way, the provision of warm meals—especially hot, freshly baked bread—and clean drinking water during times of emergency were equally as important as restoring electricity, gas and water to victims.<sup>48</sup> The consumption of comfort foods—such as freshly baked bread, which is often mentally linked to motherly love, warmth and reassurance—provided psychological reassurance to those who experienced traumatic events.

Evidence of this link between food and normalcy also arose in interviews. Edna remembers how her mother would always have a hot meal waiting at home for her, even during the air raids when the family would have to spend much time in their shelter: “My mother, bless her heart, would cook a hot supper and take it down and try and keep it warm between two plates. Well if I got home within the hour it was not too bad, but if I got home two hours later it had gotten awful cold, but we ate it anyway.”<sup>49</sup> By trying to maintain the tradition of providing her children with a warm meal, Edna’s mother salvaged some feeling of stability which the war had disrupted. This stability was not only intended for Edna, who could come home to a prepared meal, as she would have in the pre-war days, but also for her mother, who was able to reinforce her traditional role as provider of food for her family, for “[w]hen women could no longer provide adequate nourishment, their primary role as caregiver was undermined and an important sense of gender identity called into question.”<sup>50</sup>

By maintaining their identities as mothers and the providers of food, many British women brought stability both to their families and to themselves through reinforcement

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<sup>48</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 153.

<sup>49</sup> Edna Eddy, Interview with Author, September 28, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 9:13.

<sup>50</sup> Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback,” 335.

of their understandings of themselves as someone needed by others. Their children saw them in this way as well, as is evident in memories of mothers as women who would sacrifice anything for their children, and through stories which continually repeat the mantra that despite hard times, they made it through. In reminiscing about her mother, Hilda asserts: “I admire her for the way she stuck to it and kept us all together...we never went hungry.”<sup>51</sup> Muriel makes a similar comment: “A ration maybe was two pork chops for a bunch of us and to try and stretch that...I can remember just having mashed potatoes and cabbage and a sausage and that was a meal, you know. But we never starved, we still managed.”<sup>52</sup> The increasing rarity of fruit, meat, white bread, sugar and other foods which were available before the war years meant that working within the limitations of rationing, British housewives struggled to make the most out of the few supplies they did have, as war bride memories reflect. Hilda remembers how her mother could make a roast last over several meals: “Roast on Sunday, and then a bit more on Monday, and then you’d stretch it out to Tuesday and then you would boil the bones to make soup!”<sup>53</sup>

Although many women worked outside of the home to contribute to the war effort, women were told that they could “do their bit” from inside the home as well, fighting the battle for victory from the Kitchen Front.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the disruption of daily life that the war caused, women remained primarily responsible for domestic duties such as cooking meals for their families. Relying on what they did have available to them, housewives managed to feed the nation, which was not an easy task, as meals

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<sup>51</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:44.

<sup>52</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:59:40.

<sup>53</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 15:20.

<sup>54</sup> Gardiner, “The Kitchen Front,” 156.

prepared at home tested women's resourcefulness both in the kitchen and in the market.<sup>55</sup> As a way of doing their part for the war effort, women were encouraged to do their best with the little food they did have: "With shortages of her staple ingredients, and untried and sometimes unknown substitutes and ersatz food all that was available, most housewives needed new maps for this culinary wasteland."<sup>56</sup> War brides, when recalling their mother's meals, frequently marvel at their innovation and ability to create something out of nothing. Nancy fondly remembers her mother's soups during the war: "...the butcher would take out the bones, you see from the pig, and you could buy the bones to make stock, to make soup. And my mother made the *loveliest* pots of soup; it just had everything in it."<sup>57</sup> When meat supplies became scarce, some housewives relied upon other proteins, such as oxtail or pigeon.<sup>58</sup> Muriel remembers her mother serving rabbit to Muriel's unsuspecting future husband:

So my mother cooked this rabbit, so I didn't know this, so when we came home we all sat down for supper and then Syd said, that was the most delicious meal I've had in a long, long time, and he said, what was it? And my mom said, chicken. And he accepted it.<sup>59</sup>

While most basic foods were supplied through the rationing system, bread and potatoes were two staples in the British diet that were not rationed during the war years; hence, they were greatly encouraged as nutritious and filling alternatives to other less-readily available foods.<sup>60</sup> Edith remembers relying on these foods for sustenance: "Often we'd cook everything either with bread or potatoes, because you didn't have the meat and

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<sup>55</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 159.

<sup>56</sup> Gardiner, "The Kitchen Front," 160.

<sup>57</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 1, 38:46

<sup>58</sup> Spencer, "Food For All," 316.

<sup>59</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 21:10.

<sup>60</sup> Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 325.

the cheese and the eggs or anything else.”<sup>61</sup> In addition to serving un-rationed foods to fill up their families, British housewives were also encouraged to rely upon substitute products, including powdered egg and flour-based milk substitutes.<sup>62</sup> Although they were lacking in taste and often offered little nutrients, these substitutes were plentiful, and therefore their use was promoted.<sup>63</sup> Audrey remembers that although other foods were stringently allocated, powdered egg was available in abundance: “[W]hat we did have was *loads* of powdered egg. Powdered egg and onions! We cooked onions. Fried onions and powdered egg if we were hungry—usually had in the evening.”<sup>64</sup>

While women were still largely held responsible for feeding their families, the fact that they often worked outside the home led to some extra help being offered. During the war years the government took a more prominent role within what was previously the private lives of British citizens. The “Milk in Schools Scheme,” for example, which began in 1934, ensured that children had at least a minimal amount of calcium in their diets.<sup>65</sup> In an attempt to remedy potential diet deficiencies due to evacuation and the increasing call-up of women, the “School Meals System” was expanded to make certain that school children consumed enough protein, despite rations.<sup>66</sup> Although mothers may have still safeguarded their identities as providers for their families, government-instituted systems such as these helped to ensure that children were getting the necessary nutrients.

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<sup>61</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:09:55.

<sup>62</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 168.

<sup>63</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time: Food Control 1939-1945*, 50.

<sup>64</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:27.

<sup>65</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time: Food Control 1939-1945*, 61.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Women were also being coached on how to provide their families with adequate nourishment through various sources produced by the Ministry of Food, which hired a team of dieticians and cooking specials to supply advice to the public through advertisements, films and broadcasts.<sup>67</sup> Short twenty to thirty-second films called “Food Flashes,” which explained details of the ration system and how to use rationed food most effectively, were examples of such public education. The Ministry of Food also employed home economist Marguerite Patten during the Second World War who provided stumped housewives with ideas for how to turn their meager rations into nourishing and satisfying meals.<sup>68</sup> Providing an answer to the vexing daily dilemma of what to make, Patten became well known in households across Britain, armed with a spatula in one hand and recipes for SPAM Fritters and Eggless Sponge Pudding in the other. As a woman who (presumably) herself knew about the difficulties British wives and mother were having in the kitchen, Patten proved to be a good go-between in translating government information into something more amenable for public consumption—specifically aimed at targeting other British wives and mothers. Patten’s efforts, along with other public education materials dispensed during this time period, indicate the assumption that with proper nutritional education, Britain’s food shortage would prove to be little more than an inconvenience for those with a sweet tooth, rather than a major public crisis.

With names such as “Woolton Pie” (named after the Minister of Food, Lord Woolton), “Turnip Top Salad,” and “Pathfinder Pudding,” war time recipes had a

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<sup>67</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time: Food Control 1939-1945*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> William Skidelsky, “The Low Point of our Culinary History, But This Was Spam’s Finest Hour,” *New Statesman* 132.4635 (April 2003): 56.

tendency to sound much better than they actually tasted.<sup>69</sup> Despite good intentions and inventiveness, wartime meals were not always eagerly gobbled down. Also, housewives were not always ecstatic about trying new recipes, such as those suggested by the Ministry of Food and Marguerite Patten.<sup>70</sup> While housewives may have sometimes relied upon the recipes suggested to them by the Ministry of Food and Patten, the difficulty of gathering the necessary ingredients coupled with the chaos of everyday life in wartime often meant that a basic and easy to prepare meal was more feasible than something complex. This fact comes to light in the disjuncture between propaganda of the time and war bride memories of what they actually ate. None of the war brides that I interviewed made any mention of their or their mother's reliance on these sources. These silences suggest that government-issued propaganda had little actual sway in what some women did make for their families. Rather than relating memories of their mother's rendition of "Potato Pastry," most war brides talked about the simple foods they ate during the war years. Hilda, for instance, laughs while recalling the monotony of eating beans on toast day after day.<sup>71</sup> For a quick meal to bring to work, Edith would pack a less-than-appetizing lard or beet sandwich.<sup>72</sup>

Although food propaganda produced during the war years greatly encouraged the education of citizens so that they could make informed decisions regarding their diets, few war brides talked specifically about their health in relation to nutritional choices. This may also indicate that the government's increasing intrusion within kitchens around

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<sup>69</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 157.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 15:06.

<sup>72</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:06:32.

the country may not have been as effective as intended.<sup>73</sup> Still, the housewives' role in feeding the nation was emphasized by propaganda of the time to be of primary importance. A report on wartime food shortages titled *How Britain was Fed in War Time: Food Control 1939-1945* frequently mentions the British housewife and her roles in the home, thereby reinforcing the belief that the home, and specifically the kitchen, was where she belonged. In the foreword, a thank you is extended to these women, stating that "of all the people who have contributed to the success of food control, the housewife has done her share with as little fuss and as much efficiency as anyone."<sup>74</sup> While this note may show genuine gratitude towards women's roles in making do during the difficult war years, there is an undertone which suggests a celebration of the housewife's docility. Despite the somewhat blurred boundaries of her duties, women were still clearly defined as those responsible for work within the home, as throughout this report the housewife is referred to as the one in charge of these roles. She was responsible for planning the food budget, as is made clear in a section that analyzes "the division of the housewife's expenditure between rationed and unrationed foods,"<sup>75</sup> ensuring her family's health by making informed decisions on which foods to purchase based on vitamin and mineral content information,<sup>76</sup> and for preparing these carefully selected goods into nutritious meals for her family.<sup>77</sup> While women were more frequently working outside of the home during the war years, the gendered division of labour which defined their roles within the home was still not to be entirely disregarded. Many women took on the double duty of

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<sup>73</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 112.

<sup>74</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time: Food Control 1939-1945*, ii.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

working in factories loading shells and then coming home to prepare dinner for their families.<sup>78</sup>

At a time when so many young women were leaving their traditional roles in the home as they were called up for war work or decided to join the services, a generation of women emerged who did not get as much cooking experiences as their mothers did growing up. Added to this equation was the fact that, as Vera told me, “There wasn’t much to cook, my dear, in war time. Very little.”<sup>79</sup> The traditional system through which a mother passes down her cooking knowledge and skill to her daughter was disrupted due first to the scarcity of food during the Great Depression, and then to the rationing system introduced during the Second World War. As Edith explained: “Mothers couldn’t teach their girls how to cook, you know, with those rations.”<sup>80</sup> The lack of food available due to rationing greatly limited the extent to which experimental or practice cooking could be done, as Betty remembers:

I never learned to cook. My mother was a fantastic cook. And of course during the war everything was rationed and there was no way she could let me cook and ruin it and we’d have nothing to eat! Or we’d have something awful to eat! So she wasn’t going to risk that.<sup>81</sup>

Food shortages frequently meant that women’s traditional roles in the kitchen, which in the past resulted in a young women’s intimate knowledge of how to de-bone a duck or make pastry dough, were largely de-emphasized due to the disruption caused by the war.

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<sup>78</sup> Laura Schenone, *A Thousand Years Over a Hot Stove: A History of American Women Told Through Food, Recipes, and Remembrances* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2003), 306.

<sup>79</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 46:42.

<sup>80</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:06:49.

<sup>81</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 12:36.

## Digging for Victory: The “Resourceful, Disciplined and Well Managed” Citizen<sup>82</sup>

The food shortages which resulted in the institution of the rationing system in Britain during the war years were largely due to the fact that in 1939 the country produced only 30 percent of its own food, while the rest was imported.<sup>83</sup> Changes had to be made once the war broke out, and everyone was expected to do their part in order to ensure that the nation was well nourished. Eggs, milk, and bananas were dehydrated into a powder to conserve shipping space, while boneless meats such as Spam and corned beef were imported more frequently due to their higher percentage of edible product per pound.<sup>84</sup>

The Ministry of Food educated housewives on how to use rations not only to help alleviate problems caused by a shortage of food, but also to cultivate a collective sense of British identity:

Using radio, newspapers and cinema to foreground food as an integral element of the wartime British experience, the MoF [Ministry of Food] encouraged Britons to understand their diet not only in communal terms but also as an integral element of the war effort.<sup>85</sup>

Joyce remembers living with a couple in Suffolk after being evacuated with her school during the war, and how much the family relied on home-grown foods for sustenance: “What we got for dinner usually was blackberry and apple sandwich. [Laughs] They picked them, because there wasn’t much fruit.”<sup>86</sup> Growing one’s own

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<sup>82</sup> Mancur Jr. Olson, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1963), 147.

<sup>83</sup> Spencer, “Food For All,” 313.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Farmer, “Food Fight! The Cinema of Consumption in Wartime Britain,” *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History* 12 (2008): 1.

<sup>86</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 4:20.

produce during the war was greatly encouraged to provide people with more vitamin A and C, both of which were lacking due to the reduced amount of fruit in people's diets.<sup>87</sup> Audrey remembers how rare fruit was, and how much of a fuss was made over certain fruits when they did appear: "[O]ne banana raised 75 pounds! It was just one silly little banana, but it was just that we hadn't seen them."<sup>88</sup> Like the family that Joyce was staying with, Audrey's family also grew their own produce: "[T]he only real fruit we had was we had one apple tree, because we had a fairly large garden and we had an apple tree and my mother used to store the apples and that's about the only fruit we got."<sup>89</sup> Hilda also recalls eating many vegetables during the war out of her grandfather's garden: "[H]e had about a half an acre of land so he had a nice big garden, so he used to come in once a week and bring us veggies out of the garden."<sup>90</sup> In addition to eating their home-grown foods fresh, British housewives were also encouraged to preserve foods obtained from their gardens. Around two thirds of British housewives tried their hand at jam making during the war years.<sup>91</sup>

The idea that one was contributing to the war effort through their willingness to grow their own produce is evident from the name, "victory gardens," given to these plots. By tying loyalty to the nation together with producing one's own fruits and vegetables, the common civilian's most everyday and basic activities such as collecting food became a politicized action, despite the fact that this was often done out of necessity: "And we didn't have...that's why everybody grew a little victory garden, or

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<sup>87</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:11.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 15:16.

<sup>90</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 15:03.

<sup>91</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 157.

they were supposed to try to grow their food because they wouldn't get it otherwise, I mean the shops were bare."<sup>92</sup>

A "Dig for Victory," campaign was run by the Ministry of Agriculture during the war years. This catchy slogan was repeated frequently in an attempt to encourage civilians to produce as much of their own fruits and vegetables as was possible.<sup>93</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture also encouraged the British to keep rabbits in their backyards for meat, and poultry to produce eggs. Edna remembers having a hen named Henrietta which the family kept during the war:

[S]he gave us an egg every day. Well, we had her...oh, must have been over a year. And we put her in the air raid shelter. And we put straw and stuff down for her and she was all by herself and we blocked the entrance so she couldn't go flying the coop. And we'd go down and talk to her and what not...So whenever there's an air raid, at first we thought, what about Henrietta, you see...and my mother would say to me, you go and check to see if Henrietta is alright...so I plumber out and I go and look around and I'd say, you there Henrietta? And she'd go *squawk, squawk* and I'd say fine, yes, you're alright.<sup>94</sup>

Eventually the day came when Henrietta was too old to provide eggs and had to be slaughtered. Edna, when recalling the story had a quiet, sober tone in her voice: "My mother cooked that chicken the next day, nobody ate it. Of course every time we looked at it we thought of Henrietta. We never did eat it...never had Henrietta."<sup>95</sup> Since chickens were fed imported grain, they were almost completely eliminated from British diets during the war years, so Edna and her family's refusal to eat what at the time would have

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<sup>92</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:47.

<sup>93</sup> Olson, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, 123.

<sup>94</sup> Edna Eddy, Interview with Author, September 28, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 22:41.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 23:07.

been considered a rare delicacy is even more telling of the emotional attachment they had with this animal.<sup>96</sup>

Patriotic language that linked the average civilian with the war effort through phrases such as “victory garden,” or “digging for victory” also emerged in the term “national loaf.” This name was given to wartime bread which was hearty and dark wholemeal bread.<sup>97</sup> The raised extraction rate<sup>98</sup> of flour to eighty-five percent accounted for this courser bread, which contained higher amounts of iron, riboflavin and nicotinic acid.<sup>99</sup> Overall, the ‘national loaf’ is not remembered positively by war brides. While Stella simply stated that “the bread was terrible,”<sup>100</sup> other war brides showed their dislike of the hard brown wartime bread by their many references to their excitement of first encountering soft white bread aboard ships destined for Canada.<sup>101</sup>

Much of the literature regarding food usage which was made available to British housewives during the war years sought to educate through the language of practicality and patriotism.<sup>102</sup> By steaming vegetables rather than boiling them, heating more than one dish in the oven at a time, and leaving potatoes un-peeled for cooking, housewives were being provided with kitchen tips which promised to both nourish their families and win the war for their country. However, such tips were not always welcome, as “[t]his

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<sup>96</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 162.

<sup>97</sup> Gardiner, “The Kitchen Front,” 147.

<sup>98</sup> Flour made from all parts of the grain has an extraction rate of 100% and results in very dense, dark and wholesome breads.

<sup>99</sup> Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 326.

<sup>100</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 50:51.

<sup>101</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 1, 10:21; Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 30:23; Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 41:10.

<sup>102</sup> Gardiner, “The Kitchen Front,” 159.

advice was often patronizing in tone and perhaps little more than common sense, especially for housewives used to managing on a tight budget.”<sup>103</sup> Despite this, women were continually told to do their best from the Kitchen Front in the name of Victory. By nourishing the nation and keeping morale high with tasty meals, mothers and wives were called upon to make their contribution by embracing their traditional gender roles in the home, for the fear was that if they didn’t, the result would be a fractured family, and—ultimately—a fractured nation.<sup>104</sup>

Propaganda campaigns which encouraged the British housewife to do her part did not skirt around the consequences of what would happen if she did not; she was told that, “By saving food you may be saving lives.”<sup>105</sup> The message in this slogan is that by refusing to save food, the housewife was allowing—or perhaps even contributing to—the deaths of allies. Because shipping men and material for war was given priority over using vessels to bring in food, Britain’s food imports were cut in half from before the war to 1944.<sup>106</sup> Everyone was encouraged to do their bit for the war effort—even through the kinds of food that they chose. The following poem, published in Marguerite Patten’s cookbook, *Feeding the Nation*, reinforces this point:

*I saw three ships a-sailing  
But not with food for me  
For I am eating home-grown foods  
To beat the enemy  
And ships are filled with guns instead*

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<sup>103</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 111.

<sup>104</sup> Gardiner, “The Kitchen Front,” 157.

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Food, *Wise Housekeeping in War-time*, as quoted in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 110.

<sup>106</sup> Gardiner, “The Kitchen Front,” 144.

*To bring us Victory*<sup>107</sup>

Although dissension was not unheard of, the nation was encouraged to band together in the fight for Victory. By growing their own produce, making their own jams, and raising chickens for eggs, housewives led the nation in demonstrating the new character which was encouraged during the war, one of a “resourceful, disciplined and well managed” citizen.<sup>108</sup>

War brides’ memories of their mothers often portray this “ideal” citizen of the war years—she who thoughtfully provided her family with healthy and nutritious foods, thereby contributing to the national cause. Betty remembers her mother’s resourceful use of tinned sausage meat. Although the can consisted of a very small portion of meat and a large lump of fat, Betty’s mother made do with what she had, using the fat to make delicious savory pies for her family.<sup>109</sup> Stella also remembers how her mother carefully used all parts of their garden vegetables rather than throw anything away:

I can remember my mother making soup in the summertime with—we had some fresh peas, green peas and she—there was a recipe in the paper to make soup from the pea pods and put it all through a sieve and then thickened it you know, and a little bit of salt and pepper—that was soup.<sup>110</sup>

In a pinch, some housewives even had to resort to using liquid paraffin in the place of fat for cooking, due to the lean rations.<sup>111</sup>

The importance of the housewives’ role in setting an example for the nation was emphasized by the government, who made clear that “housewifery was no longer

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<sup>107</sup> From *Feeding the Nation* by Marguerite Patten OBE, published by Hamlyn. Found online at <http://www.yourdiscovery.com/web/world-war-2/home-front-britain/home-front-britain-galleries/recipes/?gallid=3150&gallimgid=3730>.

<sup>108</sup> Olson, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, 147.

<sup>109</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 14:23.

<sup>110</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 10:13.

<sup>111</sup> Gardiner, “The Kitchen Front,” 148.

regarded as a private concern but rather as a central component of the war effort.”<sup>112</sup> In this way, the roles of housewives were brought further into public view, being professionalized in the process. Representing role models, housewives were given a sense of power as citizens of the nation, a position which was previously denied them: “As a result of women’s principal role in the austerity policy, domesticity became a site of political and economic power and a basis of female citizenship.”<sup>113</sup> The paradox is that while housewives were being told that they had the power to influence the result of the war, they were at the same time limited in their power as the government and other groups were suddenly upon them with constant advice and reminders to steam vegetables rather than boil them, to fill their families with un-rationed potatoes and bread, and to give their children a daily dose of cod liver oil. By politicizing housewifery in this way, the government was able to assert more control in the home, penetrating private residences through information dispersed by radio shows such as *The Kitchen Front*, pamphlets, posters and brochures.

### **Presentation of the Self**

When asked generally about life in Britain during the Second World War, many war brides immediately recall the food situation and the struggle of life under the rationing system. While memories of difficult times may be those most frequently relayed by women who lived through this time period, much of the literature which examines life in Britain under rationing and food restrictions during the Second World War insists firstly that no major changes were made to the British diet during the war

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<sup>112</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 99.

<sup>113</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 100.

years,<sup>114</sup> and that overall people were generally more healthy under the rationing system than they were in the years before the war.<sup>115</sup> Putting a positive spin on the rationing systems generally, John Burnett argues that the system allowed homemakers a sense of independence and the freedom to make their own choices when selecting food.<sup>116</sup> Burnett also stresses that the food situation in war time Britain resulted in improved statistics for infant mortality rates and children's health generally, as well as reducing the gap between the diets of middle and lower-class families.<sup>117</sup> In contrast to Burnett, Colin Spencer makes reference to the housewife's "illusion of freedom and choice" under the rationing system. Despite Spencer's skepticism, many scholars agree with Burnett's assertion that the rationing system benefited the British public. In *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, Mancur Olson repeatedly makes clear his belief that the British were in better health during the war than they were before it.<sup>118</sup> Although Derek Oddy states that the diet of the average British citizen changed very little during the war years,<sup>119</sup> he also suggests that there may not be enough evidence for us to know if wartime food was actually healthier.<sup>120</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's *Austerity in Britain* also speaks to the issues of wartime diets, muddying the waters of what some previous scholars may have considered a straight-forward topic by suggesting that rationing affected British citizens' daily lives to varying degrees. While Zweiniger-Bargielowska discusses, for instance, the

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<sup>114</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 158.

<sup>115</sup> Olson, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, 147; Spencer, "Food for All," 317.

<sup>116</sup> Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 264.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>118</sup> Olson, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, 129

<sup>119</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 158.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

relative ineffectiveness of food propaganda intended to educate the public on nutrition,<sup>121</sup> she also insinuates that it was not only those from the lower classes who benefited most from changed eating habits during the war.<sup>122</sup> Through this book, Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that the food situation in wartime Britain was not definitively better or worse for human health. Rather, she shows how complex the situation was, fraught with ambiguities, benefiting people in some ways and disadvantaging them in others.<sup>123</sup> Recent literature on the topic tends to propose a more complex understanding of the situation, rather than the somewhat cut-and-dried analyses of Olson and Burnett.

It is interesting to compare these assessments against the memories of war brides. While most war brides admit that they consumed many vegetables, whole grain bread and few fats during the war years, their emphasis seems to be less on remembering this as a time of good health and more as a time of hunger, un-fulfillment and lack of adequate nourishment. One war bride I interviewed commented on the fact that the British were likely more healthy during the war years;<sup>124</sup> however, most, like Audrey, recount times of famine, or just barely managing to get by: “[W]e had nothing of that in Britain, we were absolutely just on the point of just enough food to sustain us and that was it.”<sup>125</sup> The reality that general health of the population varied depending on time and place, as expressed in the more recent literature on this time period, is likely to be more fully

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<sup>121</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 112.

<sup>122</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 133.

<sup>123</sup> For instance, although children’s health may have improved during the war years, Zweiniger-Bargielowska explains that mothers frequently had a more difficult time feeding adolescents under the rationing system. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 102.

<sup>124</sup> Upon reflecting on the food the British ate during wartime rationing, Doris remarked that it was “probably...very good for you!” Doris Michaux, Interview with Author, September 16, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 15:13.

<sup>125</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 55:14.

representative of the actual experiences of these women. It must be kept in mind, however, that memories of discomfort and hunger would be more easily remembered than times when food supplies were sufficient. War brides are more likely to talk about something out of the ordinary that disrupted daily life rather than something that was adequate and usual.

It is also important to remember that when the war started in 1939 many war brides were still relatively young children who may not have been completely aware of the food situation in Britain at the time.<sup>126</sup> It must also be taken into account that these women are recalling events which happened seventy years ago. While it is the case that memories fade over time, most war brides have shared their stories with many others and may have intentionally or unintentionally grafted bits and pieces of other stories onto their own. Still, memories of their difficulty surviving off of the scant rations the British were allowed during the war seem to be common amongst war brides recounting this time. There is no doubt that no matter how healthy the British population became during the war, the lack of food was not considered entirely beneficial. The report on the situation, *How Britain Was Fed In War Time: Food Control 1939-1945*, makes reference to the fact that all was not well during the scarce war years, as the introduction indicates: “The foregoing paragraphs set out briefly the bald facts of Britain’s wartime shortage of food. How the food problem was dealt with and how the hardships it entailed were mitigated are described in the following pages.”<sup>127</sup> Describing the situation as a “food problem” and referring to the “hardships” of the era speaks to the belief that the British may not have been as nutritionally stable as previously implied.

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<sup>126</sup> Six of the fifteen war brides I interviewed were between the ages of 12 and 15 in September 1939.

<sup>127</sup> *How Britain Was Fed in War Time*, 6.

Despite the fact that many people of the lower classes were eating better than they had before the war years,<sup>128</sup> and that rates of tooth decay, heart disease and tuberculosis decreased at this time,<sup>129</sup> war bride memories focus on the inadequacy of the British diet during the war years: “During the war...everything was rationed, *I mean rationed.*”<sup>130</sup> As Joyce succinctly explained, “[T]here wasn’t any food.”<sup>131</sup> Edith remembers how bare the shops were: “In England there were no goods or things in store windows, during the war. They had a calendar or a picture of the king and queen. Or they had a plant, or something. There was nothing in store windows.”<sup>132</sup> Talk of wartime shortages even went beyond lack of food and extended into other aspects of everyday life: “[W]e were so devastated in Britain! Even our clothes...we had to mend our stockings with a little hook. We didn’t...we were very lacking *with everything*—very restricted.”<sup>133</sup>

Although most war brides have vivid memories of the difficulties they and their families experienced during the war years due to food shortages, they do not talk of experiencing absolute destitution: “[W]e never went without stuff in our...we always had enough food, we were never short of food.”<sup>134</sup> Perhaps due to the immense pressure placed on women to try and maintain “normal” patterns for meals in a very abnormal time, war brides I interviewed tended to predominantly tell stories of their mothers’ incredible ability to cope in these days of reduced quantity and quality of food.

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<sup>128</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 164.

<sup>129</sup> Spencer, “Food For All,” 317.

<sup>130</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 35:01.

<sup>131</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 30:51.

<sup>132</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:10:17.

<sup>133</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:01:19.

<sup>134</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:12:14.

Contrary to the memories of just scraping by, there were a few war bride memories that illustrate rare moments of abundance and decadence in the heart of what was largely a time of scarcity and austerity in Britain. Nancy very clearly recalled two memories of lavish meals she was treated to during the war. Upon hearing about a small farmhouse which was serving meals, Nancy and her future husband biked out to the location to sample the much-talked-about cuisine. The way in which Nancy excitedly recalls this meal seventy years later proves the impact it had on her: “two fresh fried eggs with these lovely fried potatoes on the side and *oh they were so good!* And then she’d [the waitress] come along with a big dish of stewed plums, thick cream as well.”<sup>135</sup> Nancy’s second vivid memory of rich and decadent food she ate during the war was a meal served to her by her husband’s Scottish relatives who were in the meat market business: “And we went home that night—and I could see it now—there was a lovely roast of beef. *Oh, and the flavor!* You know, you never saw roast beef.”<sup>136</sup> The fact that Nancy has retained these few vivid memories of points during the war when there was an abundance—however brief—of delicious food speaks to the reality that these cases were exceptions to the norm. The reason that they stand out so clearly in her memory is because they were so different from the daily life of making do or doing without that the British became so accustomed to during the war. In relaying these stories of “good times” through happy memories of the sumptuous and greatly missed foods they ate, Nancy is also telling us something about the other times, the times when her family had to live off one egg a person a week, or go for weeks without getting meat. Through these stories it is as if Nancy is both saying that the experiences themselves were unusual for their time—

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<sup>135</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 1, 42:52.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, Recording 2, 11:20.

considering that the British had become accustomed to war time austerity—but usual in that they brought back memories of the days before the war, the days when roast beef, that pre-war Sunday family favourite, was not such a rare and precious sight.

Marlene Epp's theory that food is able to restore a sense of normalcy in times of chaos and disruption<sup>137</sup> may also help to explain why, when questioned about their experience during the war years in Britain, many war brides focus so much on stories about life under rationing, the availability of foods, and the ways in which they and their families managed to get enough to eat. By situating their own experiences in terms of concrete examples of how daily life was affected by the war, war brides are able to tell their stories of hardships, grieving, lost loved ones, and times of laughter through a medium that was central to their everyday lives—obtaining and consuming food. Through these stories, as Epp argues referring to Mennonite women refugees, “[e]motions of fear, pain, sadness, and despair elicited by events in an immigrant women's life do not disappear, but can be veiled behind detailed descriptions of ‘what we ate that day’.”<sup>138</sup> Although they presented many memories of hunger and want during the war years, most war brides convey their stories in a way that emphasizes their family's ability to successfully navigate this difficult time period. Joyce's memories of food scarcity, for instance, tend to be presented in a positive light. Rather than focusing only on the difficulties of living under the rationing system, she instead talks about how it was “an experience” or “an adventure”:

But it was an experience and because we were so hungry my parents used to try and come down and visit us on a weekend and give us some food because we were so embarrassed about it, we used to go out somewhere in the country and

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<sup>137</sup> Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback,” 324.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

they'd bring a loaf of bread and some cheese, because they didn't have much food either in the war! [*Laughs*]<sup>139</sup>

Despite the fact that she is remembering a time of hunger, want, embarrassment, and a dislocated family in times of war, Joyce tells this story in a positive way, both laughing about the past and writing it off as “an experience.” By doing this, Joyce is able to present herself as that ideal British citizen in wartime, “resourceful, disciplined and well managed,”<sup>140</sup> someone equipped to handle the harsh reality of war. In emphasizing their ability to endure, war brides are able to use these stories as a way to increase their own sense of agency.<sup>141</sup> Rather than presenting themselves as victims of their circumstances, war brides can cast themselves as almost heroic in their ability to successfully navigate the treacherous waters of Britain's wartime food shortages through their positive stories of difficult times.

Upon reflecting on wartime experiences with food, war brides often compare their situations with the situations of others. Occasionally, this comparison takes the form of describing how “lucky” one was, in comparison to other peoples' situations. While serving in the air force, Doris spent some time staying with a host family in Gloucester. Her memories of this experience focus on the cooking abilities of the hostess: “[W]e had actually very good meals because she was able to get more on her [ration] card because she had two people staying there, so I guess you could say I was very lucky because she was a very good cook too—a very, very good cook.”<sup>142</sup> Realizing that many people lived

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<sup>139</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 4:28.

<sup>140</sup> Olson, *The Economics of Wartime Shortage*, 147.

<sup>141</sup> Pamela Sugiman, “Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29.3 (2004): 382.

<sup>142</sup> Doris Michaux, Interview with Author, September 16, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 15:18.

through the war on bread and potatoes, Doris recognizes that in comparison to others, she was fortunate to have an adequate quality and quantity of food available to her.

This sort of memory in relation to the experiences and stories of others is described by Pamela Sugiman as “memory relationality.”<sup>143</sup> By befriending the shop keeper, housewives of the war years were more likely to receive favors such as difficult to obtain items.<sup>144</sup> Vera remembers how regular customers were able to get large tins of canned meat from the butcher.<sup>145</sup> Living in close proximity to the butcher shop proved useful for Vera and her family during the difficult war years: “[W]e were two floors up and we often got a bit of extra meat.”<sup>146</sup> By comparing her stories to those told by others, Vera is able to recognize that she and her family were fortunate to get extra portions at a time when food was so strictly rationed, and many others were only left dreaming of one day again eating steak.

Similarly, war brides may also compare their own personal memories with the meta-narratives surrounding a time period or event. When I asked Audrey about food during the war, she provided me with the “official” history of the era: “[Y]ou see, Britain couldn’t sustain itself during the war because we had hundreds of thousands of troops, we were full everywhere you went there were troop settlements all over. And so they all had to be fed.”<sup>147</sup> War brides relating stories of their experiences within the grand narrative of this time period are able to “weave their *own* accounts in and out of the official discourse.

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<sup>143</sup> Sugiman, “Memories of Internment,” 373.

<sup>144</sup> Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food*, 170.

<sup>145</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 14:32.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 14:37.

<sup>147</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:41.

[original emphasis]”<sup>148</sup> Knowing that food shortages are often discussed by other war brides likely influences how these women choose to tell their own stories. This does not discredit their memories, but rather allows us a new way of understanding how they choose to present themselves through the stories that they relate. In positioning their own stories in relation to others—be it through these published “official” histories of the time or simply memories shared with them by other war brides—these women are able to find a starting point, a position from which their experiences were either similar or different.

In her article, ‘Food, Memory and Meaning: The Symbolic and Social Nature of Food Events,’ Deborah Lupton identifies four different types of memory: one’s own memory of personal experiences; memory of things not experienced (obtained from others); collective or social memory; and academic memory, or formal history.<sup>149</sup> From each of these different forms of memory, recollections of the same event can be expressed very differently. The traditional de-valuing of personal memory may be a reason why Audrey decided to tell of her experience through the medium of academic memory, or official history, situating her story within the grand narrative of Britain’s wartime experience. As members of a unifying group, still classified under the name “war bride,” these women have experiences that are at the same time in contention with and similar to each other. While most war brides’ stories followed the same general formula, the intricacies of their experiences vary considerably, so while they may be united on the level of sharing collective memories, their individual experiences within this collective memory are quite diverse.

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<sup>148</sup> Sugiman, “Memories of Internment,” 369.

<sup>149</sup> Deborah Lupton, “Food, Memory and Meaning: The Symbolic and Social Nature of Food Events,” *Sociological Review* 42.4 (November 1994): 667.

It is significant to consider how each of these four levels of memory affects and informs others. As discussed above, relational memory—formed through comparison of one’s own experience with the experiences of others—affects how a war bride presents recollections of her own past. Mavis, for instance, who has read her fellow war bride Ida’s diary, referred in our interview to Ida’s recollections of food.<sup>150</sup> Collective memory, which both unites and sets the parameters of the group “war brides,” allows for some diversity of experience, but ultimately represents the voices of the majority—those who followed the “typical” war bride pattern.<sup>151</sup> When telling stories of their own experiences, war brides do so with an understanding that this collective memory exists, and therefore are able to use it, along with the official history, as a foundation from which to talk about the ways that their own experiences were either similar or different. However, collective memories and official histories are not always in agreement. Although the official history of this time period—as represented in the literature reviewed above—may indicate that rationing in wartime Britain had positive results for the country’s citizens, the collective memory of war brides focuses on the negative aspects of these food shortages. Thus, we can see how varied recollections of the past exist among these different forms of memory. One constant remains: as we have seen from quotations of war brides above, discussions of food proved to be one such starting point from which these women’s unique and powerful memories of the past could be related.

### **Conclusion: Telling Stories of Hardships Through Food**

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<sup>150</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 35:47.

<sup>151</sup> She who toughed-out life in war time Britain, met and married a Canadian soldier, moved to Canada and despite initial difficulties of settling in, now calls the country home.

While gender roles were beginning to shift during the Second World War as more and more women started taking on paid work outside of the home, it was still primarily wives and mothers who were responsible for feeding their families. The housewife was not alone, however, in her role of maintaining the nation through the warm and satisfying meals that she placed on the dinner table; the government frequently leaned over her shoulder, suggesting hints and tips for “better” ways to nourish British families, as well. Despite this extra help—or even because of it—these women’s abilities to make do should not be minimized. In war brides’ memories of the past, mothers who managed to navigate their way through food shortages of the war years are frequently remembered as strong, practical and creative women.

Although war brides grew up in an era rife with wartime confusion and disorder, the sense of normalcy restored to daily life through the simple act of eating a meal speaks to the psychological importance of food. The destruction of homes, disarray of traditional gender roles, loss of loved ones and upheaval of daily life in general were realities of life in Britain during the Second World War. For those who experienced such traumatic times, “activities as basic as cooking and eating can bring relief, sometimes even humour, to personal narratives that otherwise seem to be an endless spiral of disaster.”<sup>152</sup> By situating their narratives of the difficulty of living in this time period through their discussions of the food situation, war brides are able to convey memories of this time through the very easy to discuss and yet telling medium of food, providing them with a

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<sup>152</sup> Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback,” 317.

familiar way to describe the unfamiliar and largely incomprehensible chaos of life in wartime Britain.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback," 336.

### **Chapter Three: From Spotted Dick to Maple Syrup: War Bride Experiences With Canadian Cuisine**

From the time that they stepped onto ships in Britain that would take them to Canada, war brides were greeted by white bread, cream, bananas and thick pork chops. After enduring years of strict rationing in Britain, the sight of such delicacies were vividly etched in the minds of these women who today still recall with great excitement and detail their first encounters with Canadian foods. Upon their arrival in Canada, war brides frequently found themselves responsible for the daunting task of preparing meals for husbands and children. *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, which these women received from the Canadian government while on the way to Canada, proved to be a valuable source for many who had not learned to cook in wartime Britain. It also taught much more than just how to make meatloaf. Embedded amongst recipes and cooking tips were messages regarding what it meant to be Canadian, acceptable gender roles and lessons on thrift. Much like the food propaganda produced by the British government during the war, the *Canadian Cookbook for British Brides* coached housewives on the kinds of food they should be preparing for their families: that which was both nutritious and delicious. Despite the seemingly conservative nature of the book, some transgressions could be detected. War bride reactions to such prescriptive literature of the postwar era and narratives they weave around their experiences with Canada's culinary landscape speak to the relationship between the ideal and the reality, which, as we shall soon see, did not always coalesce.

## **“I Have Never Experienced Such Meals:”<sup>1</sup> First Encounters and Collective Memory**

Over the course of her journey to Canada, Ida Prette kept a diary chronicling her experience. In the prologue to this diary, she writes: “My constant reference to food is excusable after severe rationing during six years of war.”<sup>2</sup> Ida is not alone in her vivid recollections of first encounters with food after leaving Britain. Most war brides’ stories of their trip to and arrival in Canada are laden with comments and descriptions of the seemingly lavish menus aboard ships, their shock at encountering long-missed items unavailable in Britain during the war, and the relative abundance of food compared to that in the country they had left. Muriel Clark described the shock she and other war brides who boarded the *Letitia* in June of 1945 experienced upon first seeing the meals offered on the ship: “We hadn’t seen any white rolls and any of this kind of food for...you’d just stare at it.”<sup>3</sup> In her journal, Ida described the meals served on the ship with great enthusiasm, mentioning soup, roast, chicken, potatoes, spinach, ice cream, coffee with cream, apples, oranges, cereal, eggs, bacon, toast, marmalade, fruit cocktail, corn fritters, maple nut sundae, roast lamb, lemon meringue pie, roast turkey, steak, onions, and chips among the items that she ate while on the voyage from Britain to Canada.

War brides also frequently refer to memories of food they encountered after having landed in Canada, while on trains from Halifax to their new homes. Fruit, which had been severely limited in supply in Britain during the Second World War, was one

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<sup>1</sup> Ida Prette, “My Journey to Canada: Ida Prette’s Diary,” Unpublished, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946. “I have never experienced such meals, even in our best English hotels pre-war,” 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue, np.

<sup>3</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 34:01.

type of food war brides remember being especially excited about seeing again: “We loaded that train in Halifax with fruit. All of the windowsills were loaded with tons of fruit! Oranges, bananas...everything! We were eating it constantly all the way across!”<sup>4</sup> Mavis Butlin links her memory of first meeting her husband’s parents in Moncton, Nova Scotia with memories of food: “They were a very kindly couple and took me out for a treat—a banana split—before we got to their home.”<sup>5</sup> The luxury involved in enjoying ice cream and bananas, both of which had been extremely scarce in Britain during the war years, is mentally linked, for Mavis, to meeting her in-laws for the first time. Here, food provides a basis from which Mavis’ memory of the event is conveyed. She links her in-laws’ kindness with their willingness to provide her with such a rich and extravagant dish.

Experiences of war brides varied greatly, and through hearing about these stories told in war bride clubs or written in books by or about other war brides, this group of women developed and maintained a sense of collective identity, and in turn, collective memory. By joining war bride clubs—which united women from different countries and backgrounds who shared the experience of having married Canadian soldiers—these women were able to discuss their narratives with others similar to themselves: “They formed a lasting war bride identity based on their shared experiences rather than on national or ethnic origin.”<sup>6</sup> Through this exchanging of information, war brides heard stories of women who suffered from cramped quarters in uncomfortable ships that slowly

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<sup>4</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 55:20.

<sup>5</sup> Mavis Butlin, “Play it Again Mavis: An Anthology of Memories,” Unpublished Document, October 19, 2001, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Gabrielle Fortune, “‘Mr. Jones’ Wives:’ War Brides, Marriage, Immigration and Identity Formation,” *Women’s History Review* 15.4 (September 2006): 589.

made their way to Canada, while others had a glorious time on the trip over making friends and feasting on long forgotten favorites. Some women arrived on small farms in the Prairies where they quickly had to learn to bake bread and snowshoe to the outhouse, while others found themselves living in the middle of Montreal where they needed to learn some French in order to get meat from the butcher or make friends with their neighbors.

As a group, war brides often remember experiences that they did not necessarily live, but rather have heard much about from other war brides and have therefore amalgamated as a part of their own stories. Having heard the stories of many others, these women know the somewhat formulaic script of the typical war bride experience. Shock and wonder at seeing such an abundance and variety of food on the journey to and arrival in Canada is an area where war bride scripts are often followed by those relating their own accounts. Having exchanged stories with another war bride, Ida, Mavis recognized how much of a role this excitement around food played for others:

I don't remember particularly about it being white flour and lovely food and all that, it didn't seem to...I mean now when I hear these other people...I mean I read Ida's thing, I mean she was so entranced with the food, I mean hers was all food! And I thought—well, I suppose I did...but it didn't seem to be that important to me, I don't think.<sup>7</sup>

While Mavis is aware of how other war brides' stories may differ from her own, it is still possible that these accounts affect the way she relates her own narrative, resulting, for instance, in her choice to focus more on some areas and less on others. It is likely that the stories war brides shared with me were formed from a complex mixture of their own experiences along with bits and pieces they have grafted onto their narratives from the

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<sup>7</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:21:21.

narratives of others. In re-telling one's story over and over again, it is inevitable that details will change from each re-telling, influenced in some cases by other stories war brides may have heard. These women may also end up focusing heavily on parts of the story that they know others emphasize (such as the trip to their new homes), while downplaying other sections that are frequently not given as much attention by other women (their early childhoods, for instance). In this way, each war brides' story is shaped by the stories of other women who had similar experiences, making it difficult to speculate on the degree to which war brides' narratives accurately reflect the reality of their experiences. The key is to recognize the complexity of the relationship between collective memory and individual experience, and in that understand how these two entities both inform and affect each other.

By comparing their own narratives to those of others, war brides are able to situate their experiences within the context of the larger discourse on the war bride story. The potential downside to this phenomena is the homogenization of stories and therefore the loss of memories of unique experiences as war brides attempt to fit their own experiences into that of the dominant narrative: "I think all the stories that the war brides record was the sight of white bread, butter...um, pork chops, apple sauce, and all the foods we hadn't seen in what...five years. Of course, first day out I think I was sea sick—as we all were."<sup>8</sup> By situating herself too deeply within the standard narrative of war brides' experiences, this war bride's memories are not presented so much as individual, but rather as a collective memory.

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 1, 10:45.

Marianne Debouzy discusses the idea of a shared group memory, through which “each individual memory takes its place in a group memory that does not exist by itself but lived through the whole made up of these memories that are at the same time unique and interdependent.”<sup>9</sup> The tendency to tell one’s story in relation to the stories of others is frequently, although perhaps somewhat unconsciously, a pattern followed by war brides. Studying Japanese Canadian women’s memories of internment during the Second World War, Pamela Sugiman notes how this device of constructing memory relationally affects the way women who she interviewed both told and perceived their own stories.<sup>10</sup> War brides also tend to construct memories relationally, often reflecting upon how they were fortunate compared to other stories that they had heard: “No, I was a lucky war bride, at least I felt I was one of them—at least when I hear some of the stories from the other girls. I can’t imagine going out to a toilet at forty below!”<sup>11</sup> By situating their stories within the context of the larger narrative, war brides maintain their sense of group identity and strengthen the collective memory of the group. While memories of first encounters with food on the journey to Canada were often relayed enthusiastically and with great detail, for some war brides this aspect was not as prominent as for others. Despite these differences, war brides are aware of the dominant story of their experiences, which, as we have seen, affects the way that they choose to present their own stories.

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<sup>9</sup> Marianne Debouzy, “In Search of Working Class Memory: Some Questions and a Tentative Assessment,” *History and Anthropology* 2 (1986): 271.

<sup>10</sup> Pamela Sugiman, “Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women’s Life Stories,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29.3 (2004): 373.

<sup>11</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 5:00.

### Settling in with *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*

While war brides were frequently impressed with the food offered to them on ships and trains as they made their way into Canada, their memories of food upon arriving at their new homes were also vivid. Many were welcomed by in-laws who gathered to meet and introduce their son's wife to friends, neighbors and community members. On her first night after having arrived in New Westminster, where her husband had bought a house and was working in a general store, Edna Eddy was greeted by her brother-in-law and his wife: "so they were there and cooked supper and that, knowing I wouldn't have time to cook supper and everything. And I remember she'd made chicken, and I thought, well, you couldn't go far wrong with chicken."<sup>12</sup> Audrey Waddy was also welcomed to her new home with a big meal cooked by her mother-in-law; however, it was made clear that this would be Audrey's one night off. After the initial welcoming, she was to be responsible for preparing meals for her husband, father-in-law, sister-in-law and herself:

Well when I'd come out his mother had cooked a lovely dinner, and she'd cooked some salmon. They had a whole salmon and all the family was there to meet me—he had three sisters, a little sister who was younger than me. And then she cooked this beautiful dinner and then she turned around to me and she gave me a hug and she said, lovely to see you Audrey, she said, I'm so pleased you're safely here, but I'm going home.<sup>13</sup>

It was only at this time that Audrey realized that her husband's parents were divorced, and therefore she would now be doing the cooking; the apron had been handed down to her. Audrey's husband did have a teenage sister who also lived with her father, but because Audrey entered the family as a new wife, she was now expected to follow the

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<sup>12</sup> Edna Eddy, Interview with Author, September 28, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 32:30.

<sup>13</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 58:30.

social obligations expected of her. Her greatest concern regarding the position was her lack of culinary knowledge: “I had never cooked a meal in my life! How could I? I mean I was nursing 12 hours a day [in England during the war]...never...my mother put the food on the table that we had...I hadn’t a clue!”<sup>14</sup> Despite her hesitation, Audrey dutifully accepted her new job and went down to the butcher shop on her second day in Vancouver to buy liver for dinner that night. Unsure of how much she should get, Audrey requested two ounces of liver per person and hurried home to prepare the meal: “I thought gee, what do I do with the liver? Couldn’t find any cookbooks or anything, so I just boiled it! [Laughs] I haven’t got a clue! I just boiled it and I always remember his dad, he said, Audrey, what did you do to the liver?”<sup>15</sup> After this culinary flop, Audrey’s father-in-law came to understand just how little kitchen experience his new daughter-in-law had.

Cooking for her family was one of the responsibilities expected of the British war bride who entered Canada after the Second World War. Stella soon discovered that her husband insisted that the moment he got back from work, “dinner had to be *on the table!*”<sup>16</sup> Despite the expectations they were faced with, few war brides had much knowledge or skill when it came to preparing culinary delights. The limited supply of food available in Britain during the late 1930’s into the 1940’s meant that many women were denied the opportunity to learn from their mothers how to cook a roast, make bread or bake a cake. Despite their lack of training, most of these women were determined—or instructed—to learn, and relied upon their instincts, recipe books, trial-and-error cooking or advice from in-laws, friends or neighbors.

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<sup>14</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 58:34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:02:20.

<sup>16</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:15:30.

Although Audrey had trouble finding a recipe book from which she could learn to cook liver, many war brides depended on such sources in their first few years as new wives and mothers. Stella described how despite her lack of cooking experience growing up in Scotland, she still managed to impress her mother who came to visit:

And of course, I never cooked because we never had anything to cook with! My mother thought I would never do anything, and I said oh don't worry about it mom, I can read, and I did. And when they came out in 1955 at the holiday she was quite amazed that this creature who never boiled water could put on such a fabulous meal! [*Laughs*] She said, you know, you're a really good cook! I said, remember mom, I told you I could always read the recipes!<sup>17</sup>

One of the gifts that Edith Taylor most remembers receiving for her wedding was a cookbook, through which she learned to prepare meals for her family, and even kept and used regularly until quite recently.<sup>18</sup> While some women received cookbooks as gifts at weddings, showers, or welcome parties, others bought their own. Hilda Duddridge had a hard time containing her laughter when telling me the story of how she acquired her first Canadian cookbook. At the advice of her sister-in-laws, Hilda decided that she would try canning fruit to prepare for winter—her first attempt at canning. The combination of having a hot stove going all day to boil water for sterilizing canning jars and it being a warm July day meant that the house was scorching. In the midst of rushing around to deal with the canning while at the same time keeping an eye on her young daughter, Hilda heard a knock at the door. It was a salesman who was coming around selling magazines and other useful products that caught Hilda's attention:

He's got a dictionary and an atlas and all these...and a cookbook! And I didn't have a cookbook! You know, I was only trying to do things from memory and the little cookbook they'd given us on the boat to use, and it was about that thick.

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<sup>17</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:01:30.

<sup>18</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:06:20.

[*gestures to indicate that it was very thin*] So I thought, oh I need a cookbook! So I was interested now, so he said if you get this and this and this...one was a parent magazine, so I thought, that would be interesting, ok. But then if you get this then you get the dictionary and the atlas...so I thought oh, ok. I will...And all these other things, so I made the deal with him and it came to \$24! [*Laughing*]<sup>19</sup>

While mothers in Britain during the Second World War may not have had the time or supplies to teach their daughters how to properly baste a turkey, to recognize different cuts of meat from an animal, or plan healthy and balanced meals for their families, recipe books frequently contained this—and plenty more—information. Even for those women who did manage to acquire some cooking skills growing up in England, with a new social landscape to become accustomed to—complete with different kinds of foods, different ways of measuring and different methods of preparation—cooking a meal for one’s new family in Canada could seem outright daunting. To help ease the transition, in 1945 the Minister of National War Services published the *Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, a thin, thirty-two-page booklet that provided war brides with a short and concise introduction to Canadian cooking. As “a practical form of welcome to the Canadian way of life,”<sup>20</sup> this cookbook, compiled by the Women’s Voluntary Services Division, offered a brief introduction and then proceeded to describe Canadian meal patterns, useful kitchen tools, advice on shopping for food, information on measuring, and finally, recipes. Of the thirty-two pages, the first fourteen were devoted to providing the newly Canadian wife with basic information she would find useful in order to prepare both nutritious and delicious meals for her family.

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<sup>19</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:04:50.

<sup>20</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, (Department of National War Services, 1945), np.

## A Pie Loving Nation: Leaning to be Canadian

The introduction to *The Canadian Cookbook for British Brides* pointed to a few differences these women could come across in their new Canadian homes—different types of stoves, new foods and ways to cook and serve them—but insisted that war brides not dwell on differences. Rather, the cookbook encouraged women to learn to accept these differences without too much lament for their old, familiar ways, and instead focus on the future and their task at hand—adjusting to their current situations so they could provide their families with healthy, home-cooked meals. Along with the advice offered to war brides through this cookbook came a form of cultural imperialism which raised Canadian cooking, nutrition and practices around food above the British ways war brides were accustomed to.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that war brides were encouraged not to dwell on the past and their British ways of preparing or eating food, the fact that differences existed between the two cultures is evident on every page. Constant references to “Canadians” and “Canadian ways” continually reaffirmed the dissimilarities between these and British alternatives. Canadians were presented throughout this cookbook as a pie-loving people who valued personal space, and were non-judgmental; they “are informal people, and will never criticize you for what you haven’t got.”<sup>22</sup> They “serve many dishes ‘individually,’<sup>23</sup> and

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<sup>21</sup> Franca Iacovetta and Valerie Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food,” *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 205.

<sup>22</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

frequently have the bad habit of neglecting to eat a “proper” breakfast.<sup>24</sup> It was the duty of the new wife to right this wrong with the help of her spatula and this cookbook.

The quintessential key to true Canadian identity in terms of culinary taste according to the *Canadian Cook Book for British Brides* revolved around a love for pie; as the book states on the fourth page: “it is undoubtedly Canada’s favourite dessert.”<sup>25</sup> Making pie for one’s husband reaffirmed his sense of shared identity with other Canadians: “You know, of course, how fond your husband is of ‘pie.’ In that he is like almost every other Canadian.”<sup>26</sup> While “pie” was made synonymous with “Canadian,” and recognized as an important dish war brides should quickly learn to create for their husbands, traditional British foods were generally discouraged by the cookbook: “...suet pudding you would be wise to avoid unless your man has acquired a taste for it overseas,”<sup>27</sup> or “The average Canadian dislikes boiled fresh meat almost as much as he dislikes suet pudding.”<sup>28</sup> Direct comparisons were even made between the culinary tastes of each country in some sections of book: “The type of cake Canadians like best is lighter and richer than most British cakes.”<sup>29</sup> The message here was clear—British forms of cooking would not impress the average Canadian husband. Some traditional British foods which were adopted by Canadians, however, were presented as viable options for war

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<sup>24</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

brides to cook: “A great favourite with Canadians, Tea Biscuits are usually served hot with butter and are specially [sic] good with salad meals and fruit desserts.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to Canadian husbands, even Canadian babies were to be fed a specific way as indicated by the cookbook: “three meals a day with supplementary feedings at a very young age.”<sup>31</sup> But like for the war bride herself, the book recommended that slowly introducing the British-born baby to new foods in Canada was better than plunging straight into these dishes. The wise mother would cautiously Canadianize her baby’s diet, gradually including Canadian specific foods into it. Here was a lesson both on the strength of nation and on proper gender roles—good mothers slowly but surely encouraged their children to become open to new Canadian ways.

Now that the British bride had settled into her new country and was learning Canadian recipes and ways with food, she was encouraged by the cookbook to think of herself as a Canadian: “In the fall of the year you will probably find yourself, like other Canadian wives, busy making pickles.”<sup>32</sup> In referring to the war bride as a Canadian wife, the cookbook promoted these women to identify as Canadians. At the end of the book on a page titled “Where Can I Find Out” which listed other sources of information pertaining to cooking, parenting, nutrition and rationing, this message was made clear: “You are now a Canadian and these are *your* services. Don’t hesitate to use them.”<sup>33</sup> Throughout this cookbook, war brides were encouraged to disregard their familiar British ways and adapt quickly to the way things were done in Canada, for the benefit of themselves and their families.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Despite the difficulties some war brides experienced after settling in Canada and establishing their new roles as Canadian wives and mothers, many frame stories of their first encounters with food in a comparative light, linking the bountiful amounts of luxurious food available in Canada with a sense of freedom and promise. Jackie recalls her shock at discovering just how much there was available to eat in her new homeland: “We couldn’t believe that there was enough food! They would say, do not line up for food, there will be enough for everybody there!... Ya, the food looked absolutely wonderful.”<sup>34</sup> Doris Michaux remembers her excitement of finally being able to try food in Canada that her family did not have in England: “In our house we never ate pork. And the first thing I did I remember in Canada when I came over, I said, oh, I’d like to have some pork chops!”<sup>35</sup> In this passage Doris makes a mental link between Canada and the freedom to eat whatever one wants. Audrey also had fond memories of the bounty of food that awaited her: “And when we got on board that ship...everything! All the beautiful fruit...all the sweet...the lovely cakes! Oh my, we had nothing of that in Britain, we were absolutely just on the point of just enough food to sustain us and that was it.”<sup>36</sup> Here, she contrasts the limitations of food in Britain with the freedom and abundance of food in Canada. “And there was *so much* in this country, it was just mind boggling to know that you could say, I want this, or I want that with food or fruit or...Yes, eat as much as you want.”<sup>37</sup> Audrey and Doris’ above quotations indicate their discovery in Canada of a sense of entitlement around food that had been absent in Britain during the war years. This was compounded by the fact that both women were coming

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<sup>34</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 30:31.

<sup>35</sup> Doris Michaux, Interview with Author, September 16, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 39:50.

<sup>36</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 55:05.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:30:10.

from a country that experienced very strict rationing into one that was much less stringently monitored.

The excitement with which war brides today still recall food they first encountered in Canada suggests how greatly the experience affected them. Stella's description—relayed to me amidst her bursts of laughter—aptly demonstrates just how thrilling this experience was:

“I mean, my view of Victoria...of course I thought that everybody had so much food! I ate like...as if I'd never eaten...I kept raving after I'd arrived and telling my husband, oh, this food!...We never had anything, like no sugar, everything was artificial, your taste buds...the bread was terrible and you know, for so long that you don't know the taste of something that was really wonderful! And I...of course I was just...EEEEEH FOOD! [*Laughs*] And when I came here it was just...oh this is paradise!”<sup>38</sup>

Mavis also eagerly recalled the seemingly lavish meals her father-in-law prepared for her when she first arrived in Canada as a young woman accustomed to the drudgery of war-time food: “[H]e used to fry me up these huge chunks of steak, well I'd never had steak in my life! [*Laughs*]”<sup>39</sup>

Marlene Epp has studied how Mennonite refugee women use narratives of feast and famine when describing their transition into Canada. Memories of bread and sugar—both of which are mentioned by a war bride in the passage above—represent the abundance these immigrant women felt they had encountered in their new country.<sup>40</sup>

White bread—which had been unseen in Britain since the start of the war—was one of the most striking memories war brides describing their arrival in Canada recall. As a

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<sup>38</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 50:46.

<sup>39</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:05:01.

<sup>40</sup> Marlene Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women,” *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, eds. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 328-9.

symbol of better times ahead, white bread, and the promises it held, were devoured by war brides anxious to escape the strictly rationed lives they left behind in Britain: “We had white bread I know that we hadn’t had in...forever! [Laughs]”<sup>41</sup> The symbolism of sugar, which signified prosperity and abundance also represented a metaphor for better times.<sup>42</sup> Like the Mennonite refugees Epp discusses, recollections of gorging oneself on oranges, bananas, desserts and other sweet foods that had been absent from Britain during the war were highlighted by the vast majority of war brides reflecting upon their early experiences in Canada. On the way to her new home, Ida remembers how she and many of the war brides she traveled with bought “bananas, pineapples, chocolate bars or ices.”<sup>43</sup> Although Mavis remembers being excited about encountering a much missed fruit, her young daughter did not share that enthusiasm: “I remember I bought a bunch of bananas, of course we hadn’t seen bananas!...[P]eeled a banana and gave it to my daughter and she took one bite and that was the end of bananas [Laughs]!”<sup>44</sup> Audrey also talked about finally encountering sweet foods on the way to Canada: “I remember all of the beautiful desserts, and all of these beautiful things—sweet things that we never had—I mean, chocolate was rationed in Britain and we got two ounces of chocolate a week! So we *craved* these things, you know.”<sup>45</sup> Ida, Mavis and Audrey’s narratives, all of which depict memories of sweet foods, reflect war brides’ mental link between extravagant fare and signs of better times, as Epp suggests. Such narratives attest to the symbolic ways in

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<sup>41</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 40:57.

<sup>42</sup> Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback,” 329.

<sup>43</sup> Prette, “My Journey to Canada: Ida Prette’s Diary,” 17.

<sup>44</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 34:18.

<sup>45</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:39:32.

which immigrant women entering Canada after the Second World War perceived their own lives and hope for the future during this time of great transition.

This new social climate of abundance and promise represented a greater sense of freedom for many British war brides who entered the country after the Second World War. Differences were commonly noted and adjustments had to be made to accommodate new foods, social habits around them, ways of talking about, preparing and buying them. Audrey discovered this within her first few days in Vancouver, when her sister-in-law noticed that she had come back from the grocery store with the smallest bag of sugar she could get: “Audrey, she said, we don’t buy little things of sugar like that! She said, we buy 25 pounds! And I said 25 pounds! I mean, it was such an eye-opener because...you had *everything* over here, and we were so devastated in Britain.”<sup>46</sup> The image of Canada as a country of “affordable abundance”<sup>47</sup> was fueled by food fashion-makers of the postwar era who also promoted the country’s relative advances in order, convenience, cleanliness and quality over other countries when it came to food.<sup>48</sup> While most war brides recall their shock and delight at first seeing in Canada seemingly vast quantities of food products that were hard to find or altogether absent in Britain, many of their narratives which focus on food once they were settled in their new homes describe how they managed to stretch or make-do with the food products they were able to obtain. After getting married, Joyce Woods and her husband moved to Belleville, Ontario where they rented a room until they could find a more permanent residence. Having “no proper stove,” and very little culinary knowledge, Joyce recalls how she and her husband lived

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<sup>46</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:01:30.

<sup>47</sup> Iacovetta and Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping and Maria the Homemaker,” 205.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

off of wieners and tomato juice.<sup>49</sup> Life in Canada was no easier for Jackie and her family: “Well, we were very poor, I mean we were really, *really* poor...the idea of going to a restaurant for a meal was so exciting!”<sup>50</sup> Edith, who settled with her husband on a farm in Alberta also remembers days of economic difficulty: “[W]e never had any money because often if you got a good crop one year and then you had to buy the seeds and everything, well then when you didn’t get a crop you had to have enough to pay for another year.”<sup>51</sup> This image of Canada as a land rich in food where one had the freedom to eat what he or she pleased proved to be somewhat of a veneer masking the reality of class differences in a country still feeling the effects of the Second World War.

In spite of the differences they encountered, many war brides strove to recreate dishes that they had come to know and love in Britain for their families. Canadian and British citizens did have varying tastes when it came to meals. Edna discovered this when she was told by her butcher that she could have all the liver she could eat for free, since few Canadians would buy it.<sup>52</sup> Liver, meat pies, stews and rice puddings were some of the meals war brides frequently made for their families.<sup>53</sup> Cooking “British” seemed to be a common trend followed by many, despite the change in physical location.<sup>54</sup> While part of the reason for this may have been related to having some knowledge of British cooking or a love of the food, preparing British foods in an attempt to feel more at home

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<sup>49</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 29:45.

<sup>50</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 43:47.

<sup>51</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 16:59.

<sup>52</sup> Edna Eddy, Interview with Author, September 28, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:03:34.

<sup>53</sup> Joyce Woods, Interview with Author, July 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 48:00.

<sup>54</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 15:30; Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 47:30; Ida Prette, Interview with Author, July 7, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 32:30; Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:01:00.

likely played a role as well. By cooking foods that their mothers used to make—sponge pudding, hearty soups and stews, panclets (similar to Canadian pancakes) and Yorkshire pudding—war brides could be mentally transported to memories of home and time spent with their families in Britain. In the same way that Marlene Epp has shown how “[f]ocus on the prosaic and everyday—food—offered a point of reference for narrating significant, but extremely painful, life events,”<sup>55</sup> narratives around food also provided foundations from which war brides could relate powerful memories of joyful times. The strong link between food and memories of home was clear to Ida who met an English couple upon arriving in Canada who were friends of her in-laws: “I happened to mention liquorice allsorts and they produced some, I really felt at home then!”<sup>56</sup>

Some war brides married Canadian soldiers whose parents were British. Stella Higgins felt that having an in-law from her native country meant less of a culture shock for her: “His mother was from Scotland, so I didn’t have a different culture to go into.”<sup>57</sup> Although British war brides entering families who originally hailed from their own country may have had an easier time adjusting than those who did not, the Canadianization of British ways which undoubtedly occurred in these families over the years meant that differences did still exist. Hilda’s mother-in-law was a war bride in the First World War who, like Hilda, had come from Wales to Canada after marrying her serviceman husband. Despite the fact that his mom was from Wales, Hilda remembers that her husband did not care much for British food—which she loved.<sup>58</sup> To address this problem, Hilda incorporated a mixture of British and Canadian foods into their daily

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<sup>55</sup> Epp, “The Semiotics of Zwieback,” 333.

<sup>56</sup> Prette, “My Journey to Canada: Ida Prette’s Diary,” 29.

<sup>57</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 51:00.

<sup>58</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:06:00

meals, modifying certain dishes to negotiate a balance between her British past and Canadian present.<sup>59</sup> This amalgamation of new and old ways was common among postwar immigrants in Canada, although to varying degrees.<sup>60</sup> While some war brides continued to rely heavily upon dishes they had known since their childhood, frequently passing this culinary knowledge down to their own children, others embraced new Canadian foods and ways of cooking.

### **Taking Lessons from *The Canadian Cookbook For British Brides***

As the title of the cookbook clearly implies, this document was produced intentionally for women—British brides who have come to Canada. In a short introduction discussing the differences between food in Canada and Britain, we discover who the primary beneficiary of these new and delicious “Canadian” dishes would be: “...the purpose of this book is...to give you recipes for dishes that are likely to be among your husband’s favourite things to eat.”<sup>61</sup> The understanding in this final sentence on the page was that women will cook and men will eat. In this way, cookbooks were a form of prescriptive literature which set borders marking out the “proper” roles of men and women. War brides recognized the message conveyed though this book regarding who the recipient of the creamy casseroles, flaky pastries and tender pot roasts found amongst its pages would be, as Nancy made clear in our interview: “we were given this little thin cookbook that I still have on how to feed your husband.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hilda’s Diary, unpublished document, np.

<sup>60</sup> Iacovetta and Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping and Maria the Homemaker,” 213.

<sup>61</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 2, 19:45.

As part of the values impressed upon the young British bride who was reading this recipe book, the importance of women's roles as good wives and mothers in their new Canadian homes was at the forefront. The ability to keep a clean, well organized household was presented as a desirable characteristic of the good wife. Disheveled or dirty surroundings indicated a woman incapable of living up to her expected roles: "A stained or musty coffee pot will not make good coffee and it's a sign of a poor housekeeper."<sup>63</sup> Throughout this short cookbook, newly arrived British women were also advised to be thrifty and were thereby shown ways to "stretch" foods, use up leftovers,<sup>64</sup> and avoid buying things that they did not need.<sup>65</sup> They were also encouraged when purchasing both kitchenware and food products to find a balance between cheap, lower-quality options and overly expensive or extravagant products. Another balance had to be found between the amount of time put into a meal, its nutritional qualities, and household economics. Regarding canned baby foods the cookbook cautioned: "You will find them most convenient to use but not the most economical way to feed the baby."<sup>66</sup> In addition to the extra cost of buying pre-made baby food, a mother was also expected to consider the quality of the product she would be feeding her child at a time when home cooked meals were still thought to be better than those that were store bought. This belief would soon fade, however, as the rise of convenience foods in the 1950's imparted the message that from scratch did not necessarily equal better.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Sherrie Inness, *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender and Class at the Dinner Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 36.

Perhaps presented less overtly than the message about thrift, yet implied as no less important, it was indicated to British women through this publication that pleasing their husbands—while at the same time preparing delicious and balanced meals which would bring together the family—should be their ultimate goal. As a preamble to the section on pastry and pies, which offered both recipes and a list of pastry making tips, the importance of pies to Canadian men was implied, and by extension, so was the necessity of British-Canadian women’s role in making these pies: “If you ask your husband what he would like for dessert, his answer will probably be ‘Anything as long as it’s pie!’”<sup>68</sup> Here, gender roles were presented very clearly. Although there was a joking-like quality to the imaginary husband’s response, he was at the same time making a demand upon his wife, specifically for pie. Since pleasing one’s husband, however, was presented as something that should be of primary importance to wives, recipes for apple, pumpkin and lemon pie followed. A similar implication was present in the section on pancakes and doughnuts—two typically “Canadian” foods—where it was enthusiastically stated: “If you can make good doughnuts, your husband will think you’re wonderful!”<sup>69</sup> Where the message truly surfaces was in the sentence that followed this one: “On the other hand, you can buy them.”<sup>70</sup> Here it became apparent that “wonderful” wives made donuts from scratch, others bought them pre-made. The link between “husband-pleasing cooking and marital stability,”<sup>71</sup> was frequently reinforced throughout this cookbook and its

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<sup>68</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, “The Way to A Man’s Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology and Cookbooks in the 1950’s,” *Journal of Social History* 32.3 (Spring 1999): 538.

representation of the “good” wife. The old adage, “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach,” underpinned the various recipes for biscuits, cookies, stews and roasts.

Despite the messages that were overtly or non-overtly presented to young British wives who had newly arrived in Canada, cookbooks proved to be of primary importance to many young women who had never worked in the kitchen before. These sources also tell us much about the past, for “cookbooks provide recipes for masculine and feminine behavior as well as for meatloaf. In addition, cooking literature teaches lessons about race, class and ethnicity.”<sup>72</sup> While learning about meal preparation, British war brides were also able to pick up cues from cookbooks as to how they were expected to behave in their new roles as Canadian women, wives and mothers.

While war brides were learning what they should be doing in the kitchen, they were also learning the limitations of their roles. The ideal image of the family sitting down to a turkey dinner together is not complete without father carving the turkey. While women were often pictured as busily rushing around the kitchen to organize meals at large family gatherings, “Dad’s only culinary responsibility in all of this seemed to be to carve large joints on festive and ceremonial occasions.”<sup>73</sup> One of the first cookbooks that Hilda bought in Canada conveys this stereotypical message. In a section titled “Table Setting and Service” it was explained that when entertaining, the host served the meat while the hostess was responsible for the other dishes.<sup>74</sup> The preferred gender of the carver was also clarified in a section which provided tips for proper carving etiquette: “The carver should remain seated while carving and should carve enough for all who are

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<sup>72</sup> Inness, *Secret Ingredients*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 104.

<sup>74</sup> Untitled Cookbook, 81.

at the table before *he* begins to serve anyone.”<sup>75</sup> [emphasis mine] If these hints were not clear enough, photographs were used to stress the point. Throughout the book photographs are included of women (usually just their hands) preparing the recipes that are listed. The only time that men (also just their hands) enter the photos is in the section on carving. Although this cookbook was published in the United States, the message was similar across North America: men were needed to handle the meat. Even within the unlikely location of the kitchen, the image of the man who presided over his family continued to be maintained through this tradition of men being responsible for carving the meat: “...for it was a symbol that in the end—after Mom’s alchemy in the kitchen—it was still the man of the house who would apportion the meal’s centerpiece.”<sup>76</sup> By linking masculinity to meat preparation, the authors and editors of North American cooking literature normalized gender roles that proclaimed Dad as the celebrated carver.<sup>77</sup>

The majority of war brides that I interviewed explained that their husbands had minimal responsibilities in the home, and often even less in the kitchen specifically. While their children were growing up, Hilda’s husband Lew spent little time in the kitchen when he wasn’t enjoying one of his wives’ tasty creations: “you put his meal in front of him and he ate it and got up and walked away and that’s the way it always was.”<sup>78</sup> Reflecting on her husband’s roles in the home, Betty asserted: “Meryn was not good around the house at all. That was *my* job.”<sup>79</sup> Stella shared a similar sentiment regarding her husband’s household duties: “He didn’t have any role there, you know; I

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<sup>75</sup> Untitled Cookbook, 83.

<sup>76</sup> Levenstein, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 104.

<sup>77</sup> Neuhaus, “The Way to A Man’s Heart,” 538.

<sup>78</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:52:00.

<sup>79</sup> Betty Easthom, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:08:01.

did everything.”<sup>80</sup> Jackie Dineen described how “hopeless” her husband was in the kitchen when he mistakenly fed their baby birdseed while Jackie was away in the hospital: “he said, the kid didn’t like it very much.”<sup>81</sup> The popular portrayal of men’s domestic roles in postwar Canada frequently followed similar lines as Jackie’s story about her domestically incompetent husband; “the image of the hapless father recurred in a variety of 1940’s and 1950’s media. This genre portrayed men as more than adequate breadwinners but ridiculed their status in the home.”<sup>82</sup> By mocking men’s good hearted yet ultimately failed attempts to assist with jobs typically done by women, discourse around men’s roles in the home implied a link between men’s domestic inabilities and “proper” masculinity.<sup>83</sup> Although a cultural shift would occur in the 1950’s and 60’s which brought many more men into the kitchen, throughout the late 1940’s, this would remain a predominantly female space.<sup>84</sup>

While being coached through recipes telling her what she should make for her family, the newly Canadian war bride was being taught middle-class values through *The Canadian Cookbook For British Brides*. The attention she was to give to thrift when buying, preparing and serving food stemmed from the social conditions of the time—published the year that the Second World War ended, rationing was still in effect in Canada. In addition to certain food products, such as whipping cream, which were off the market at the time, many kitchen tools remained difficult to attain and therefore had to be

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<sup>80</sup> Stella Higgins, Interview with Author, June 30, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:38:14.

<sup>81</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 59:55.

<sup>82</sup> Chris Dummitt, “Finding a Place for Father: Selling the Barbecue in Postwar Canada,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 9.1 (1998): 218.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>84</sup> Laura Schenone, *A Thousand Years Over a Hot Stove: A History of American Women Told Through Food, Recipes, and Remembrances* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2003), 311.

collected slowly as they were made available, as Hilda remembers: “[W]e bought two of everything right then because it was just the two of us and the baby and we bought two soup or cereal bowls...and then I bought a couple of plates, you know, just so that we had enough to get by with for the time being.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the social milieu in which the cookbook was written, complete with rationing and shortages of some food products, “pro-capitalist, middle-class food practices, household regimes, and family values,”<sup>86</sup> were still emphasized. These values were relayed through prescriptive literature of the time, literature which frequently presented an idealized world in which all Canadians represented, or at least aspired to be, middle class. The image of the bright-eyed, happy nuclear family seated around a nutritious home cooked meal—a scene which the cookbook sought to conjure—symbolized efficiency, time-management and cleanliness, thereby celebrating capitalism and middle-class values which were common in cooking literature directed at immigrant women entering postwar Canada.<sup>87</sup>

Considering the types of recipes printed in the book, it is clear that women responsible for these creations would be spending many hours of their time in the kitchen—meaning that they wouldn’t likely have time for a paid position outside of the home. There is no mention throughout the cookbook of women’s work anywhere except in the kitchen, and with recipes for pickles, pies, cakes and roasts, it is unlikely that these women would have had the extra hours to take on other positions. This was not an unusual trend, as recipe books in this time period tended to focus on the middle-class

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<sup>85</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:17:00.

<sup>86</sup> Iacovetta and Korinek, “Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping and Maria the Homemaker,” 219.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

woman who devoted her day to preparing food for her family.<sup>88</sup> Convenience food—advertised as the working woman’s dream—would not start to make its grand entry until the 1950’s and ‘60’s. In the meantime, however, a backlash which pushed women who had worked out of the home during the war into the kitchen rapidly attempted to right disrupted gender roles which the Second World War displaced: “Reiterating that a woman’s place was in the kitchen was an effective counterpoint to the challenge that women’s war-time employment presented to traditional gender norms among white, middle-class families.”<sup>89</sup> Society frowned on the working woman, especially she who worked out of personal choice rather than economic need. It is implied by this cookbook that British brides entering Canada should devote themselves to their families—through healthy and hearty home cooked meals—rather than working outside the home.

In the face of economic difficulties, war brides had to be creative, much like their mothers were during the war. *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides* did offer some advice on how, for example, meatloaf could be stretched by adding two cups of bread crumbs or cooked cereal. However, war brides also learned to experiment on their own in their attempts to negotiate the little money they had with their need to feed the family. Marjorie Jagers found creative ways to inexpensively feed herself, her husband and their two children:

Used to take the dog bones home...boil them up, take all the meat off, make dumplings and put vegetables in. And then I used to go to the fish store—frozen fish store—and ask if they had any fish heads. And the same with the...I got a pound of smelt, you know, ten cents, and then I’d do the same, I’d make the chowder and that, you know. And we lived like that.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 105.

<sup>89</sup> Neuhaus, “The Way to A Man’s Heart,” 532.

<sup>90</sup> Marjorie Jagers, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 15:50.

Amidst other ways whereby she managed to negotiate her husbands' wage with the family's needs, Jackie was especially cautious with how money was spent on food. To ensure that no money was wasted, she would make entire meals in the oven—baked pudding, custard and potatoes—rather than using both the oven and stovetop.<sup>91</sup> Thinking back to her first few years in Canada, Jackie vividly remembers a particularly heartbreaking memory of the past:

We were so poor you couldn't believe it. And then we got a chicken it was going to be such a thrill and we kept saying, you know, it doesn't smell good, but oh boy it's going to be good—I didn't know you had to clean a chicken! And in those days—now when you buy a chicken it's hollow, in the old days they didn't—so I cooked it with all its guts and we had to throw it away...I cried!<sup>92</sup>

Later in the interview Jackie brings up the chicken again, proving how disappointed she was with this flopped meal and the wasted money she spent on what was going to be a luxurious feast for the family: “You know, throwing that chicken out was...disaster!”<sup>93</sup>

Although *The Canadian Cookbook For British Brides*, like other prescriptive literature of the time, may have attempted to impose middle-class ideals on war brides coming to Canada from various backgrounds, such literature frequently offered inaccurate and problematic representations of the population as composed entirely of middle-class citizens, or those striving to become middle class. While some minor concessions to this ideal were made in *The Canadian Cookbook For British Brides*—suggesting tips on how to economize, for instance—this message portraying the country as middle class remained strong throughout the book and often did not align with the reality that many war brides faced upon arriving in Canada. Along with this discrepancy

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<sup>91</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 46:23.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 45:49.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:20:17.

came another, as the ideal postwar era middle-class wife who was entirely satisfied with devoting herself to fulfilling the needs of her husband and children through their carefully packed lunches and from scratch dinners may have been closer to a nation's dream rather than its reality.

### **“It was Kind of Boring!”<sup>94</sup> Transgressions in the Image of the Happy Housewife**

On the eve of a cultural shift when women's roles within the household were beginning to be re-defined, war brides entered Canadian kitchens often unsure of what exactly they were expected to do. While cookbooks seemed to offer conservative ideas regarding the “proper” roles of a good mother and wife, transgressions of this message could often be found amongst their pages: “cooking literature is not monolithic, passing on a single message about issues related to gender, race, and class; rather, it conveys a wide range of views.”<sup>95</sup> The value of a woman's time was suggested in the *Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*. Under a section entitled “To Help You When You Shop,” advice was given to the busy mother who may not have had hours to spend in the kitchen: “Many mothers like the pudding mixes because small amounts of dessert for the baby can be quickly prepared from them.”<sup>96</sup> However, as was discussed earlier, women were encouraged to find a balance between time put into preparing food, the amount of money it cost, and nutritional value it offered. Convenience goods, while they saved women many hours in the kitchen, were often considered more expensive and less nutritious than

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<sup>94</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:00:27.

<sup>95</sup> Inness, *Secret Ingredients*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 11.

a home-cooked meal, as Jackie expressed: “who could afford tinned food?”<sup>97</sup> Also, the time women saved in using convenience foods was often not considered extra time she could spend on herself, but rather time she should devote to her children and husband.

Through this recipe book, women were also coached on how they could create their own “convenience” foods at home that would be more economically feasible than buying products and still would contain that “mother’s touch” the family loved. By pre-mixing dry ingredients for baking powder biscuits, “many variations can be turned out practically quick-as-wink.”<sup>98</sup> The recipe for Ice Box Cookies was also labeled as being “convenient for the small family, for the cookies can be baked a few at a time as required.”<sup>99</sup> Although war brides who arrived in Canada in the latter half of the 1940’s may not have been encouraged to buy large quantities of convenience foods, some acknowledgement of a woman’s need to save time was recognized in this cookbook, a step towards the convenience food revolution that would start to emerge in the 1950’s.

Aside from these minor transgressions that arose in the cookbook, sites of contention could also be found in a few war brides’ interpretations (or lack thereof) of the material. Not all women openly welcomed the messages that were presented to them through cookbooks. Nancy Archibald remembers feeling offended at a comment made in the *Canadian Cook Book for British Brides* that implied a lack of common sense among women reading it: “And there was something that I was very cross about...and it was as though we didn’t know...anyway, I forget where it was, but...”<sup>100</sup> Although she has forgotten the specific site of contention, it is telling that over sixty years later Nancy can

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<sup>97</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 48:00.

<sup>98</sup> *The Canadian Cookbook for British Brides*, 24.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Nancy Archibald, Interview with Author, October 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording 2, 19:55.

still remember her frustration and annoyance with this message. Other war brides, such as Jackie did not remember getting the cookbook.<sup>101</sup> Either she did not receive it, or it did not have enough of an impact on her for it to be a prominent memory.

It is interesting to question to what extent women actually followed the advice offered in the *Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*. Hilda's story is representative of many war bride experiences. Originally from Wales, Hilda met her Canadian husband in England where the two married in April of 1945. The following year, she came to Hanely, Saskatchewan to join her husband with their four-month-old daughter. In a journal she kept shortly after arriving in Canada, Hilda kept a record of meals over the course of a week, from Sunday to Saturday.<sup>102</sup> Many of her choices were in accordance with the meal plans suggested by the cookbook in a section titled, "Canadian Meal Pattern." Hilda included pie twice on her menu for the week, and pancakes were also listed twice—both times as a supper item. The cookbook advised that desserts served with dinner should be more hearty, such as pies and puddings, both of which Hilda included. Desserts served after supper, according to the cookbook, should be lighter, such as fruit and cookies, another pattern that Hilda followed.<sup>103</sup> Despite her willingness to incorporate Canadian meal patterns into her own cooking, Hilda showed some signs of transgression, including throughout the week traditional British dishes such as Welsh rarebit, stew, liver and onions, fish and chips and steamed pudding (which is also called spotted dick). This technique of combining both British and Canadian foods into the

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<sup>101</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 32:17.

<sup>102</sup> Although it is uncertain whether this undated list was written in advance as a menu plan for the week or written after the fact, a few clues hint at the former. Sunday is the only day that all three meals (breakfast, dinner, and supper) are listed. From here only dinner and supper are recorded. Also no variation is allowed for in the menu: dishes are simply stated for each meal. Whether the document was written before or after the fact is insignificant. The fact that Hilda even created such a menu is telling in itself.

<sup>103</sup> *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*, 4-5.

weekly meal plan speaks to the larger cultural negotiations many war brides likely made during their first few years of living in Canada and adjusting to their new identity as Canadians.

Not all war brides revelled in their expected roles of cook and homemaker. Hilda referred to her daily routine of cooking, cleaning, shopping and looking after the baby as boring.<sup>104</sup> Jackie too commented on the dreariness of life as a Canadian housewife in the late 1940's: "I had the baby, I didn't know anybody, you know. Clean the house, push the carriage—we didn't have a car for years, not until my mother died and we had some money—push the carriage, cook. It was fairly lonely."<sup>105</sup> While some war brides who were interviewed directly referred to the ways they were disappointed with their expected roles, others' lack of discussion regarding these roles suggest a similar feeling. Doris spoke very little about her duties around the house—and specifically the kitchen—but rather described in great detail the different jobs she had outside of the home as her children grew up. The emphasis that she put on the importance of paid work over work done in the home is telling of her beliefs regarding women's roles: "I find that working does give you...something...you understand life better."<sup>106</sup> Doris' choice to take on work outside the home likely means that she would have had a hard time fitting into the description of the "good" wife, mother and homemaker as indicated through *The Canadian Cook Book for British Brides*—she who devoted herself entirely to ensuring her family's health and happiness through the intricate and thoughtful meals she prepared for them. But Doris was not alone: "These books were instruction manuals in attitudes

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<sup>104</sup> Hilda Duddridge, Interview with Author, June 29, 2009, Langford BC, Audio Recording, 1:01:10.

<sup>105</sup> Jackie Dineen, Interview with Author, July 8, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 55:01.

<sup>106</sup> Doris Michaux, Interview with Author, September 16, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:15:28.

and desires that should have been ‘natural’ to men and women, thus they actually denaturalized those attitudes and desires.”<sup>107</sup> The mere fact that prescriptive literature such as cookbooks, which defined “proper” roles for women of the postwar era, had to be so heavily pushed upon society speaks to the reality that women may not have been following the gender roles these cookbooks advocated.

### **“I’ve done everything, you know.”<sup>108</sup> The Strong War Bride Myth**

In addition to relying upon cookbooks for culinary advice, war brides also got help from their new Canadian relatives or friends. Mavis remembers needing some extra help in the kitchen upon first arriving in Canada: “One of his sister-in-laws was showing me how to bake a cake and showing me how to do a few things because my mother didn’t make cakes or we didn’t seem to go in for fancy things like that.”<sup>109</sup> After serving her husband and new father-in-law boiled liver for their first dinner together, Audrey admitted her lack of culinary knowledge. To rectify the problem, Audrey’s father-in-law insisted that his teenage daughter help with the cooking until Audrey caught on: “He said now Nan—Nan was his younger sister—and he said Nan, you help Audrey. You come home from school and you help her with the cooking...Oh I was just flabbergasted because I couldn’t make a thing!”<sup>110</sup>

Mother-in-laws often proved a valuable source for many war brides as well, although not all were willing to teach their new daughter-in-laws with a hands-on approach: “When I came out to this country my mother-in-law said to me, now look,

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<sup>107</sup> Neuhaus, “The Way to A Man’s Heart,” 547.

<sup>108</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 23:23.

<sup>109</sup> Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:10:03.

<sup>110</sup> Audrey Waddy, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 1:02:49.

there's a recipe book, there's the ingredients, there's the pots and pans or whatever you'll need...go to it!"<sup>111</sup> Some war brides learned to cook in spite of receiving no help from their mother-in-laws—after all, not all Canadian women were considered a wiz with a mixing bowl. Edith compared her mother-in-law's cooking to her own, which she honed while living on a farm in rural Alberta:

She couldn't cook! Some of the things she made, the pigs wouldn't eat, the dogs wouldn't eat...so they used to have to bury it! When we went down on Mother's Day she used to have things she'd bought, or she'd open cans of salmon or cans of sardines, or bought things like that. And, oh, while I was out there [on the farm] I made all my own bread. I learned to make bread and everybody liked it. I made 3-6 loaves of bread, 2 pans of buns and a pack of cinnamon buns three times a week.<sup>112</sup>

Contrasting her mother-in-law's lack of cooking skills and need to rely upon canned and store bought goods with her own from-scratch baking, Edith's story clearly displays a sense of pride she felt in her ability to provide her family with these delicious home-baked products.

A similar sense of pride is explored by Laura Quilici, who studies how post-World War II Italian women living in Vancouver cast themselves as the "Strong Lady" as a strategy of empowerment when telling stories of their pasts.<sup>113</sup> Quilici explains that by portraying themselves in this way, Italian women who—due to economic necessity—took in boarders were able to "reconcile their discomfort with the lack of control over the decision."<sup>114</sup> It is possible that this model is also transferable to the war bride experience. Life in Canada was far from easy for many war brides trying to adjust. Household

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<sup>111</sup> Betty 12:40.

<sup>112</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:06:30.

<sup>113</sup> Alexander Freund and Laura Quilici, "Exploring Myths in Women's Narratives: Italian and German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1947-1961," *Oral History Review* 23.2 (Winter 1996): 19-43.

<sup>114</sup> Freund and Quilici, "Exploring Myths in Women's Narratives," 36.

devices, for instance, used to prepare food in Canada, looked archaic when compared to those in Britain. Many war brides entered their new kitchens in Canada only to find that the gas or electric stoves they had known in England were absent, and in their place coal or wood stoves sat. Despite being faced with these large, dirty, inconvenient and inaccurate devices, many war brides described how they managed to adapt to and even embrace such challenges:

...so I learned to pile the wood, you know and all this...*[Laughs]* Oh dear. You know that was different, learning to cook on a wood and coal stove. But I enjoyed it, I could cook a roast...like we'd go out on Sunday afternoon and I just knew how much coal to put in the oven and the vegetables ready, come back and it was all done!<sup>115</sup>

Ida's pride in her ability to successfully maneuver her way around an initially foreign and strange wood stove is evident from this passage. A similar sense of pride is demonstrated through Muriel's recollections of her early days in Canada: "[A]ll summer long you had to do the same thing, light this stove up and cook and do everything with it and heat the water, even to do some washing, which—we never had a washing machine or anything, you know...but we managed."<sup>116</sup> Vera also remembers learning how to cook with new kitchen appliances in Canada, despite her initial hesitancy: "There was a coal stove in the kitchen...how I ever cooked on it, I don't know. How to control the temperature really. So I didn't do so bad."<sup>117</sup> Vera's sense of self pride is obvious from this passage. Such accounts attest to the fact that these women represent themselves as strong in that they were able to successfully cope with difficult situations and foreign ways that they encountered in their new homes.

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<sup>115</sup> Ida Prette, Interview with Author, July 7, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 48:07.

<sup>116</sup> Muriel Clark, Interview with Author, July 3, 2009, Duncan BC, Audio Recording, 44:57.

<sup>117</sup> Vera Watkins, Interview with Author, July 13, 2009, Duncan, BC, Audio Recording, 43:01.

Women who arrived in rural settings in Canada and were faced with no running water or indoor plumbing, expansive gardens they were expected to tend and harvest, and wood or coal burning stoves upon which they were to make three or more meals daily for their family and even hired help, may have felt a sense of lack of control over their lives. While it is true that some war brides who were welcomed (or not welcomed) to these kinds of lives did decide to return to Britain, most stayed put—be it due to a lack of money for a ticket home or refusal to abandon their husbands and children. In addition to the initial shock of entering into a lifestyle entirely new to her, Edith was faced with situations throughout her life on the Canadian prairies that would have had many war brides packing their bags. When re-telling the story of her life in the country—complete with losing her house in a fire, being unable to wash the floors of a temporary home in winter because the water would simply freeze on the floor, or having to walk barefoot and eight months pregnant through mud because the vehicle could not make it down the road to the doctor’s office—the strength of Edith’s character becomes clear. This war bride even helped her husband to build their own house. Edith’s justifiable pride in her ability to undertake many different forms of labour was evident in our interview: “So I helped build the forms for the basement, I helped pour cement, I helped do this and everything in my spare time while the kids were at school. I’ve done everything you know.”<sup>118</sup> Like the Italian women that Quilici interviewed, a “strong” war bride was responsible for cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, shopping, watching the children, meal planning and keeping a garden.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 23:14.

<sup>119</sup> Freund and Quilici, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives,” 36.

While war brides may not actually refer to themselves as “strong” women, the language that they use while telling their stories often hints at this. One war bride, for instance, talks about how the neighbors used to gossip about her; however, when it came to gardening she asserts: “But I taught them a thing or two too!”<sup>120</sup> Another war bride who had a verbal confrontation with some unwelcoming women from the community recalls telling her brother-in-law about their quarrel: “Anyway, he said, I guess you cooled their tails haven’t you? And I said, yes, if they’ve got tails I sure cooled them, yes.”<sup>121</sup> While these war brides may have initially felt unwelcomed by certain members of the community and their reaction towards them, they are able to cast themselves as strong ladies in their rendition of the past, thereby allowing themselves an outlet for empowerment. This sense of pride that is closely related to Quilici’s myth of the strong lady is also present in Edith’s description of all the food she prepared and provided for her family:

We had our own milk, eggs, cheese, butter, everything. We didn’t have to buy a heck of a lot. I made my own bread, buns, cinnamon buns...I grew my own lettuce, celery, I didn’t have to buy any...Another thing is that I used to learn to can fruit, veggies...I used to do over 500 sealings of fruit and things like that...I grew my own raspberries and strawberries and things like that—I grew all those things, and I canned my vegetables and I had potatoes that lasted us a whole year down there and all those things. And carrots. And beets and everything. I grew everything.<sup>122</sup>

To be responsible for preparing this much food is an impressive feat that should not be looked upon without respect and awe. Portraying themselves as strong ladies, war brides who faced these kinds of daunting responsibilities are able to depict a sense of personal

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<sup>120</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 9:55.

<sup>121</sup> Edna Eddy, Interview with Author, September 28, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 43:07.

<sup>122</sup> Edith Taylor, Interview with Author, September 14, 2009, Victoria BC, Audio Recording, 1:05:01.

empowerment in a situation where they may have traditionally been viewed as victims.<sup>123</sup> Freund and Quilici explain how by using myth, postwar immigrant women were able to make sense of the gap between ideal situations and the reality with which they were confronted.<sup>124</sup> War brides who came to Canada only to face the unexpected were also able to rely upon myth as a way to reflect upon and make sense of their own experiences. Through the use of myth in their narratives, these women portray a sense of self that allows them to negotiate the chasm they encountered between the life they had imagined and that they would actually live.

### **Conclusion: Reconciling the Real with the Ideal**

The gap between the “ideal” postwar era housewife, as advocated through prescriptive literature and popular culture of the time and the reality of these women’s lives becomes apparent when one compares this literature to the actual words of women who lived through this defining time in North American history:

The women who baked, basted, glazed and decorated throughout postwar cookbooks were figments of the postwar American imagination. They were expressions of desires and fears in a nation strained by the war and baffled by the unstoppable social changes that shaped the 1950’s.<sup>125</sup>

It was implied that through gatherings over steaming hot plates of potatoes with gravy, roast beef and peas, a strong sense of family unity would result. Women’s roles in binding family ties through the food that they prepared were emphasized through popular culture of the post-war era.<sup>126</sup> Along with the comfort food placed on dinner tables round

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<sup>123</sup> Freund and Quilici, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives,” 41.

<sup>124</sup> Freund and Quilici, “Exploring Myths in Women’s Narratives,” 42.

<sup>125</sup> Neuhaus, “The Way to A Man’s Heart,” 546.

<sup>126</sup> Levenstein, *The Paradox of Plenty*, 103.

Canada after the Second World War, comfort was simultaneously being served in the belief that despite the recent upset to traditional gender roles, women were making their way back to the kitchen. Not all women, however, were entirely satisfied with devoting their lives to duties within the home, as the memories of some war brides indicate. As drastic societal changes in the 1950's and 1960's would prove, cracks atop the cake were already beginning to form.

## Conclusion

As my interview with the last war bride came to a close I started packing up my things. She cleared away our tea cups and saucers and dabbed a dishcloth at the crumbs which had become embedded between the weave of the white lace tablecloth from the pecan squares we had been eating. I thanked her, said goodbye and left. Reflecting on my experience interviewing these women, I realized how central food was not only in their narratives, but also to the actual interview process. For it was around plates of cookies, pieces of cake and cups of tea or coffee that these women shared their memories with me.

Many war brides discussed memories of food as a way to indicate strong familial bonds. The long-held tradition of a family sitting down to a leisurely Sunday meal that mother had spent the day preparing was frequently recalled by these women, who, through this stereotypical and idyllic image that they conveyed, relayed their own understandings regarding British families in the pre-war years. War bride memories of life before the war are frequently captured through food narratives which place memories of mothers at the centre of these experiences. Images of mothers who managed to make do despite the difficulties which came out of the Depression years were central in many war brides' narratives. War brides' tendencies to connect memories of their mothers with memories of the foods that they prepared—frequently hearty comfort foods such as bread and soups—indicate both the dominance of women's pre-war roles in the domestic sphere and the importance of women's duties as providers of nourishing food for their families. Not only did food prepared by the mothers of war brides in the pre-war years fill a psychological need, but it also satisfied an emotional need, as can be understood in the

way that war brides reminisce about memories of food in relation to memories of their mothers.

Nostalgic memories of foods enjoyed during their childhoods were often vividly described by war brides whose mouths still watered at the thought of their mother's homemade stews. This kind of sensual history, although often vividly remembered, is difficult to translate into language, and therefore is frequently overlooked in scholarly representations of the past. Also, nostalgic memories are sometimes considered problematic to historians concerned with uprooting the "facts" due to subjects' propensities to exaggerate and distort the past. Their use, however, should not be limited to their ability or inability to tell us truths of the past. Rather, historians need to recognize their potential in providing us with an understanding of the atmosphere of the past, or, failing that, an understanding of our representations of that atmosphere as indicators of how we want our stories to be perceived and remembered.

While memories of delicious and abundant meals in the pre-war years were common amongst the war brides that I interviewed, few relayed memories of food scarcity, despite the fact that they were discussing life in the 1930's—during the Great Depression. It is important to remember that these women are looking at this time period in retrospect. They are reflecting on the last days when families were still together, before brothers went off to war, younger siblings were evacuated with their classes, or parents were re-located for war work. Through memories of abundant foods passed around the dining room table, war brides are able to emphasize the strong feeling of family unity before the disruption of the Second World War began to stretch these bonds.

The way in which war brides present information about the war through food also illustrates how they want their stories to be remembered. By laughing about memories of surviving off of the scant rations available, or casting themselves as strong women who managed to survive these lean years, war brides are able to avoid the label of victim, despite the fact that the time period they are recalling was frequently marred with memories of loss and sadness. Happy memories, however, were not altogether absent from war brides' food narratives. Recollections of family and friends' joint efforts and challenges to put together wedding cakes for young brides were often remembered by war brides whose eyes watered with laughter as they told me about their improvised cakes and bare-bones wedding dinners.

Stability through the habitual act of eating meals together is hinted at by war brides as they reminisce about their mothers' skilful preparation of home-cooked meals in the midst of rationing and air raids. Establishing the regularity of habitual eating patterns could bring about a sense of normalcy and represents the effort to create a feeling of stability in a society shaken with the reality of war. The acquisition and preparation of food also seems to have been a way for mothers to reaffirm their positions in the family, as suggested by many war brides' distinct memories of their mothers' ability to creatively maneuver around limited food supplies and continue to provide meals for their families. In sticking to these traditional roles, mothers were able to add to that sense of normalcy, thus providing emotional reassurance for both themselves and their families. Throughout their narratives, war brides never admitted to times of complete starvation, insisting "we never went hungry." Since traditional gender roles were interrupted during the war years as women increasingly played a larger role outside of the home—resulting in many war

brides arriving in Canada without any knowledge of how to cook—reliance upon traditions such as mom’s famous Sunday pot roast during the war years were reassuring for a nation distraught with social change and political strife. Through these memories relayed by war brides, we can gain a greater understanding of food’s significance on a psychological level.

During the war, government-issued propaganda in Britain depicted the “ideal” woman of the nation—she who was cheerful yet shrewd, patriotic and willing to contribute to the war effort, yet careful not to overstep her expected gender roles. In addition to this, she possessed beauty and strength, always prepared with both her gas mask and lipstick.<sup>1</sup> It is questionable as to what degree women actually conformed to this ideal; despite propaganda, not all women served potatoes with the skins on. However, the government’s increasing presence in British homes—telling women how to cook vegetables or use up leftovers—led to the increased public scrutiny of women’s roles. While government-issued food propaganda in Britain during the war years encouraged housewives to do their part for the nation by providing nutritious and filling meals for their husbands and children, prescriptive literature produced in Canada in the post-war years encouraged a similar ideal. To help build the nation, war brides were encouraged to raise hearty, healthy Canadian children who were well nourished—strong citizens for a strong country.

The rich and plentiful foods that they encountered en route to Canada were excitedly recalled by several war brides that I interviewed, indicating their shock and delight of experiencing delicacies un-obtainable during the war years in Britain. After

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<sup>1</sup> Although American, the image of Rosie the Riveter proves to be an excellent example of the government’s role in encouraging women to aspire to a similar ideal.

hearing the narratives of other war brides, it is inevitable that that these stories would influence war bride memories. It is possible that individual memories have become enveloped within a shared group memory that typifies these women's experiences, a kind of melting pot that homogenizes the eccentricities and variations found between different stories.

It is apt to think of these women's lives in Canada through analogies of food, perhaps best exemplified through the recipe. Since most of these women did not even own a cookbook until they arrived in Canada, the acquisition of this common household item is significant. Through social cues provided to them by sources such as *The Canadian Cookbook for British Brides*, war brides were being told what was expected of them as they settled into their new lives in Canada. However, some variations were likely made, both in recipes and real lives. After settling in and having become familiar with a few recipes, it is likely that many women started experimenting, omitting, for instance, the raisins in one recipe or using less sugar in another. In a similar way, these women also likely became more confident in their roles as Canadian wives and mothers, and in turn more willing to test these boundaries as well.

Some mildly transgressive messages could be found amidst the cookie recipes and basting tips, usually in the form of suggesting convenient alternatives to more time-consuming methods; however, women's expected roles were made clear. By indicating what counted as acceptable Canadian dishes, *The Canadian Cookbook for British Brides* drew lines along national differences, forming a dichotomy between war brides' old ways of doing things (bad) and new Canadian ways (good). While this cookbook encouraged war brides to leave behind their familiar British ways and do their best to become

Canadian, it is evident that not all women eagerly followed this suggestion. British war brides, unlike their Dutch, Italian or Japanese counterparts, were seen as similar to Canadians in terms of race, religion and background; however, differences were quickly noted by both sides, and sometimes resulted in experiences of alienation for women who casually told neighbours how they were “knocked up”<sup>2</sup> in the middle of the night, or to “keep your pecker up.”<sup>3</sup> Although they may not have fit perfectly into the Canadian citizen mould, British war brides did frequently represent the ideal immigrant and as such were valorized as role-models for other post-war immigrant groups arriving in Canada.

As the dearth of scholarly information on this topic has shown, there is still much academic work to be done on the experiences of British war brides who came to Canada. This study has attempted to encourage a more critical analysis of the war bride experience while honouring the voices of women willing to talk about their lives; however, there is still plenty of room for further study and elaboration. It is difficult to critically analyze the stories of these women, stories filled with memories of hunger during the war years, sadness around saying goodbye to friends and family as they left home, and the struggle of trying to make the best of their new lives in Canada. Through these analyses, however, we can get a better understanding of the way these women talk about their experiences and what this indicates about how they want their lives to be remembered. Far from devaluing their experiences, scholarly work which examines these women’s lives offers the possibility of both providing war brides with an outlet through which their stories can be heard and an opportunity for us to further recognize the glorious complexity and uniqueness of their experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> British slang term meaning “woken up.”

<sup>3</sup> British slang term meaning “Keep your chin up.”

Race and ethnicity are other areas that could be elaborated upon further. This study concentrated on the lives of British war brides, but it would be interesting to consider how different groups of war brides relate their stories. Do race and ethnicity play significant roles in how war brides lives are remembered? Are food-centered narratives more predominant within certain cultures? How do these narratives differ among war brides from different ethnic groups?

It would also be useful to question how the cultures of families that the war bride entered into affected how she portrayed her own narratives in regards to food. With only one exception,<sup>4</sup> all the war brides that I interviewed for this study came to Canada to settle in English-speaking, predominantly Anglo-Saxon families and communities. A study of how war brides who experienced the extreme culture shock of ending up in a family that did not speak English or living on a reservation recall their experiences through food would offer a valuable contribution to this largely open field. Do these women talk more about cooking, the expectations placed on them as wives and mothers and the foods that they prepared for their families? Did they rely more heavily on traditional British dishes, or were they more willing to adopt the foods of their new homes? A comparative study that takes into account the experiences of war brides in Anglo-Saxon homes and families compared to those in other settings may be able to provide answers to these questions.

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<sup>4</sup> Mavis and her husband first lived in Montreal when she arrived in Canada. Although she admits that Canadian life was a culture shock, she maintains that language was not a problem for her, even though she did not speak French: “[E]verybody mostly spoke English...No, I didn’t have any trouble with the—I just talked to English people.” Mavis Butlin, Interview with Author, July 10, 2009, Victoria, BC, Audio Recording, 1:11:37.

Although very little attention has been paid to them within scholarly and popular literature, there were a small number of war grooms during the Second World War—British men who met Canadian women during the war and settled in Canada. Future research could question if these war grooms rely as heavily as females on food as a form through which to talk about their experiences. More generally, how do gender differences affect how the story of this experience is told?

Little academic work has focused on the relationship between war brides and their children. Such a topic could be questioned in relation to the ways these women and their children relate memories of food. Although my work has touched briefly on the relationship between motherhood and food (discussing, for instance, the emotional importance of a mother's ability to provide food for her children)<sup>5</sup> more critical analysis would further add to our understanding of this topic. How important a role does food play in these women's recollections of their relationships with their own children? Do children's memories of their war bride mothers revolve primarily around food?

This study has attempted to open up further discussion on issues involved when relying upon oral history, including an understanding of memory as fluid and ever-changing. Rather than posing a problem for the historian, these qualities offer the opportunity for a new, more vibrant and empowering understanding of the past. To remain consistent with the values of the kind of history to which this project seeks to contribute—an understanding of history as a living, malleable, constantly shifting entity—I am not attempting to claim any definitive answers, but rather hope that I have succeeded in sharing information which will contribute to our understanding of war

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Two.

brides' experiences while at the same time providing areas for future dialogue and debate. Much like the spices they added to meals they prepared for their families, the individual stories of war brides each offer a unique flavour that contributes to the completeness of the final dish—memories of the war bride experience.

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