



Patricia Young's story of

Martha



My mother, Martha Brown, was born on the 8th of May 1928 in the family home in Langley, B.C. She is a petite woman with what was once very bright red, curly hair, and lots of freckles. She is still affectionately called "Red" by my Dad.

My Mom was the fifth of nine children, and when she was born, her mother, Violet, was 26 years old, and her father, George, was 46. All of the children were born at home and lived until adulthood, except her sister Thelma, who died of pneumonia when only a month old. My Mom was born during the middle of the night and was delivered by her father, as her Grandmother and namesake, Mary Martha, who was a lay midwife, was unavailable.

Her father was a logger and had a small wood mill on their property. He was born in Cardiff, Ontario, and moved with his family to Westward Ho, Alberta, when the railroad was built across Canada. Her mother, Violet, was born in Junction City, Kansas, and after her father died in 1910, Violet and her younger brother moved with their mother to Alberta, where Violet's oldest sister lived. Leaving school at about twelve years old, Violet found work and lived on the Brown family farm, where she met her future husband, George. She worked for a short while as a telephone operator and eventually moved to Vancouver with the Browns and married George in Vancouver in 1919. They moved to Langley soon after.

Despite growing up during the Great Depression, my Mom's childhood memories are happy. So different from life today, her childhood experiences included having her brothers and sisters born and her Grandmother dying, all in the family home. This early life forged her values of the importance of family, love and friendship.

Living in the Fraser Valley, the Browns always had a home with a garden for growing fruit and vegetables and usually had a cow and chickens. Mom remembers coming home from school to the smell of freshly baked bread or biscuits, and a favourite treat was date cookies. My Mom can't remember having toys, so imaginative play with friends and siblings filled her time. She does remember that her Dad, like many people of the time, had very little formal education and could barely read and write. Still, he would call them all to "gather round" to hear his wife read a story; Westerns were his favourites. He was a very social person and enjoyed playing cards and dancing at socials held in their home or at the neighbours. My Mom still enjoys playing cards, and it's a pastime my daughter and I also enjoy.

Violet had her first child at age eighteen, her ninth at the age of 38 and worked hard to feed and care for her family. She rarely sat with the family during meals, but rather chose to sit down on her own when all the work was done. My Mom says that although there was an understanding of the work that needed to be done around the house, her Mom always encouraged them to play and have time with their friends. School was a two-mile walk away, and Mom remembers walking there with a group of children. She loved school and recalls being captivated when her teacher read Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol and other classics. She remembers being thrilled to win a school prize of a store-bought Valentine card.

In 1942, the Browns moved to West Langley, to a house on the Holmstead Road, which is now known as 213th Street in Walnut Grove. The house had been left empty after the Japanese were interned during World War II. The property had a raspberry and strawberry patch, and George planted an acre of beans. Most importantly, and for the first time, the Browns now had a house with electricity. My Mom remembers it also had a traditional Japanese bath house, and she would ask her brothers to carry pails with water to fill the very large bath tub for them to use. Many years later our family would make connections with the original Japanese owners of this house and share memories of this difficult time.

It was also about this time that Mom decided, at the urging of her best friend, to leave school and get a job in Vancouver. Since her two older brothers were overseas in World War II, and her older sisters were already away from home, this idea did not meet with any protest from her parents. So when grade nine was completed, at sixteen years of age, Mom moved to Vancouver and with her friend, Bette, got jobs as switchboard operators with the BC Telephone Company. Mom says the work was never that exciting, and they were strictly forbidden to listen in on calls. Listening in was especially tempting when the switchboard lit up. Once, when this happened, she thought the war had ended, but it was because President Roosevelt had died.

During the war she corresponded frequently with both of her brothers, who were overseas. In one of her letters to her brother Tom, she included a small photograph of herself. One of Tom's soldier friends carried this photograph with him, and when the soldier died, Tom included her photograph with his body at his burial.

Days off were spent travelling back to Langley on the BC Electric interurban train, which ran between Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, for home cooked meals, family visits and local dances. It was at a dance at the Willoughby Hall that Mom met my Dad. Coincidentally, my Dad's family had also lived on the Holmstead Road, but they had never met, as my Dad had been overseas serving in the RAF during World War II. They dated and then married in February 1947. My Mom was nineteen.

Rental suites were very hard to come by in the post war years, and Mom says she can remember travelling on the Vancouver street cars, following up on newspaper advertisements. They eventually found a suite in a house on East 6th Street in Vancouver, which still exists today. My oldest brother Jim arrived in March of 1948. Well before the time of prenatal classes and natural childbirth, Mom found herself in hospital having her first child, not really understanding what was happening to her. Separated from the support of mothers and grandmothers that her own mother had had, she had to figure out for herself how to care for infants and growing children.

In 1951, when she was pregnant with my second brother, Bob, they moved to Prince Albert Street in East Vancouver and rented their first house for \$65 a month. They eventually bought this house for \$4,500. Life here was a happy, busy time. There were lots of families on the street, and backyard baseball games, riding bikes and swimming at the local pools were all part of our family life. Mom was involved with the PTA at Sir Richard McBride School, helping with school lunches, and she joined the school bowling team. My parents bought a heavy canvas tent at Woodward's, and we had many summer holidays in the interior of B.C. Dad bought an 8mm film camera, and for years Christmas morning and summer holidays were captured on these 3-minute films. I arrived in June of 1958. Apparently the whole neighbourhood remembers my arrival home from the Grace Salvation Army Hospital.

By 1962, Prince Albert Street was changing. Lots of the families were moving to the suburbs, and my parents decided that this was the time to take advantage of the Veteran's Land Act, which enabled them to purchase land at a significantly lower mortgage rate. After a lot of searching, they eventually found a half-acre piece of land in Upper Lynn Valley in North Vancouver, hired contractors and built their first house at a total cost of about \$19,000. They still live in this house today.

In 1964, my youngest brother, Ken, arrived, sixteen years after my oldest brother had been born. My older brothers were in their teens, and I was just starting school. I have a picture in my mind of that time, with all of us in our very small kitchen, gathered around the arborite kitchen table, leaves extended, with my youngest brother in his high chair and my paternal Grandfather also joining the family meal. Mom has on

a yellowish plaid sleeveless dress with a tight bodice and full skirt, and she is preparing a meal of beef short ribs and baked apples for dessert.

During the late 1970s, Mom and a close friend volunteered to work with senior residents at some of the local nursing homes, leading craft groups, listening to their stories and making their lives more enjoyable. Eventually they got a grant to do this work. This was, I think, the only “paying” job Mom had in her married life.

My Mom loves gardening and takes real delight in the natural changes that come with each season. She enjoys watching sports, especially the BC Lions and the Vancouver Canucks. She is an avid reader and enjoys listening to music. When I was in my late teens, Mom got more involved in our church and her Christian faith became central to her life. She’s still a very active participant at her church.

Looking back more closely on my own childhood, I remember so many special things that my Mom did for me: shopping trips and lunches out at the Marco Polo and the Bamboo Terrace restaurant in Vancouver’s Chinatown; going to see Katherine Hepburn on stage, *The Mikado* at the Theatre under the Stars in Stanley Park; making Barbie clothes and furniture; and always giving us a bag of comics and penny candy when we started our summer holidays. Although these were simple gifts, I have such vivid memories of them that I know they had a significant impact on me. My Mom’s heart is revealed in these simple acts of love and generosity.

Mom and Dad have enjoyed their retirement years, forming close relationships with their six grandchildren. In the early years of their retirement, they traveled to Europe, Asia and Australia. Her mother, Violet, eventually moved into a seniors home nearby, and Mom visited and cared for her mother until her death in 1991.

Mom and Dad are now usually home, and friends and family often drop by to visit and share memories. Mom, who is now 84, continues to have an active life. She enjoys her garden, taking photographs with her digital camera and using her computer to email friends and explore the world with the Internet. Mom and Dad care for each other with patience and love, and they have a loving relationship that is filled with grace.

Many years ago a family friend suggested that I should listen to my Mom, as she was very wise. At the time I thought the suggestion a bit ridiculous. Now, a bit older, I agree that she is very wise, and I look forward to sharing more of life with her and learning even more about this beautiful loving person.