



Gaile Lacey's story of  
**Velma**



Velma Isabelle was born on April 3, 1916, the fourth child of Charles and Cora Boothby from Gormley, Ontario, who had homesteaded to Weyburn, Saskatchewan, in 1908. Charles had health issues, so in 1919, when Mum was three years old, her father decided to move out West to Mission City, B.C., where members of his family had already settled. They sold the farm, the equipment and all the animals, and Charles and Cora, with their five children, rode the train to British Columbia.

Mission City was a railway town with the train station right in the middle of Main Street. Instead of going into farming again, Mum's father decided to set up a freight business. The family lived happily over the office on Main Street for seven years, until a fire destroyed the office and their home, and they had to find a new place to live. A new baby sister had been born in 1923, increasing the size of the family to eight. They moved into a large house that used to be a hospital, which came with chickens and an orchard full of prune trees.

Mum was a shy girl, so she and her sister Laura, sixteen months younger, stuck close together, going to school and playing with the many children who lived in the area. By the look of all the tiny invites I found in her keepsake box, she had many friends who had birthday parties, Valentine parties and other events.

More aunts and uncles of the Boothby family moved out West from Ontario, so there were many people to share time with each summer. Mum and her cousins enjoyed picnics and sleepovers at White Rock and Hatzic Lake or days at the beach in Birch Bay or on family farms in the Fraser Valley. Her Grandmother, Hannah Boothby, lived part-time in Nooksack, across the Washington border, and part-time with Mum's family in Mission. They got to know their Grandma Boothby well.

At age fifteen, in 1931, Mum had the honour of being the May Queen for Mission City. She officiated at many festivities, like dancing around the May Pole, and rode in the May Day parade. She had a lovely dress, robes and a crown that I still have. The next year Mum had the pleasure of crowning the new May Queen, her sister Laura.

The Depression had hit, so times were tough and summer jobs were part of life. Mum worked at the Aylmer Foods cannery, where she would pick through the English peas on a conveyor belt, culling out the peas that did not make standard. This sounds pretty tedious, but she was happy to have a job. I think she enjoyed school and her friends, but after graduation, instead of college, she decided to go to Beauty School in Vancouver.

Mum mastered the art of doing shampoos, cutting hair, and giving manicures. It was an extensive course, and I remember her telling me they had to learn all the bones in the skull and how to massage the head and neck and hands. I remember her cutting our hair as kids, especially my brother's, with the electric razor. I also remember the great feeling of her scalp massages.

Her travelling days started in 1934 or 35, when she went to Hollywood, California, to visit family and friends. It was a New Year's visit, and she was able to take in the Rose Bowl Parade and Football Game. For a nineteen-year-old girl from Mission, this trip was very enjoyable. Watching The Rose Bowl Parade on TV was a yearly highlight for Mum.

Beauty school qualifications gave her the opportunity and skills to join the Canadian National Steamships. These ships, the Prince George and the Prince Rupert, took tourists to Alaska during the summer, much like our Alaska Cruises today. One summer she signed on as a beauty operator, a job that allowed her to meet many of the female passengers. She became good friends with Gaile, a lady from Ohio, one of the

passengers, who I believe was my namesake. Mum has many cards and letters from Gaile, and I think she may have sailed many times on the Alaska trips. Mum kept in touch with her until she died.

Writing letters was one of Mum's passions, and she kept in touch with many friends. I found boxes of cards and letters, all carefully sorted. Pictures also tell a story, and from her albums I could tell she had good fun with passengers and other members of the crew and officers. She wasn't shy anymore.

Mum didn't tell me much about her relationships. I now know she had many admirers from all the notes and cards I read. It's strange to look at photos of my mother now and realize she was hot. One of the officers suggested to Jack Mackay, the purser and radio operator, that he take Velma ashore and show her around Skagway. That was the beginning of a fine romance, according to the many love letters I found, all wrapped in white ribbons. They gave me a new vision of my parents. As my father's job often took him out of town, they wrote many letters to each other. They would write every day and then run the letters to the train for delivery. Their letters show the love they had for each other and for each other's families. Also how they both liked sports and plays and getting together with friends.

They married in 1940, after courting two to three years. Mum found work at the Chic Beauty Salon in Vancouver, while Dad worked at the Vancouver Airport until he was transferred to a radio range station.

In the days before satellites, these stations were located in remote areas of Canada. My mother loved the adventure and didn't mind living in isolation. She would bake bread, grow vegetables and generally maintain the house. She enjoyed taking lunch to Dad at the office a mile or so away. I've been told that the boss would not let non-employees in the office, so Mum and Dad would sit on the outside steps of the little building and eat lunch together.

By 1944, they were moved to Pincher Creek Station, in Alberta, and I was born. My sisters and brother were born later in Nelson, B.C., when my Dad was transferred to Crescent Valley, B.C. Mum had a full house now and was known to shoot gophers that were eating her vegetables. She had the Doukhobor ladies of Krestova come to do spring cleaning, and they taught her to make borscht, a Russian beet soup. I remember going to school with the Doukhobor children. The Doukhobors were famous for setting their houses on fire, which would set the forest ablaze, and everyone had to scramble to get the garden hoses out to fight the fires. I still relate the smell of wood fire smoke to these forest fires that occurred next to our homes.

In 1952, Mum and Dad moved to North Vancouver, where they lived for the rest of their lives. In 1953, when I was nine, I got polio, and this changed my life forever, but also added another dimension to Mum's. I needed to get to G F Strong Rehabilitation Centre in Vancouver for therapy and Mum didn't drive. She had to get her driver's licence, and I remember my little sister "helping" her by watching out for and calling out all the Stop signs on the roads.

Mum was very health-conscious when it came to food and spent lots of time gardening and then canning vegetables and fruits. She was a great housekeeper, following the rules in the home economics books of the 1950s. She liked to bake and sew and knit and crochet in her spare time. She was always attending classes for exercise, like aquasize and line dancing. In her later years she and my Dad would walk a lot on the NorthShore hills.

When my siblings and I grew up, left school, got jobs and married, Mum and Dad had more time for car trips throughout B.C., visiting Mum's siblings and cousins or, later, grandchildren living in Williams Lake,

Clearwater and Kelowna. Dad was a ham radio operator with lots of friends all over B.C., who were also given a visit.

And they'd take vacations to faraway places. They were great travel pals, and in the movie clips Mum was always seen walking just a little bit ahead, so Dad could take her picture, usually of her back side. They took bus tours through Britain and visited the Scottish side of the family. There were cruises to Hawaii, through the Panama, Caribbean trips and European bus tours to Paris and London. Australia and Hong Kong were on the list. They also travelled to Texas to visit me and their grandchildren when we lived there for a few years.

One thing is sure, they loved their grandchildren, and whether we met at their home or ours, there was lots of time for visiting, making dinner, picking raspberries and cherries in the garden and playing in the fish pool. Then, always, Mum would have lots of cookies ready.

Volunteering in the community was a very important part of her life. The Red Cross had her help at blood donor clinics, making swabs, knitting sweaters and mitts and baking lots of things for their bake sales. The church got lots of her baked goods too.

In 1990, they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Mum was uncomfortable with the thought of organizing a big party, but Dad thought it a grand idea, so the rest of the family took over the planning. We had the best party ever, inviting friends and family from every time of their lives. It was a fun day for sure! We were so glad we had it, since a short time later my father suddenly died.

This was the ultimate life-changer for my mother. She lived for two more years in the house she shared with Dad, until the memories and the yard were too much and she sold the house. She moved into a beautiful condo, just five blocks away with the same lovely view of Vancouver. In 1999, she was diagnosed with Parkinson's, and gradually a series of falls left her unable to walk. She lived her last two and a half years at Evergreen, an extended care facility, where she did her best to take part in all the activities.

Mum had a wonderful life with many varied experiences, from the early days on the farm in Saskatchewan to the ever changing days in North Vancouver. She met every challenge in her own quiet way and was happy to call North Vancouver her home, the best place to raise a family and grow old. She had four children, ten grandchildren and, at the time of her passing, two great grandchildren. She was a woman who took care of all the things in the background and made everyone's lives easier.

What an accomplishment! Love you forever Mum.