



Ruth McIntosh's story of

Maureen



My mother, Margaret Maureen McIntosh, began her life in a small town in Lancashire, England on 29 July, 1930. She was born to Mary (May) Elizabeth and Thomas Hope. In 1933, a year after her brother Arthur John (AJ) was born, May took the children and left Tom. This began a life of constant moving. Maureen never did find out what it was that Tom did to warrant May leaving, but it must have been an intolerable situation. Society dictated separation and divorce to be a disgrace, so May told her children and anyone else who asked that Tom was dead. Maureen knew he was not, yet she followed her mother's wishes and never spoke of her father. May took the kids to live with Tom's Uncle Richard Hope, joined by May's sister Florence (Acie). Maureen never understood how her mother chose to live with Tom's uncle and, at the time, felt awkward answering questions about her family—who she lived with and, more keenly, with whom she did not live. Yet these five years were Maureen's happiest as a child. She loved her school, took piano lessons, and Acie taught her hand crafts and how to play a solitaire card game, which she still plays today. She loved her great Uncle Richard, who played with her and AJ; her own father had been more interested in his motorbike. She was still living with her Aunt and great Uncle when WWII broke out in 1939.

A year after England issued a notice of evacuation for children and mothers, May received an invitation to live in Canada with her mother's distant cousins Uncle Will Brown and Auntie Girlie. Maureen and AJ were fortunate not only to be going to live with relatives, but to go together and with their mother, unlike those who were sent off to the countryside—some of them never to see their parents again.

Only 24 hours notice of their departure would be given, so May and the children went to live with May's parents closer to Liverpool, from where they would sail. (It was here that a connection to religion began as her grandpa served as a vicar.) Unfortunately before the year end, Maureen's appendix ruptured and she was rushed to hospital. The day they received a call that their ship was to leave the next day, her appendix was removed. Maureen was six weeks in the hospital fighting peritonitis. Thanks to the advent of penicillin Maureen healed but they missed their ship to Canada. It would be two years before another call came. Life continued with the realities of the war: blackouts, air raids and sleeping under the dining room table or in the pantry; food and clothing rations were part of Maureen's day-to-day life. Every night her mother and Grandpa closed the outside shutters and drew the black curtains. Bedtime upstairs was held in the dark.

Finally in 1942, at the height of October storms and the Battle of the Atlantic, they received a call to leave and my mother said goodbye to her grandparents. They were on the move. The crossing took three weeks in all and was made memorable for sea sickness, and a U-Boat attack – both of which they survived – and treats like white bread and Canadian ginger ale. Arriving in the Halifax harbour at dusk was magical: they were in awe at the lights twinkling on the shore, like fairyland compared to the dark English nights to which they had grown accustomed. When Uncle Will and Auntie Girlie met the train in Kingston, Maureen began her Canadian life. She was 12 years old.

The first siren Maureen heard was terrifying: Canada wasn't safe after all. She wondered why her class wasn't diving under their desks or organising to go to a bomb shelter. This was her first experience with the Canadian fire engine (in England the engines had bells). An awkwardness developed as she found her way in this new life. She did well in school, excelled at math and chemistry, went to church and continued to play the piano. Teaching Sunday school taught Maureen that she didn't particularly enjoy working with kids so, when she was presented with such career options as teaching or nursing, she chose nursing. She graduated from Grade 13 by 1950.

Maureen initiated her move away from her family for nursing training at the Royal Victorian Hospital in Montréal. A Young People's group became attractive and Maureen once again became a 'churchgoer', causing her frequent teasing. While not socially mature in her opinion, she continued to feel awkward. She made life-long friends in residence, but relations with young men remained tentative. Despite her good looks, she thought herself unattractive, and never could find the 'right' young man. As required, she returned to Kingston to finish nursing science at Queen's. She lived with her mother who, by that point, had moved to a small apartment by herself. When Maureen graduated in '56, she received a certificate, not a degree, in Nursing Teaching and Supervision because she failed some classes. But her life shifted that year into the much sought-after arena of romance.

She dated two men at the same time over the course of the winter: Bruce, a friend of AJs, and Ron, a young man she met in the church choir. By spring Maureen recognised that Bruce was fun, but Ron was more. Yet she wasn't sure if she wanted to marry. Before he left for Vancouver to get his BA at UBC, Ron brought Maureen a dozen red roses and proposed to her. She said she'd think about it; she loved her work, and her growing career. But by January she missed Ron and agreed to marry him. Ron gave Maureen a diamond ring in June, 1957, and they were engaged. The two married September, 1957 and Ron introduced her to the pleasures of camping.

Ron continued training and took teaching positions until he was ordained as a minister in the United Church in 1965. Maureen mostly taught nursing or was a house-wife. Their marriage consisted of years of Maureen following Ron – to Vancouver, to north Ontario, Montréal, rural Saskatchewan, California, and finally Winnipeg, Manitoba. Move upon move. She thrived in her work in the cities; in the smaller communities she struggled with her own identity and a sense of isolation. There was a rumour that married men at school didn't succeed as well as bachelors, so Maureen endeavoured to make things easier for Ron. As expected of a wife at this time, she fully supported his career.

In Montréal, Anne Maureen was born in 1964, and Ruth Orian in 1965. Maureen had become a full time parent. In Saskatchewan, Maureen and Ron wanted to give an Aboriginal child in foster care a home (common for United Church ministers at the time) and wanted to be sure of having a boy. In '68, under the "Adopt Indian Métis" (AIM) Program, they adopted their third child, Colin Bret (born '66). My mother loved us and cared for us and for our home, but it was hard for her to 'have a life' with three toddlers in diapers and her husband working 24/7. As years went by, there arose many obligations which, as a minister's wife, Mom felt required to uphold, but she and Dad were in agreement that it was important that she participate in church life only as she felt she could, and not in accordance with the community's expectations. One compromise was that she didn't always go to church service.

In Winnipeg, she could no longer put aside needs and passions while her husband's work took focus: she fought for equal status in the relationship. She and my father sought counseling and personal therapy; in 1978 they separated for a year – us kids staying with Mom. Determined to work towards a university degree that complimented her nursing, my mom studied at the University of Manitoba School of Social Work. She adopted strong feminist values (my sister and I called her a 'man-hater') and she redefined her sense of spirituality: she considered that perhaps heaven was under earth and that 'God' could just as easily be female as male. My mother learned that screaming into a pillow helped to release her anger. One of my favourite outfits of hers at the time was a Madagascar skirt, a white cotton blouse and a rust-coloured vest, worn with long dangling earrings.

In '79 my parents decided to try again so we moved together into another rental. They developed new divisions of household responsibilities. These years were continually challenging. Moving was constant

between rented houses and church manses: in Winnipeg alone we moved six times, partly determined by Dad's parish placements either as a settled or interim minister. As Mom juggled her studies with primary parenting (she received her Masters in Social Work in '88), she kept the house going while sharing duties with Dad, and worked on her marriage. Summer family camping vacations were a highlight. We kids demanded their attention through our various forms of teenage rebellion. With Ron, Maureen waded her way through our collective exploits with highschool: alcohol, drugs, theft (arrest and probation), suicidal thoughts, boy and girl friends, sex, pregnancy and general growing up. Tough love was used, but they loved us unconditionally. She taught me that love and friendship cannot be bought with gifts. When I came home from rehearsals she listened as I excitedly rattled off everything that had happened. She was thrilled that I was pursuing a career which I loved passionately. Gradually we all moved out and, with loans, my mother and father purchased their first house in March '85. This was their home for over 22 years.

Maureen took a sessional teaching position in the School of Social Work and Ron continued interim ministry. When he retired from ministry, they ran a counseling practice out of their home, eventually discovering they complimented each other. Together they counseled women who had suffered abuse and, later, abusers. A strong partnership and friendship developed. In 1990, when their granddaughter Orin was born, neither felt like grandparents: they took the names Grandmo and Ronpa. Not long after, in 1994, her mother May died in her arms.

In retirement, Maureen developed new passions and revisited old ones. She became involved in English Country dancing, Scottish and Morris dancing, life-story writing and story-telling. She picked up the piano again and volunteered at the Women's Health Clinic in a number of capacities, including Board Chair. Maureen and Ron developed a deep sense of companionship. Long walks were memorable times and car-camping continued to be their first choice mode of travel.

In 2002 Maureen flew with Ron to Great Britain to explore her roots in England, Ireland and Wales. She showed Ron the places where she'd grown up. She grew interested in her family tree, particularly on her mother's side, and eventually got curious about Tom's side of the family. In tracking her father's roots and his path after her mother had left him, to her great surprise and shock she discovered she had a half-sister nine years her junior with the same name as she, Margaret Maureen (Hope).

My dad was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in August 2006, underwent surgery and months of chemotherapy. My mom cared for him as his cancer metastasized into his liver and finally his lungs. He died in August 2007. My mother found herself alone after 50 years of marriage.

Since then, she moved for her 16th time in 77 years into her own apartment, after suffering an accident being hit by a car. She has recovered beautifully with time, albeit not quite to her original ability. Now at 80, her daily rituals include coffee and sudoku puzzles in the morning, and walks in the afternoon. She grieves my father, and seeks time with friends. She continues dancing and story-telling, ushering at the theatre, and attends classical music concerts. At some point she'll likely move again, but not for a while. She's settled.