# OVER THE BRIDGE

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"Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did."

Sexing the Cherry  Jeanette Winterson
Vintage  1989

I remember everything being so different, so open, few houses and no tall trees. The maple tree on our lawn had to be wrapped in chicken wire to prevent the cat from pushing it over when he rubbed his whiskers on it.

I can see my mother standing at our west window as the winter sunset flamed across the sky. It was years before I realized that she was not looking at the blazing colours; she was watching for my father's car to come over the bridge.

In the early 30s most of the houses on Douglas Crescent were owned by the Borough of East York who had taken over the properties when their owners could no longer pay their taxes. It was the Depression when many people were unable to meet their financial obligations. Before long East York decided it did not want to be in the real estate business, and began selling off the houses for not much more than the outstanding back taxes. That was when my father, T.H.R.McNally, - Theo, bought #51, the house in which I still live.

My mother and a real estate agent were touring a lovely rug brick house. She decided it was the right house for us, but she wanted my father to see it before finalizing the purchase. She and the agent came out of the house to see a man standing on the front lawn writing a cheque. It was Meurice Sherk. His son Gordon is still living in #35. Marjorie Sherk and my mother, Glad, were life-long friends. They were in the same bridge club for years.

Seeing how disappointed my mother was about not getting the house she wanted, the real estate agent showed her almost every house between #67, (the block - the apartments - Governor's Manor - the townhouses, the name changes), and #33 the last house in the row, - all but one. None suited. #41 had a bathroom so small my father said he would burn his bottom on the radiator every time he sat down. #59 was built on a lot that was partially filled land. There was a sewer easement in the driveway between #55 and #53. Finally they got to #51.

The tenant in #51 did not want to move. She refused to open the front door. When the agent forcefully

reminded her that she was legally obliged to show the house to a prospective buyer, she reluctantly complied. My parents came back in the evening for another look. She let them in, but she had removed every light bulb in the house except one in the five branch chandelier in the living room. Fortunately, my father had come armed with a powerful flashlight. They liked the house but what really clinched the sale was the ravine lot.

My father loved to garden and he had been to the East York offices and found the lot extended well past the garage and fence down into the ravine. A hawthorn tree and a little plum tree grew on a narrow ridge that fell away steeply into the ravine and the railway property. It had been a private dump and the land was unusable as it stood.

After clearing the area, - I remember throwing old tomato cans into a garbage pail, - my father decided to build a retaining wall and fill in the steepest part of the ravine. From the Neighbourhood Workers Association he hired Frank, a Polish man, to help build a dry stone wall. Frank shook his head. Dry stone? That was no way to build a safe wall. He had almost no English but there was great rapport between the two men. Frank would show the proper way to build a wall, - a sod wall. They compromised. My father built his dry stone wall; Frank built his sod wall just inside it.

In the summer of 1932 my mother discovered that Douglas Crescent was a scary place to live. The field in front, the ravine behind, no neighbours, - she refused to unpack. Every night brought another midnight flit, - people moving away in the dark, leaving behind unpaid rent and utility bills. No store keeper extended credit over the bridge. The

out-of-work young brokers who had kept their mistresses in the charming little Spanish bungalows on Governor's Road and Nesbitt were no longer financially viable. My mother intended to move as soon as possible.

Gertie

I think it was Gertie Page and her raucous laughter that changed Mum's mind. The Pages lived in #49 and I thought they were absolutely marvelous, - at least Gertie. Mr. Page (Gordon) I found hard to talk to, -his speech was not always clear. I couldn't understand how he could get his face sunburned in the middle of winter. But Gertie I loved. I suppose she was about my mother's age, 35, but she seemed much younger, perhaps because I had the heady pleasure of calling her by her first name. Gertie was a large woman, but then, with my mother 5'3" tall, weighing less than 100 pounds, most women looked large to me. Gertie had a strong face, prominent beaky nose and laughing eyes. She could turn the most trivial incident into hilarious comedy. She wasn't in the house five minutes before she'd have us roaring with laughter as she did wickedly apt imitations of our neighbours. "Wonder what she has to say about us?" pondered my father. Mum and I were laughing too much to care. I remember the laughter, but none of the jokes, except one. Gertie was afraid to sit down in Lucille's living room lest those huge birds on the wallpaper should fly off their trellis and poop on her dress.

As I entered my teens I became more aware of the problems next door. Gertie was frequently at our place talking to my mother. Problems she had, yes,

but she always gave them a comic twist. It saved looking at tragedy.

Both Gertie and Gordon came from very old, very wealthy Halifax families. Gordon's family had owned a large and prosperous department store for generations. There was no notion that the scion of Halifax society would ever be expected to earn his living.

Then came the crash of 1929. The family lost everything including the store. Eaton's bought it and gave Gordon a position which he couldn't fill. He drifted to Toronto.

Gertie's family was equally impressive. I loved her name. To me, - Gertrude Helen Louise Douglas MacKenzie Page spelled - important. Her wit and her music had made her a popular debutante the year she came out. She had been educated to be a lady in a very select Halifax girls' school but music was her life. Her piano was long gone and she loved to play ours. How she could make that old piano sing, laugh, dance, Charleston. I wasn't sure which I loved best, her imitations or her music.

On the rare occasions when I went into Gertie's house, I hardly noticed that there was very little furniture. I loved her collection of old brass that shone in the subdued light. I wondered why she always kept her heavy drapes closed.

One day I found out. Gertie was at our door before breakfast with her arms full of brass pieces, candle sticks and snuffers, pitchers and plates. Her husband held a large brass wood box, the design hammered in bas relief.

Gertie said, "I can't let the bailiffs get this. We've sold all the silver and mirrors and most of the antiques. This brass is all that's left of my old home." The brass went into our cellar.

What about your lovely navy blue rug?" I asked.

In the midst of her personal tragedy Gertie could still laugh uproariously. "The bailiff can have it! When the last rug was completely thread-bare I turned it over and painted the back with ink." Fine as long as the sun never revealed the truth.

The next day Gertie was gone, - another midnight flit. Years later she came back for her brass.

## The Streets

Early in the Depression many of the houses over the bridge had reverted to East York and stood deserted. Many a summer evening saw the neighbours checking the stoves and refrigerators in the empty houses. "That stove has three working elements. Mine has only one left." So a quick switch was made. The neighbours really pulled together. Or maybe it was lifted together.

In the 1930's 'over the bridge' was a land apart from the rest of Toronto, and especially from the main part of East York. Our isolation was emphasized when some of the neighbours deliberately set a grass fire in the field and phoned the fire department. The Toronto fire department stopped on Astley. They didn't go over the bridge. The East York fire department got lost. The men put out their own fire.

The woods, brickworks property, were a real joy. In the spring there were masses of trilliums, violets - purple, white and yellow - adder's tongue, mandrakes or may apples, meadow rue and columbine. It was perfectly safe for a young girl to wander through the woods down into the valley under Governor's Bridge.

The field across from #51 was full of buttercups, daisies, vetch, burdock and various grasses. Mr.Allen, the farmer who lived in the red brick house on the crest of Bennington hill, came down every summer to mow the field and stook the hay.

There was a pond in the field that stretched from the curve in Douglas Crescent, opposite #33, almost to #6. It was big enough to provide skating for a child, and was even more fun in the spring. I remember building and launching a wonderful boat. After working all the long cold spring on it, I launched it and it promptly sank. During spring migrating ducks made our pond their resting place. I was always sorry to see it dry up in the summer.

The apartments, or the Block - Governor's Manor -the town houses were the last buildings on Douglas Crescent. The road from Douglas Cres. to Nesbitt and on to Pottery Road was paved, but Pottery Rd. itself was a dirt track in such bad condition that my father refused to drive on it. Twenty years later my children thought it was called Pottery because of the many pot holes.

The houses on Nesbitt ended at the Spanish bungalow, #24 at curve. So did the road. A cracked and broken side walk led through a field, past a decrepit tennis court, to join up with Douglas Crescent.

This whole area had once been an orchard and many old fruit trees remained. There were several pear trees opposite the field that is now the parkette. An old man had a hut, and privy, under the trees. He drew his water from a well. He lived there until the war years.

When Victory Gardens became a war-time necessity each house holder on Douglas Crescent took the 33 feet of the field opposite his house. The high enthusiasm of the 24th of May melted under the July sun, and my father took over about 90 feet of garden. Mr. Allen plowed and my father grew vegetables and flowers. A bench on the boulevard encouraged neighbours to stop, chat and carry away some of the harvest.

The Ravine

In the 1930s some of the residents of Rosedale might have been surprised to meet their neighbours, for the valley across the tracks from Douglas Crescent housed a well established 'hobo jungle'.

On the other side of Pottery Road the valley divided into four or five narrow defiles. Pea Creek ran through the first little valley and there the men had their village. The spring that was the source of Pea Creek provided good water, even though it was a peculiar colour. The shelters, built of tar paper, packing boxes and odd bits of lumber, lined one side of the creek. The largest one had a large rusty Coca Cola sign for a wall. The street was immaculate, - neat, tidy, no garbage lying about. It was no jungle.

In winter the cold was always a problem. The trains used a great deal of coal to get up steam for the steep grade ahead and the firemen always managed to spill quantities onto the tracks. As soon as the train

had passed the men were out with sacks gathering the bounty. Whether this littering of the tracks with coal was deliberate or accidental was never established, but the railway people were always trying to stop this 'waste' of coal. A few check-ups would diminish the supply for a few days, then the train crews got sloppy again, ensuring that the hobos had their coal. Every morning about 7.30, when I looked out my bed room window, I saw the smoke rising from their fires, thanks to the train men.

Not far away another defile, sheltered by trees, made a perfect toboggan run for teenagers. We had the parents convinced that it was perfectly safe until I smashed my toboggan against the tree at the foot of the run. Years later I heard my children muttering, "How'd she know?" when I cautioned them, "Don't run into that tree at the bottom of the hill." When I was young we liked to toboggan when the moon was full. I remember my father's warning, "Don't you bother those men. And keep the noise down. I don't want you disturbing them." They were good neighbours.

Another favourite tobogganing spot was back of #31. When I was tobogganing about 1932 or 33 there was a deep grove so it was unnecessary to steer. The hill was steep and part way down there was a little depression that left the toboggan airborne for a brief moment. The slide ended parallel to the railway track back of #39. My wire haired terrier, Noddy, loved to toboggan. She always got the front place and she liked to lean into the wind with her whiskers blowing. As the pale winter twilight deepened into dusk the hill grew steeper and the toboggan heavier. I stopped to rest part way up the hill and looked back. There

was Noddy, sitting on the green toboggan cushion riding up the hill in comfort. The tobogganing ended when Will Adam built his bungalow at #31 Douglas Crescent.

## Tragedy in the Woods

The open spaces, the woods, the pond made Douglas Crescent in the 30s a great place to grow up; but it was lonely. After buying #51 my parents realized that the East York schools were a long way off. Families with children didn't locate over the bridge. I continued to go to Moulton College. The school was in a large Victorian mansion located on Bloor St. east where The Bay is now. There were other teens living across the bridge, but since I didn't attend Jarvis Collegiate with them, I was not one of the group. I was surprised and delighted one winter evening when Dick and Spence turned up at our door. "Got to see your Dad. Alone." I was put out at being dismissed like that, until I realized that both boys were drained of colour, and Dick was shaking violently. Both their homes were nearby but it was my father they wanted.

Taking a short cut through the woods under the bridge, they had come upon something frightful. Propped against a tree was a dead man. There was a lot of blood and a gun still clutched in his hand. My father took over, and shortly he, the two boys and an East York policeman went back to the woods.

To comprehend the horror you must realize that in 1935 there was no T.V. to show us violence at home and in distant places. As far as we were concerned murder, or suicide was something that happened in an Agatha Christie novel.

#63

As more stable families moved into the area the neighbourhood began to change and I got to know some of the neighbours. The Boyds had come from the west to live at #63. You could still hear the western twang in their voices. As the depression deepened people were driven to great lengths to save a bit of money and keep the wolf from the door. The Boyd's economy was to save water. On Saturday night, bath night, Mrs.Boyd got the tub, with it's minimum of water first, next came Evelyn, the adult daughter, and finally Mr.Boyd got his turn. But that was not the end. The water was carefully scooped out of the tub and carried to the garden to water the plants that most needed a drink.

Evelyn was a tall, rather awkward girl with straight brown hair and a harsh voice. Like so many others she had no job; so she took courses. Cooking, typing, office management, ballet, singing, you name it, Evelyn took it. But still no job. Some time after the war I heard that she was leading horse back camping trips in the Rockies.

I remember how all three Boyds were devoted to their dog Skippy, a beautiful golden haired mut. Skippy had two aims in life: to bite as many people as possible and to rid Douglas Crescent of trucks. Everyone made allowances for Skippy's biting but his penchant for trucks was his undoing. Horse drawn vehicles that delivered bread and milk, Eaton and Simpson wagons, the garbage trucks with their huge percherons didn't bother him at all, but nothing could stop Skippy's truck crusade. Ropes couldn't hold him. Cooperative drivers sprayed him with javex. Still he chased trucks. Then it happened. Skippy was getting old, not as fast as he had been. He slipped under the wheels of a truck and was killed.

#59
Made Land
The Stars lived at #59. I didn't know him, but I got to know Kay Star quite well. She was a dark haired, pretty young woman who spent her days sitting in a deck chair on her front lawn. She had been a junior reporter on the Star. In carrying out her assignment she had been badly injured. She didn't like to talk about it and never told me any details. I only knew how bitterly she resented the Star's treatment of her. The doctors doubted that her knees would ever recover, so that was the end of her career. The Star, like all other employers, paid for work done. No work, no pay; as simple as that. Workman's compensation and unemployment insurance were distant dreams. So Kay just sat and rested her knees. One summer day, just after six o'clock, when the men were getting home from work, there was a loud 'whump'. It reverberated like an explosion. All the neighbours came running. We could see clouds of dust in front of #59. We ran to the house. Mr.Star's car had disappeared. It was in the attached garage with only the roof showing. With great difficulty the neighbours helped Mr.Star squeeze out of the window, and onto safe ground. He was shaken but unhurt, and came up loudly cursing the builder who had failed to put proper supports under the garage floor. There seemed to be no damage other than the roof of #59 leaning gently onto the eaves trough of #57. As we walked home my father said, "Now you see why I was so particular not to buy a house that was even partially on made land."

## Lawsuit Jones

The next to live in # 59 was Lawsuit Jones. He was going to sue every one on the street. Children walked on his grass; dogs barked; radios were too loud; someone was stealing his morning papers. They were found behind some bushes. The suit that got the most attention was his claim against #57. Their roof was touching his roof, and he was determined to go to court about it. Every one knew it was the other way round. People laughed. Lawsuit Jones was the joke of the neighbourhood. I think it was the laughter that drove him away from Douglas Crescent.

Ernie and Doreen Crabtree lived at #59 with their son Brian and daughter Val. Before Bennington Heights School was built the children from over the bridge were bussed to Whitney School. The trip was considered to be too much for the kindergarten children, so Ernie and Doreen converted their basement and Kindergarten was held there for some time. Later the Crabtree basement was the gathering place for all the neighbourhood kids. Any one who saw The Spook Show put on every Hallowe'en will not forget the house of horrors, complete with moaning ghosts, rattling chains, clammy hand shakes and dancing skeleton marionettes. The producers, Brian Crabtree and Stuart MacEwen were kept busy for weeks preparing the show.

When Mrs.Priestman, the rather prissy neighbour in #57 complained that all those bikes were ruining the grass, Doreen, in her quiet way, said, "I'm raising kids, not grass."

Doreen was a music teacher to a generation of over the bridge children.  I read an article by Sir Ernest MacMillan about the perfect music teacher.  He outlined the rapport, the necessary loving give-and-

take between teacher and pupil. He ended by saying that this was an unobtainable ideal, but in fact he might have been describing Doreen's relationship with her pupils. When my young son didn't want to practice, I said, "Fine. Just go up the street and tell Doreen you are not taking any more lessons." With that he settled down, practiced like mad and went off to his lesson muttering, "Couldn't hurt Doreen's feelings."
Most of her pupils were ordinary little kids taking piano lessons but some were stars. Diane Stapley won all the Kiwanis prizes and awards under Doreen's tutelage, and went on to a professional career in music. There was only one problem with Diane's vocal lessons. Pretzel, the Crabtree dachshund liked to sing with her.

Pretzel
Douglas Crescent has been home to a number of doggie characters. Pretzel liked to visit us about 7.00 each evening. He barked in the front porch and gave a woof and a wag as he came in. He raced through the house greeting each member of the family. In the kitchen he grabbed a potato from the vegetable bin, and was ready to leave.

Then there was the Doggie Club. Bubbles Trainor was a stout black and tan character with a tea pot handle tail. Pretty-boy Pete had a shaggy reddish coat and looked as if he were wearing black mascara. Looney Stapley was the long haired one. There may have been some collie in his background. So - the charter members of the doggie club; non members welcome to play. Those were the days when dogs could roam freely, and I laughed to see the first dog out in the morning go calling for his friends.

## The Community Centre

In the early 50s Ernie Crabtree was the moving force behind the organization of the Community Centre in Bennington Heights School. There were classes to appeal to every taste, young or old: - ball room dancing, square dancing, bridge, weaving, painting, fabric design and puppetry Friday night was 'Tweeners Night' where there was an equally varied program for grade 7 and 8 kids. For the adults there were fashion shows and dances held in the kindergarten.

I remember one costume party because I rented a harem girl costume, chiffon pants, bare middle, veil and all.

Before one dance a special notice was sent out. The committee had been successful in persuading the world famous soprano, Madame Olga, to come out of retirement and sing for us. Madame Olga? I'd never heard of her, but I hated to show my ignorance and didn't ask questions. We were forewarned that the great lady was so self-conscious about her broken English that she spoke only in her native tongue.

When she arrived we could catch a glimpse of her in the little kitchen by the kindergarten, before she went on stage. She was a statuesque lady and you could see that she must have been very beautiful in her youth. She was wearing a floating sort of pink chiffon dress, a bit old fashioned, elbow length white kid gloves and a picture hat. She carried a fan and was being quite flirtatious with the men clustered around her.

At last she came on stage, and she did indeed have a lovely voice. The applause encouraged several encores. She made a final curtsey and raised her hand to her hat. She removed the hat, and her hair! And there stood Bill Trainor from #52 Douglas Crescent.

#57
The Priestmans
A lovely old gnarled apple tree stood in front of #57. The only other tree on the street was in front of #53. The Priestmans were keen gardeners, and there was great rivalry between Jay Priestman and my father. Both had standard roses and we were all watching to see whose tree would bloom first. One Sunday morning my father was chagrined to see the Priestmans' rose covered with large buds just ready to burst open. We walked up to have a closer look. My father went in the gate and Mrs.Priestman firmly closed me into the alley way. "Now Jay," she said when her husband protested, "You know our rule. No children in the garden." I was nearly 22 and preparing to be married. So I didn't see the wonderful standard rose. My father came home laughing. Close inspection revealed that each perfect florist's bloom had been carefully wired into place.

The Moles
After the Priestmans, Harry and Helen Mole lived at #57. She was a dear, but she was a bit of a pain. The kids always called him 'Harry-the-mole'. The Moles liked to eat at the far end of their garden. They also liked music, - C.F.R.B.. They put the radio in the kitchen window and turned it on full blast. They could hear perfectly, and so could the whole street.
By the time he was in his early teens, Brian Crabtree (#59), was already an electronic whiz. When the other boys were playing shinny on the rink in the park, Brian was home building radios. So, Brian to the rescue of our tortured ear drums. He rigged up a device that produced horrible static when the Mole's

radio was turned up to full volume. Harry and Helen moved away, never knowing what ailed their radio. When they decided to sell #57 and move to the country the Moles realized that something had to be done about the interior of the house. Ruby Priestman's pale pink silk walls showed 25 years of wear. Harry stripped the whole house and put up the cheapest paper he could find. He was so proud of it we all had to go in to admire his handiwork. Sunflowers and cabbage roses bloomed in profusion, but his cleverest job was the stair well. He chose a large pattern of ivy climbing on a trellis, sure that it would disguise the bulge in the plaster wall. It didn't.
When the Paradis moved in to #57, the first thing they did was to strip off all Harry's wall paper and repair the bulge.

## Neighbourhood Kids

During the 50s all the local kids played together, regardless of age. I remember one water fight that involved kids from 3 to 15 years old. There were no sides, no winners or losers, just fun. I had a grandstand view because our garden hose was the chief source of supply for water pistols and pails.

When it came time to start school Frankie McEnaney just went up to Bennington with the rest of the gang. The staff were somewhat surprised to have a child registering himself for kindergarten, but Frankie did just fine until it came to the question, "What does your father do?"
Answer, - "Nothing."
"He must do something."
"Nope." Finally Frankie dredged up the information that his dad carried out the garbage for the apartments. Success. The school records were completed. Father's occupation, - janitor. Vince MacEnaney owned Governor's Manor, among other things,

and Frank's mother, Marjorie, was a writer with the C.B.C.

Apple tree hill was back of #59. The tree that stood there was old in 1932, when I was warned that its branches were too fragile to climb. It was Scottish Hill Top to the McQuaig children in #55, and the Fort to Frank McEnaney, Sandra Gill and my son Stuart. They tunnelled under the tree until they had a large excavation and were considering furnishing the interior of their fort. I think it was Gordon Gill and Ernie Crabtree who decided that the wonderful fort was much too dangerous. They went out one night and filled in the excavation. Apple tree hill reverted to being only a home for orioles. The tree lived until quite recently when a new owner in #59 filled in the space to enlarge his garden, piling new earth half way up the tree trunk. The tree died the next year, and Apple Tree Hill is no more.

In the early days # 55 seemed to change hands frequently. There were the Philips, Prim and Hap. They had just adopted a new baby. It was their first night home with her. They were frantic with her crying. Nothing could pacify her. Mum and I were still at the cottage when Dee arrived home about midnight. The screaming baby could be heard all over the neighbourhood. Dee went up to see if he could help. "I don't know what to do!" lamented the tearful Prim. "I don't know how to be a mother. I can't even get her to take her bottle." Dee had a look. "Try poking a hole in the rubber nipple with a hot darning needle". When the formula flowed there was no more crying.

Ruth Macey and her husband and little girl, Cynthia, lived in #55. I never knew his name. He was called 'Lamie' from his initials, L.A.M. When there was no second baby Ruth was very unhappy and got some pills from the doctor. She insisted that if the fertility pills were good for her they were good for him too. She must have been right because soon there was another little girl.

After the war a hot shot pilot named Joel Aldred moved into #55. He announced to any one who would listen that he intended to be Prime Minister of Canada. I think the biggest mark he made on the land was all the cement he poured into the ravine as a base for his bar-b-que.

Bill and Jean Redford and their two children, Bob and Pat lived in #55 for many years. Pat was married from 55. The last I heard Jean and Bill are great-grandparents.

During the 30s and early 40s Edna and Josh Meredith lived in #53. I never knew his real name. Josh came from his love of practical jokes.
Today, with royal scandals appearing so frequently on our T.V. news and in the papers, its hard to realize how shocked we were in 1936 when the news of the Prince of Wales and Mrs.Simpson reached Toronto.
Taboo words like mistress, or affair, were never printed, but gossip and speculation was the substance of many a party. We were horrified. This dreadful woman was leading astray our lovely prince.
In the midst of all this Josh Meredith had a picture in a silver frame on his piano. It was a rather attractive, dark haired woman. Visitors to the Meredith home glanced at it, and looked again. It was

Mrs.Simpson. Josh loved the reactions he got, and he got plenty.
Josh and Edna had lived with Edna's parents, the Silverthorns, at #33 until after their baby was born when they moved to #53. All the neighbours were going to see the new baby. Little Johnny Crocket from #39 got me to one side. "Why do they call her Gloria-the weasel?" he whispered. "She doesn't look too bad to me." The baby's name was Gloria Louise, shortened to Dordy', and a more beautiful baby you never saw. To me she was the little sister I never had, and I adored her. As she grew older she spent more and more time at our house. Our annual trip to the Santa Claus Parade was a joy to both of us.

One day when Mrs.Meredith, Mother and I were having afternoon tea on the front lawn Gloria came howling up the street, her head streaming blood. Her mother cleaned up the mess, put a bandaid on the cut on her forehead, and said,
"Now tell us what happened."
"Georgie hit me with the dish mop."
I was ready to charge after Georgie and do battle. "And what did you do to Georgie?"
"Nothing," wailed Gloria. "I only hit him with a wooden spoon.

When I was in university I drove home one day to find all the seven year olds in the neighbourhood waiting for me. They were in their going-to-a-party finery, wildly excited and all yelling at once. Finally I understood what they were saying.
"Gloria's dead! Gloria's dead! All burnt up!"
The world rocked beneath me. Gloria. My Gloria. But there was my mother with reassurance, and a cup of tea. Gloria was not dead. She was in hospital and they hoped they could save her.

Edna told us what had happened. Gloria had been at a birthday party at the Yeighs, # 19, the red brick bungalow at the edge of the woods. The children had sparklers. Some one touched Gloria's organdy dress with the glowing, burnt out end of a sparkler. She went up in flames. They rolled her on the grass and put out the fire. Someone put unguentine on her, - the worst thing that could have been done.
Nelles Silverthorn, her uncle, was a doctor at Sick Kids and with his care and patient nursing, Gloria recovered. Her neck, back, shoulder and one arm were badly scared. This very special little girl had a very special brand of courage. I never once heard her complain or show any resentment about the awful thing that had happened to her. When I was married in 1941 Gloria was a junior bride's maid. She wore an exact replica of my wedding dress and carried a miniature version of my bouquet. I moved away. The Merediths moved to St.Thomas. Letter writing between a child of 9 and a new bride is difficult. I have never ceased to regret that I lost touch with Gloria.

The next family in #53 owned the Hand Laundry on Church St. With the war time housing shortage East York conveniently looked the other way when they converted the second floor with its four small rooms into a flat. So there were two families, each with a teen age daughter living in #53.

By 1954 when I moved home with my two children and a large English Springer dog the Callows were living in #53. Some years later when their children were old enough to play out on the street they were concerned about the dry stone/sod wall that my father and Frank had built so long ago. The children never went down into the lower part of their garden where the hill was

still very steep, but the parents were sure the wall was going to fall over and crush them. My father had been dead for some years so the responsibility was mine. There was a definite bulge in the wall. Not big, but I could see that it was not plumb. The wall would have to come down.
I sent for a stone mason. He was a long time probing and examining the wall. He came back up to the house looking grim. "We've got a problem, lady." I feared the worst. "In order to take down that wall I'd have to set off a charge of dynamite larger than is allowed within the city limits." So the wall still stands. So does the old hawthorn tree.

That brings me to #51. HOME. Memories of my teen years flood over me. - Christmas, with the biggest possible tree in the front window. All the relatives came for Christmas Eve, and gift opening. The party broke up some time after midnight, and then they were all back again for breakfast and to listen to King George the Fifth's Christmas message. To actually hear his voice was almost unbelievable. Next came messages from all the parts of the Empire, - if radio connections could be maintained. I remember Dee working at his garden. Week-end after week-end the back seat was removed from the car, and we set out for the Georgetown area to gather water worn stones for the rock garden. I remember those stones very well. I sat on them for the homeward trip. Years later there was Sunday high tea when we rolled up the rug and danced to the music of Guy Lombardo on the radio.
Another memory goes further back to an autumn day when I was helping Dee clear up the dry leaves. I think Noddy, my wire haired terrier, and I were doing more scattering than clearing. I saw chalk marks on the

curb. Knowing how Dee kept everything neat and tidy, I started to scrub them out with my foot.
"Don't do that," Dee said. "Get a piece of chalk and we'll fix it up again." As he carefully replaced the symbols, he explained, "That's the code of the road. It says that you'll get food here, but no money." We often had stew, and I couldn't count the plates full that were passed out the verandah door.
More than other streets, Douglas Crescent got the knock at the door, and 'could you spare a bite to eat?' Men, riding the rails in search of work, dropped off the freight trains before they got to the well policed Leaside Station. Walking down the tracks ours were the first houses they saw.

One summer day as I was lying in a hammock at the bottom of our garden, reading about the siege of Sterling Castle, and enemy infiltrations, a voice right beside me made me jump so I almost spilled out of the hammock. The man standing on the other side of the fence was as black as a coal delivery man. In a soft voice he apologized for disturbing me, but would I ask my mother if he could have a little soap.
"She's out," I replied, "But I can get you soap." I gave him a 10 cent bar of Palmolive still in its green wrapper. He almost didn't take it lest I get into trouble for giving away so much. I pressed it on him and away he went to the Don River about half a mile away down Pottery Road.
Several chapters later another man stood at the fence. "I brought back your soap." He held it out to me, damp, but carefully wrapped in it's green paper, even to the black band. With the soot removed I had not recognized him. He had washed himself and all his clothes in the river.

In the 30s costume parties were popular. Not fancy costumes, but 'hard-times' parties. Every one came dressed as a hobo or a tramp. There were good times, lots of laughter, but no liquor. Only years later did I realize that no one had the proper clothes to go to a party. Keeping up appearances was very important. No one would admit to being hard up. You never heard 'I can't afford it.' The nearest thing was the expression, - 'a little bent, maybe, but not broke.'

I can't leave the depression years without writing about Old Mr.Robinson. He was the local grass cutter. He came on an ancient bicycle, -it must have been as old as he was. He wobbled and clattered through the traffic with a push lawn mower tied on behind. Once when I was alone in the house, I'd been left enough money to pay him when he finished. This I did. An hour later I saw him still pottering around the garden. What should I do? I had no more money to pay him. I rushed out to try to explain. He looked at me with the nearest thing he ever came to a smile. "Not working. Just enjoying."

When asked how long I've lived on Douglas Crescent I always reply 'about 65 years.' but that is not exactly accurate. In 1941 I married and went to live in various war time villages where my husband was making explosives,- TNT and later DNT and cordite. The marriage didn't outlast the war by many years, and by 1950 I was divorced and living on Rathnally Ave. with my two children.
In the summer of 1953 my parents rented a cottage in Haliburton. The children, Mother and I were out raspberry picking when Mum said, "Oh." That was all. "You O.K.?" I called to her.

"No." And indeed she wasn't O.K.  She had stepped in a rabbit hole. One look at her gray-green face and I knew we had trouble. The car was parked on the road some distance away. I picked her up and carried her across the steep ditch, and got her into the car. At that time she weighed about 15 pounds more than I did. The doctor in Minden set her broken ankle, but was not satisfied with it. She sent us to the hospital in Lindsay. Three operations and four casts later the doctors assured her that the ankle would heal. She would walk again. My kids and I moved home to look after her.

At that time I was working part time as a school dental assistant and the public health department provided other work in the summer. That left my 10 year old son, Stuart, and my 7 year old daughter Christina to look after Mother while my father and I were at work. The so-called walking cast was so heavy Mum couldn't manage it at all. Stuart was the only one who could help her. He was just the right size to fit under her shoulder and bear her weight. All that summer Stuart would cruise by the house on his bike and holler up to her open window, "You O.K. Gram?" She said she was always waiting for the day when he'd yell, "You gotta go to the bathroom, Gram" frightfully embarrassing for her generation.

Six months later Mother was still unable to take a step. By this time I decided I enjoyed adult conversation for a change, and the kids and I moved home permanently. I've been here ever since and intend to stay.

As I have said, there were a few babies on Douglas Crescent in the 30s, but no teenagers. The expression 'teenager' was not in general use. We were

adolescents. It had seemed to me that I was a perfectly normal human being, (commonly known as a human bean), when all of a sudden I'd caught something dreadful, like measles, and now I was an adolescent. Well, this adolescent was absolutely thrilled to have Fred and Una Francis and their adolescent daughter Margie move into #6 Governor's Road.
Not only was Margie exactly my age, she was to attend Moulton College with me. Margie had lived a very exciting life. Fred Francis had been in charge of laying the railway tracks in Northern Saskatchewan, and Margie had lived in a caboose. Some people have all the luck. As the tracks progressed so did the Francis family. They had friends all across the prairies. Both Una and Fred had come from Nova Scotia, and when you added western hospitality to Maritime hospitality the result was one continuous house party at #6 Governor's.
When #6 was sold the Francis' just moved next door to #2, (there was no #4), and the parties continued. I should explain that in the 30s 'party' did not equate with alcohol. Party' meant food, talking with good friends, but no drinks.

I remember the day at school when Miss Russell sent for Margie. If she was acting in her capacity as math teacher the books were on her desk; if she was being school psychologist the box of kleenex was ready for the inevitable tears. Margie saw the kleenex, but she came out laughing. ''The great pooh-bah thinks I'm unhappy at home and that's why my marks are down." Giggly, bouncy Margie unhappy? Now we all laughed. We knew that she was having too much fun at all the parties at her house to be bothered with home work.

#49
Back to Douglas Crescent,-

When the Pages left Toronto Frank and Pan (Pansy) Forester came to live next door to us in #49. Her real name was Lucy but every one called her Pan, except me, of course. Adults were never addressed by their Christian names, but I always thought of her as Pan.
Pan was a very shy, retiring person until a massive stroke and cerebral hemorrhage seemed to change her personality. Though they had never been more intimate than a little chat in the garden, my mother kept going in to see her. Pan attempted to talk but her speech was hopelessly garbled. She persisted. We had strawberries in the victory garden and mother took some of the first crop to Pan. She could sit up in bed but the nurse had to feed her. There was no question of her holding a spoon. Pan's eyes lit up when she saw the strawberries and she was determined to eat them without help. As she reached for the bowl her uncontrollable hand spilled the lot. Mother picked them up and she tried again. Finally she grasped a berry but it squashed in her hand. She tried again and again until she found her mouth. She ate the whole bowl full, - all but the ones that were mashed into the sheets, or her hands and face, or fell to the floor. "I did it!" Pan said. At least mother was pretty sure that's what she said.

Pan's courage and determination carried her to a full recovery, - almost. She drove her car again, but my heart was in my mouth every time I saw her weaving from one side of the road to the other. She drove with complete confidence and never had an accident. Pan, still unable to speak clearly, organized the Douglas Crescent bridge club. Her fly away hands couldn't hold the cards so she tucked the cards into the edge of the card table. There were no fancy bridge cloths when Pan was playing.

Over the years some members moved away, some died, but the bridge club carried on, every other Wednesday for 40 years, until my mother died in 1982.
Frank Forester was Marjorie Sherk's brother, so eventually her son Gordon moved into #49. He and his family stayed there for years until they moved back to his boyhood home #35.

When Gordon was a little boy and I a teenager the space now occupied by #45 and 43 was scrubby bushes and three old apple trees. I fancied myself quite the adventurer when I climbed my favourite tree, but really, I was not very skillful.

#41
Freeman and Florence Waugh bought #41 shortly after we arrived on Douglas Crescent. Freeman taught Math at Eastern Commerce and eventually was principal. I remember his arguments with my father about equal pay for equal work,- the same rate of pay for men and women teachers. Mr. Waugh was dead set against it. "After all," he protested, "a man has a family to support." I wonder if he changed his mind when his clever little daughter Mary became a teacher. Freeman Waugh was a bigger man than my father, but he coped with the tiny bath room. As she grew into her teens Nora, the second daughter, found her bed room too cramped. Freeman built her a high captain's bed, reached by a ladder, with drawers and storage space underneath. Florence Waugh, another bridge club member, could do anything with her hands. She often knit a bulky sweater on the trip up to their Lake Simcoe cottage and home again. Florence and Nora designed and hooked a large rug with a pattern of maple leaves in reds, gold and browns, just before Nora was married. It was lovely.

When Florence's father, Mr.Withrow came to live with them he turned the space under the apple trees (now #43) into a beautiful victory garden. Withrow Park was named after him, and some of us hoped the same thing would happen to his victory garden.

Of course it didn't turn out that way. Immediately after the war a developer took over the crescent. The field, the pond, all the open spaces were filled in with bungalows or story and a half houses. My young son thought it would be a nice idea if I were to buy the bungalow #54 just across the street. That way when he inherited #51 there would be something for his sister. Little did he realize that the astronomical sum of $24,000 was beyond my wildest dreams.

#39

Lucille Crocket and her little boy Johnny lived at #39 during the 30s. Lucille and her dentist husband were absolutely devoted to each other; but he lived in the Turner Valley, B.C., where he had a good practice and she stayed on Douglas Crescent.

Missing

There was a violent knocking at our door.

"Johnny's missing!" Grabbing his coat my father followed the frantic neighbour. Johnny had last been seen riding his tricycle in his driveway across the road from the pond. Heavy rains and spring thaw had made the pond deep and treacherous. His mother was running along the soggy shore calling and calling. No Johnny.

Quick sand! The men ran to the area now occupied by #27 and #25. All the children had been warned to stay away from there, but Johnny was not quite five years old. I was old enough to know that the foundations for a house had disappeared there. But there was no sign of Johnny.

The searching men spread out to comb the woods. At last they heard a cry. They ran toward the sound but couldn't see the child. They reached the lip of the cut made by the brick works and looked over. There was Johnny - held fast in the heavy clay. The men tried to lift him to safety but he had sunk into the clay almost up to his knees. There was no budging him. Finally someone unbuckled his galoshes and they pulled again. Up came Johnny, his little bare feet exposed to the cold. His galoshes, embedded in the clay, remained there for years.

#37

The Farrows lived at #37 When he died very suddenly. Mrs.Farrow was left in strained circumstances with an infant son to support. Uncle Ed and Lil came to help out, and my father was able to give Mrs.Farrow a job. In all the years she worked for him I never knew her first name, nor the last names of Uncle Ed and Lil. Mrs.Farrow was in charge of the Lakeshore office, - tourist information centre, and she also did convention registration. I remember seeing her wheeling her baby around the circle in his carriage, a beautiful baby with golden curls and the most amazing blue eyes. Harvey Farrow, like Gordon Sherk and me, is a permanent fixture on Douglas Crescent.

Some of us just can't be budged.

#33

Poppa Crabtree

When I got my driver's license the first thing I learned was to watch out for the crazy old man at the corner. I always stopped at the end of our driveway and waited to be sure he was no where on the horizon.

When he came down his driveway, full speed behind, it was- watch out world, here I come.

Later I learned that he was Poppa Crabtree, pronounced 'Puppa', father-in-law of my friend Doreen, and that he lived his life in double quick time. Once when we were at Inn Ertia, the Crabtree Muskoka cottage, there were eleven of us for dinner. Doreen had produced her usual four course meal, but any body else could do 'The Bloody Dishes'. That meant me. I was scraping, rinsing, and washing each plate. Poppa Crabtree was drying.
"At this rate you'll never be done. Move over." He pushed me aside, dumped all the stack of dirty plates into the sink and turned the taps on full force until the sink almost overflowed. Grabbing a dish mop he stirred vigorously. There was an ominous clanking of dishes and the garbage floated to the top. In ten minutes he had done all the dishes for eleven people with only one casualty.

Ernest Crabtree continued to live at #33, always in a hurry, smoking his cigars and painting his pictures until well into his nineties.

#31
Will Adam
During the 30s my father, Dee, and Will Adam started a neighbourhood association. Dee did most of the work, but Will was president. Dee was concerned with the welfare of the district, but he couldn't let his name appear anywhere. - Reason - he worked for the Toronto Convention and Tourist Association, and through much of the eastern U.S.A. he was known as 'Mr.Toronto'. He

was sure his board of directors would be highly displeased to learn that he didn't live in Toronto. So Will Adam was the president. Maybe that's why the association died a natural death during the war years. Will was sparing in his use of words. Once when I was driving with him, as we passed Chorley Park, I said, "Isn't the snow on the evergreens beautiful?" When we got to Bloor Street he said "Yes." Will was very discreet about his affair. When the neighbours talked about what a fine man he was, it was all I could do to hold my tongue. Because he was my mother's cousin I knew all about his fancy lady on Jarvis Street.

#29
The Kendricks

Will Adam had a lot more to say when he built his bungalow next to #33. The Kendricks, one lot to the south, had built their new house the year before and numbered it 31. There was a great row and the Post Office had to intervene. Of course the Adams got #31. Number 29 didn't bring the Kendricks any luck. Edna had taken the baby and gone to visit her mother. She came home a day early to find her husband in her bed with his secretary. She was shocked, hurt, humiliated, insulted, devastated. She demanded a divorce - a drastic step in 1934. The young husband pleaded for forgiveness. He would make amends. Edna was adamant. There could be no forgiveness. So Edna got her divorce, and she and her baby and her pride moved into a flat on Grosvenor St.. She supported herself clerking at Eaton's. As her son grew into manhood he discovered that he much preferred his father's affluent life style in Don Mills. For years Edna used to phone my mother to have a little cry and bewail her youthful pride.

## The MacKinneys

The MacKinneys were the next family to live in #29. She had a strange sense of humour. When no baby put in an appearance they decided to adopt a little girl, - easily accomplished in the 1930s. When the Children's Aid Society called to say there was a baby boy they could have her reaction was, - "What the heck. One baby is much like another." So the new baby came to #29. As the weeks passed and he still had no name, the neighbours talked. The other topic of conversation was the current murder. The suspect was named Warren. Warren, - that's a nice name. So the baby was named Warren.

The next summer Mrs.Mac had her brother and his friend baby-sitting little Warren. As University students they were excellent; as baby sitters they were somewhat lacking. What to do with a screaming baby and a very dirty diaper called for planning and action. The cloth diaper and contents they put in the garbage, but the unhappy baby was still in a mess. How to clean him up? Water. They filled the bath tub with warm water and swooshed the baby back and forth, back and forth, hoping the action of the water would clean his little bottom. It didn't, but Warren survived.

It was August the next time the boys were asked to baby sit. It was very hot, the end of a long boring afternoon when a knock came at the door. There stood two Salvation Army lassies. "Could they interest the young men in the work of the Army?" Indeed they could. The boys invited them into the house. It was so hot "would they like a glass of lemonade?" They drank it quickly and were much refreshed. "Would they like another?"  It was absolutely the best lemonade the Salvation Army girls had ever tasted, so they had another, and another.

When Mrs.Mac got home about 7.00 P.M. she could hear the giggling and the music as she came up the front walk. The Salvation Army lasses, their bonnets all askew, were being taught how to tango. The wonderful lemonade had been well spiked with gin.

## The Godwins

The Godwins had a problem of another sort. In the long summer evenings many of the neighbours walked around the circle and ended up at one house or another. I liked being at 27 Governor's road in spite of the hard stone steps. I liked the Godwins, especially Mrs.G. She always seemed so happy. She was much older than my mother, a pretty woman with short curly white hair. She always wore a blue dress and blue button ear rings that just matched her eyes. He was a dapper little man, and it amused me to think of Romance in connection with these old people. But even I could see the way they looked at each other with private little glances like Nick and Nora in The Thin Man. Where ever the Godwins were there was laughter and fun. I could forget the hard stone steps just listening. The first two ladies to arrive got the two small canvas chairs. He never brought out extra chairs as other neighbors did. Once in a while, if there were only a few people on the steps Mrs.G. would make lemonade.

As summer turned to fall I was taken up with school activities and didn't see the neighbours. Mother decided to have a tea to get all the ladies together again.

"I can't find the Goodwin's telephone number in the phone book. You just run over and ask her for tea on Thursday.

I was delighted to have an excuse to see Mrs.G. again.

I knocked, and knocked again. It was cold standing there. Finally the door opened, but only a little way. Mrs.G seemed different even though she was wearing the same blue cotton dress she had worn all summer with a gray cardigan over it. She gave me a wintry smile as I delivered my message.

"That's nice." Her voice was leaden. "But, no. No I don't think so."

"Oh please come. Mother really wants you." I could see part of the living room as I coaxed.
"That's very kind. Thank your mother, but no, I think not."
"Please!"
"Well, maybe. We'll see." As she hesitated I could see more of the house. It was what I didn't see that shocked me. There was no furniture. Nothing. Just the two faded canvas chairs. No rugs, no pictures -- just empty space. I didn't tell any one. Obviously she didn't want me to see, so I said nothing. Strange things happened during the depression.

Mrs.G. did go to the tea party, everything seemed fine and I thought no more about the Godwins.

Just before Christmas my father came home with the news, "The Godwins have gone."
"Gone? Gone where?"
"Nobody knows. I'll see what I can find out tomorrow. They may need help."
It was a week before we pieced the story together.

Mr.Godwin had been unable to find work of any kind. They literally had no money. They were hungry. He had applied for relief. To have to go on the dole was to hit rock bottom. But for the Godwins worse was to come. His son found them.

There was a dreadful scene. The son reduced the poor old man to tears, talking about the insult to his dead wife, and the disgrace to the family name. He threw Mr.Godwin's clothes into a brown paper bag and took him to live in a basement room in his bungalow. As he bundled his father into his car he called Mrs.G a tart and a whore.

“What’s a whore?” I asked, and my father, being the kind of man he was, explained.

So Mrs. G. was not Mrs. G.  Then who was she?  Where had she gone? No one knew.

How I hated that awful son and his mean ways. They had been so happy. And now it was all spoilt. My parents sympathized but were helpless to do anything. Mrs.Godwin had disappeared.

It was 1936. Living in sin could be neither condoned, nor forgiven.

So many changes over the years, - the field is gone and the pond, the woods and the little red fox who lived in the valley below #27. The hobo jungle is gone, and the ridge where the wild plum blossomed and the pheasant strutted and honked his joy to the rising sun.
There are new houses and new people, but the spirit of Douglas Crescent is strong as we prepare for the next millennium.

"The more things change
the more they remain the same."

In two or three of my reminiscences I have changed the name but not the street number in order not to hurt or offend anyone.

These pages could not have been prepared without the of Karri Paradi (#57) and her friend Peter Maropakis who struggled with my recalcitrant printer.

Notes about this document:

This document was prepared from scanning an original and using optical character recognition software to generate a Word document. Errors often result from this process and they did in this case. I have corrected all those I can find but there may be others.

The photos have been scanned separately. They should be inserted in the document as follows:

| File Name | Location |
|---|---|
| Jean MacEwen I.jpg | Between pages 24 & 25 |
| Jean MacEwen IIa.jpg | Between pages 26 & 27 |
| Jean MacEwen III.jpg | Between pages 26 & 27 |
| Jean MacEwen IVa.jpg | Between pages 35 & 36 |

The two photos in IVa are labeled as David and Johnny Langstone. Actually they are both of David.

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