

Mug Up MEMORIES



Mug Up Memories

Edited by Dale Gilbert Jarvis
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Heritage Foundation
of Newfoundland and Labrador
2020
St. John's, NL

Produced with the assistance of the
New Horizons for Seniors Program,
Government of Canada

ISBN 978-1-988899-15-2

What is the Memory Mug Up?

The Seniors Memory Mug Up was designed as an informal story sharing session for seniors, where people gather, have a cup of tea, and share memories.

It is part of the Heritage NL's Collective Memories project, established to safeguard the memories and knowledge of NL's seniors. The goal of the Mug Up is to help seniors share and preserve their stories.

Our Mug Up sessions were held at two different locations: the St. John's Farmers Market, and the Marjorie Mews branch of the St. John's Public Library.

We met, swapped stories back and forth, learned about each other's histories, and shared a lot of laughter. In the wake of Covid-19, we haven't been able to meet as we were doing, so this booklet presents some of those stories that were told in written format!

Thank you to all our helpers, volunteers, seniors and multigenerational participants! Special thanks to the staff of the Farmers Market, Julia Mayo and her crew at Marjorie Mews, and the board and staff of the St. John's

Storytelling Festival for all their help and support. Thanks as well to Terra Barrett and Katie Crane for their help in running the events, Graham Blair for his design work, and Terra Barrett and Andrea McGuire for their interviews with participants.

- Dale Gilbert Jarvis, December 2020.

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Memories of Auntie Lil

By Judy Collins

She was my father's sister, older sister, they were from Spaniard's Bay. They were a big family, 11 children in the family. She worked at Government House; I don't know what years but looking at her pictures she might've been in her 20s or 30s. She died at age 60 in 1963 so she was born in 1903.

Now I don't remember her working there but my sister remembers her working there. I have a sister who is four years older than me and she remembers when my aunt, Auntie Lil we called her, worked at Government House as a maid and apparently the maids in those days lived there as well. Now I don't know what floor the residence was on but I think it was in the basement, someone told me it might be in the basement.

My sister remembers going there to visit her while she was working there and going to her room, a little room that was her bedroom but I never did that. I don't know how long she worked there. I have no idea.



I don't know exactly what she did. I don't know if she did housework, you know making beds or working in the kitchen or what. Upstairs or downstairs.

She was a really, really nice person. She never had any children herself, she married late in life and she lived in Kelligrews on Tilley's Lane. She was married when I can remember her, I can only remember her being married, I don't remember her being single. I think she was single when she was a maid there, I'm pretty sure she was and I don't remember her working anywhere else. She may have, but I don't know.

[My sister] said to me she remembers walking along with Auntie Lil in a big long corridor, that's why I think she might've been pretty young - it sounded like she was by herself, walking along the corridor and Auntie Lil's feet going click, click, click, click, click on the floor all the way down the corridor until she got to her room. That's why I'd like to know where her room was.

I remember her personality. She was my favourite aunt. We had lots of aunts and uncles but she was our favourite. She liked children, although she didn't have any of her own. Like I mentioned she used to send us a birthday card for our birthday with a dollar in it like I said which was a lot of money back in those days.

She was really outgoing. Lots of fun. She used to sing little songs. Even though she had no children she was good with children. She was always happy. We used to love going to visit her house in Kelligrews. We used to drive from Gander to St. John's to visit my mom's people on the Southside Road and we would stop in Kelligrews and I believe we stayed overnight in her little house. There were five of us children, and a dog, and a mother and father, so seven people and a dog and we stayed in that little house.

I remember her always having nice meals and baked things ready for us when we got there and we walked down to the end of the street, Tilley's Lane, and we would come to the ocean and the beach was all rocks and that was a real novelty to us because we were from Gander we grew up in the woods in Gander to see the ocean was a real novelty.

They used to laugh at us because they were right by the ocean; it was no novelty to them. So the first thing we wanted to do was walk down to the beach, and sit on the beach and put our feet in the ice cold water. She was a really, really, sweet person. It's too bad she didn't keep a diary of her time at Government House.

Wonders of the World

By Cathy Field

I remember like it was yesterday. Every single year we got the exact same thing. It was a colouring book and crayons, it was a stocking full of oranges and apples, and there was something different every year.

I remember getting a ViewMaster, when I was probably 7, and Mom had put in with it two video reels -- is that what you call them? -- belonging to the ViewMaster and they were like Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck. So I said her, I said,

“Mother! I’m not interested in that, could I bring them back and change them?”

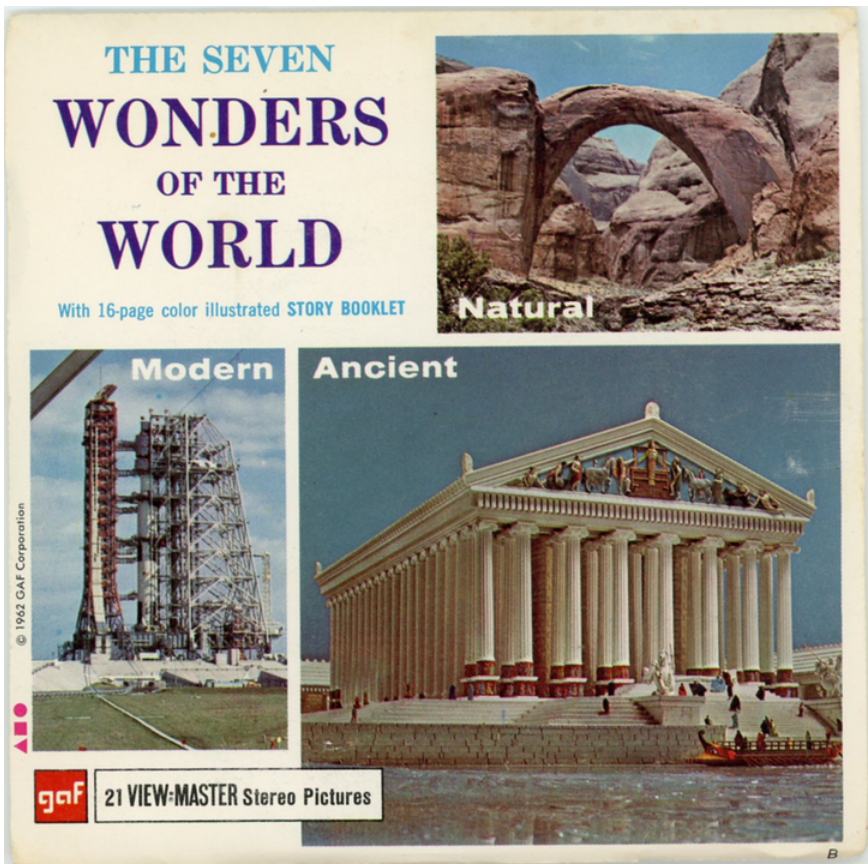
She said,

“Go and change them for anything you want.”

I went out and I got “The Wonders of the World” - the 21 Wonders of the World!

You know, even at that age, I was like 6 or 7, I wanted to work at the airport.

And I did, for 30 years.



I thought I was Superman

By Wayne Guzzwell

I wanted to go to the Royal Stores because the Royal Stores had this neat machine that—you put your new shoes on, you'd stand up to the machine, and you put your feet in the machine, and then there was a scope, and you'd look down, and it was an x-ray machine.

And you could see your toes inside the shoe, so you could see if there was enough room for your feet.

So, you know, our feet were probably massively radiated by the x-rays, but I thought I was Superman at the time, because I could see my feet through the shoes. And that was a really neat aspect of the Royal Stores, that x-ray machine.

That's the only thing I would buy at the Royal Stores, or my family would buy, was shoes, and it was because of the x-ray machine.

Tonic Wine and Wooden Skates at W.J. Murphy's Store

By Ed Murphy, as told to Andrea McGuire

I interviewed Ed Murphy about the W.J. Murphy store in St. John's, which operated from 1895-2000 on Rawlin's Cross (in the space now occupied by Hungry Heart Café). As the third-generation owner and operator of the store, Ed had a wealth of stories to share about the history and legacy of the business.

Over the years, W.J. Murphy's sold many local products, including rabbit, moose, salmon, halibut, fish (cod), partridgeberries, blueberries, bakeapples and locally grown vegetables. The store also imported a few fancy items from England, Scotland and Ireland.

In the early days, the store delivered their wares using bicycles and horse and cart, before making the obligatory shift towards car deliveries. Many customers entrusted W.J. Murphy's with keys to their homes, even in the years leading up to the business's close. As Ed explained it:

"Like I said, it was family. And we used to go around delivering, and we had keys to their houses, and if the driver went there and they weren't home, we just opened the doors and went in. If there was ice cream or anything frozen, we'd put that in the fridge, leave the rest of the stuff there and go on. It was just a different atmosphere altogether, you know."

After our interview, Ed showed me several intriguing artefacts that he's held onto over the years:



This is a bottle of pre-confederate tonic wine, which Ed estimates as being "80, 90 years old now, it's got to be." Before confederation, W.J. Murphy's was permitted to sell wine, but the Canadians opted to outlaw such practices "because the liquor store took over."

As Ed remembers it, "The liquor store went around to all the stores and collected these bottles of wine and

liquor that weren't already sold, but Dad said to himself, 'They're not getting that liquor.' So we took all the cases." Ed drinks the tonic wine very sporadically, and has kept many bottles since that time. He opened up a bottle on his 60th birthday, thinking it might taste like vinegar, but instead found that "Harvey's Bristol Cream has nothing on it. A little shot of it like that, and you can feel the blood in your body starting to curl."



Here, Ed is holding a pair of wooden skates that his grandmother used to skate across the St. John's harbour. At first, I registered this fact with some astonishment—could people have truly skated across the Narrows?—but Ed appeared unswervingly confident:

Ed: And I'm going to show you now a pair of wooden skates that my grandmother used to skate on the

harbour. And you might say this, “Now, how can you use a pair of wooden skates on the harbour?” It was homemade, they were homemade here in Newfoundland, and she’d hook them onto her boots. Whichever way the wind was going, you’d give her a push and the wind would take her, and she’d go down the harbour. So then she had to come back on her own, but these were used on the harbour.

Andrea: So was that considered a risky thing to do?

Ed: No, no, they walked across the harbour, oh yes—back then at the time, loads of them. Even when I was going to school, I can remember ice in the harbour. And you could, if you wanted to, jump the ice and so on.

Andrea: Could you skate to Fort Amherst?

Ed: Oh yes. Like I said, because back then it froze. Later on we more or less got slab ice, you know, because things warmed up.

Valentine's Day

By Daphne Gillingham

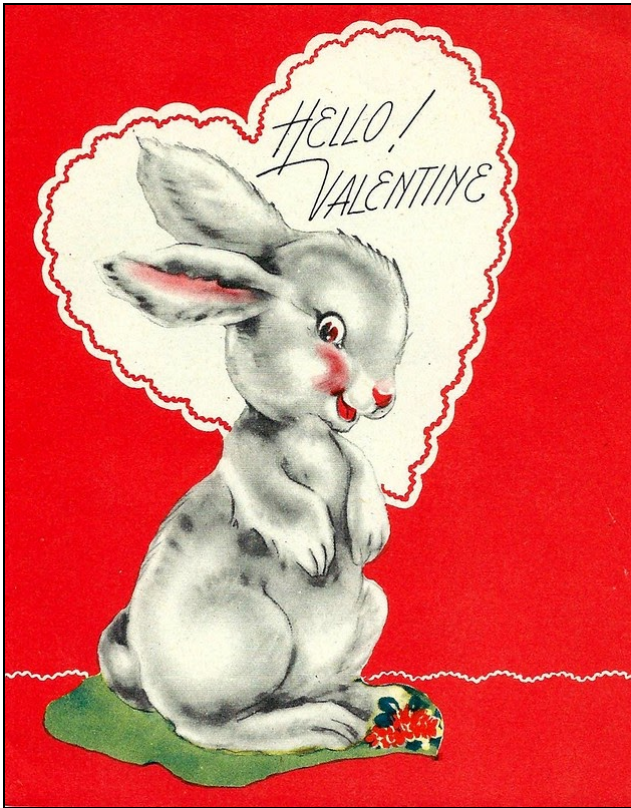
One thing that I remember which has certainly changed over the years is Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day was very different when I was a child. You would get your cards, you'd buy cards or you would make them, and your cards probably came in a book and in the book you'd have to cut them out yourself.

When it came to sending them to somebody, you wouldn't let them know who the card came from. You would write down on the back probably "Guess Who" or if you really wanted them to have to think about who it was from you might put your initials.

You might put letters here and there all over the page, like a puzzle they'd have to figure out, or you might write your name backwards, or print your name backwards.

The big time was the evening. Once it got dark, you would go around to your friend's houses who had cards for, and you would put it in their mailbox or put it under their door somewhere, and you'd ring the bell and you'd

run, because you wouldn't want them to know. But you would probably be hiding somewhere to make sure they opened the door to look to see who the Valentine was from.



The Meteor Phenomena

By William J. Tucker

In 1961 my father and mother decided to take our family on an adventure to the hinterlands of Canada. Dad, with his brand new Master's Degree in Education left his St. John's position of Department Head in Social Studies at the Brand new Booth Memorial High School and moved us all to Aklavik, North West Territories. Dad was new Principal in Aklavik and went on to be Principal of two schools in two communities.

Both communities we lived in were approximately 380 miles above the Arctic Circle. We spent 3 years in two Gwitch'in First Nation communities. Aklavik was a former regional hub of the Mackenzie Delta but was now a small community of just over 340 souls. I have many memories, all good, of living and being accepted by the people as a whole and we immersed ourselves in the social life and what it had to offer.

What stands out from those distant childhood memories was my mother trying to walk my dog, a full grown husky sled dog, using a collar and leash. That memory was always one that caused great

embarrassment for my mother and many smiles for myself and my father. I am sure that the first nation's people were mightily amused but were too kind and gracious to say anything to her. But they did get to see my mother being dragged and pulled around the town. Thank God there were no phones, which would have increased the gossip factor greatly! To say that we were isolated and or primitive was an understatement. There were no phone services, there was only one vehicle in the community (not always running), no doctor but a nursing station and a small RCMP station.

I remember our ice, which melted into our drinking/cooking water, was delivered by hand. The men used a dog team to deliver the huge ice blocks to our barrel in our back porch. No skidoos (not even heard of back then), one store the HBC and no TV just a shortwave radio. Everyone including the RCMP travelled by dog team, bombardier or ski and/or float plane.

The two most vibrant memories about Aklavik was the annual spring flood which explained the use of floating log sidewalks tethered with rope and the grave of the Mad Trapper, who was immortalized by the Charles Bronson movie. Aklavik has many stories that should be

told but for this narrative I move on to the Meteor phenomena!

In August 1962 – July 1964 the family consisting of mom, dad and I moved to Fort McPherson, in the Mackenzie Delta region of the North West Territories. This was a slightly bigger community and I have fantastic memories of attending feasts, playing with my friends and all of us wanting to be cowboys, none of us wanting to be Indians (how ironic) and just loving the comradery and pace of such a simple life.

There are many stories that could be written about the northern lights, the feasts, the hunting for ptarmigan, the time I saved a kid's life (according to dad) and the birth of my brother. One of the fondest memories is the record player booming out the songs of A White Christmas over our record player, which dad had placed the speakers outside of the bedroom window of the Principal's apartment over the school. My most vivid memory is walking home from Robert Alexis' house to go home for supper. There was no light except the infrequent light posts very unevenly placed, the light from the log house windows looking warm and welcoming.

As I walked you could see the smoke going directly up in such a lazy and meandering line, the warm smell of wood smoke from all those homes and in the stillness the sound of Bing Crosby, crooning about the gift of the season. In my memory there were lazy snow flakes of snow along with those almost pesky northern lights! I thought, being all of 7 years old, that to have no light for a solid month and have those waves of colour dancing in the sky completely normal and made it harder to see if Santa happened to be flying by.

One vivid memory of that time was a spring's day in 1964. I would surmise it was late in the spring because there was very little snow, it was bright at 10:30 am in the morning and I was just completing my assigned school work in Mrs. Foreman's grade 2 class. I remember asking Mrs. Foreman if I could get a book from the long bookshelf under the windows, since I was finished all my work.

This school was an older wood structure and housed children from the surrounding area who attended school from grade 1 to grade 8. Along the full side of the classroom were these enormously high windows and by looking out the window to the left you could see the length of the classrooms side of the school. We

were the last classroom in the school because the grade 1s were housed in a separate building at the end of the school along with the school care taker's house and the Home Economics building of the school.



When I arrived to pick up my book my best friend Robert Alexi was already at the book shelf picking out his choice and he had the new Curious George Book in his hands, just my luck! I took a quick glance to my left to see if the grade 8s were being let out for recess. When they got out and Mrs. Foreman saw them on the playground we were sent out. When I looked up I saw something that was seared into my memory ever since, it is vivid and such a unique experience.

As I looked up to see if the Grade 8s were being excused for recess I saw to my amazement a rock about the size of a basketball glowing bluish and red with flame, looking just like a hot round flaming charcoal briquette go flying the length of the school about 5 feet above my height, narrowly miss the Home Economics building and then sail on over the river. I know that it would have gone over the river and into the foothills of the Richardson Mountain Range. I remember saying to Robert,

“Look at that!” meaning look at the rock and he said,

“Yes they are out, let's get our jackets on.”

I told him what I saw and several days later I told my parents but I am sure they thought what an imagination Billy has... and I do, but this was real and so cool, and I love that I experienced it! 10 feet closer to the school we would have had newspaper stories and pictures of the destroyed school to remember it and prove it!!

The Story of Sister Beads

By Katie Crane

This is a story that I first heard back in the early 2000s when I was attending high school at Holy Heart of Mary in St. John's. It was told to me at an event that was being held after hours in the school where the best school legends are inevitably told.

This is the story of Sister Beads.

Holy Heart of Mary was once an all girls school, and as such it was run by nuns who would walk to the school every day from the convent behind it through a skywalk that connected the two buildings. However, there were some subjects that the nuns did not teach, and Brothers from nearby Brother Rice school would come up daily to teach these subjects. There was a tunnel which connected the two schools, so the Brothers would be able to walk up regardless of the weather outside.

There was a nun who taught at Holy Heart who must have been extremely beautiful, because one of the visiting Brothers took one look at her and fell instantly in love. And she fell in love with him. But because their

love was forbidden, they had to meet each other in secret. He would sneak up from Brother Rice through the tunnel, and she would sneak down from the convent at night and they would meet on the grounds of the school.



As all things go, they eventually were caught. They were told in no uncertain terms that they could not remain in the church if they wanted to be together and so they had to choose between their faith and their love for each other. The Brother decided that his faith was more important, and he could deny his love for the beautiful nun. He turned his back on her. But she could not deny the love she felt for him, and his betrayal devastated her.

The nun, so distraught, walked through the school to the auditorium, and seeing no life for herself without her love, she hanged herself from the balcony.

Now, they say if you are in the school after hours, or are alone in a quiet hallway, you can hear the nun rattling her rosary beads as she walks the halls in search of her lost love.

This is why she is called Sister Beads.

On Getting Started as a Writer

By Helen Fogwill Porter, as told to Dale Jarvis

Dale: How did you start as a writer?

Helen: In school, really.

Dale: Yeah?

Helen: Yeah. Essays, compositions.

We had a book that came out, I think it was like, fall, spring, and just before we got our holiday – The Collegian, it was called – and school was very progressive in those ways, you know. And you could enter a poem or a story or whatever you like, and so I started at quite early and kept it up all the way through, I think. And always, you know, always thought I'd like to be a writer, but I just didn't think that it was possible to be a writer living in Newfoundland.

I'd never heard of one, except J. A. Cochrane who wrote the history book that you probably all had in high school. And 'course he wasn't a Newfoundlander, a lot of our teachers came from England.

So anyway, it was always there, I was always scribbling out something and writing for the papers, for the Collegian, was the first thing probably I did.

Anyway, then as time went by, I'd send a few things in to magazines and eventually, you know, I got a few things published in Chatelaine and Newfoundland Quarterly, and things like that. But I was 50 when I published my

first book. Takes a long time and you know, when you're working and mother of four, you don't really have too much spare time.



The Business of Getting Up

"It's time to get up, it's time to get up!" that mocking cry to me
Each morning on the stroke of eight from my sweet reverie,
I stretch my legs, and stretch my arms, and twist my neck and all,
Each morning when that ghastly call comes from the lower hall.

I lie against my pillows in the worst kind of despair.
When in the early morning that wretched call I hear,
And desperately I try to snatch a moment more of sleep,
But knowing sometime I have got from 'neath the quilts to peep.
Now down my spine a shudder runs, as once more from the stairs,
'That hateful call I dread so much, comes once more to my ears,
And I hear my younger sister jump up with a glad cry,
So I say with resolution, "If she can do it, so can I."
So at last I get the courage to jump out of my bed,
And a great triumphant feeling goes surging through my head.
I rush into the bathroom, dash cold water on my eyes,
And think how wonderful 'twould be, if I didn't have to rise.
And now, in closing, I will say, if a fairy came to me,
And gave me a ruby ring which would grant me wishes three,
My dearest friends, my Mother and Dad, I'm giving you a warning,
One of those wishes would surely be, to stay in bed in the
morning!

—Helen Fogwill, Grade VII.

(from *The Collegian*, 1943, [01], Easter, Page 20.)

Images

Photo of Auntie Lil courtesy Judy Collins;

Seven Wonders via Ebay.com;

Tonic wine and skates, courtesy Ed Murphy;

Vintage Valentine Card - Hello Valentine! GB Valentine Card (P7106-B), Made In USA, Circa 1950s, Joe Haupt Valentine Card Collection, Flickr;

School in Fort MacPherson, circa 1961/62 (courtesy William Tucker, the kid in the middle with the blue shirt!);

Presentation Sisters at Holy Heart of Mary, circa 1960-1965. The Sisters in the front row are Sr M Tarcisius, PBVM, Sr M Nano, PBVM, Sr M Hildegarde RSM, Sr M Imelda, PBVM, Sr M Thomasina, PBVM, Sr M Reginald, PBVM, Sr M Grace, PBVM and Sr Marie Antoinette, PBVM. In the next row, sitting behind the empty chair, is Sr M Ernestine, RSM. stpatricksconventschool.blogspot.com;

The Collegian, 1943, [01], Easter.

The Memory Mug Up program was set up by Heritage NL as an informal story sharing session for seniors, where people could gather, have a cup of tea, and share memories. It is part of the Heritage NL's Collective Memories project, established to safeguard the memories and knowledge of NL's seniors.

The goal of the Mug Up is to help seniors share and preserve their stories. Whatever story is important to them, whether it is a personal story, a story about a family member, or a story about the community, the Memory Mug Ups allowed people to share that story.

Over the course of a year, we met, shared stories, tea, and laughter. These are some of the tales that were told.

Produced with the assistance of the New Horizons for Seniors Program, Government of Canada.



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© DECEMBER 2020
ISBN 978-1-988899-15-2