

The Story of My Life

Constance Nicholson Lea

Introduction by Ken Russell



Constance Nicholson Lea, 1968

My Mother, Elizabeth Russell, encouraged Grandma Lea to write her story partly because of her interest in their Quaker past. Mother joined the Canadian Friends Historical Association around the same time in the mid-1960s. Gran was a writer whose output included *The Bishop's Jacket & Other Stories*, a collection of inspirational stories and *Jaunting Through England*, a travelogue of a trip through England, Scotland & Wales with her husband in 1955 (both self-published). She also wrote articles and short stories for

newspapers (*Toronto Star Weekly*) and magazines (*Saturday Night*). She sometimes wrote under her own name and occasionally used the pseudonym Rebecca Shorthouse, the name of her Quaker great grandmother in England.

Gran was quite religious, and, though Anglican, looked upon all churches as the House of the Lord. We remember both my grandparents as people who were very friendly and had many interesting friends visit them. My mother told me that Grandma Lea was acquainted with the

writer Mazo de la Roche. My father, Bruce Russell, wrote a poem in honour of his in-laws' fiftieth anniversary in 1953 and his feelings for Grandma Lea are expressed in the following excerpt: "Do you remember what a charming host/ Your mother's mother would on occasion be?/ Do you remember gracious Sunday meals/ Sparkling with wit and goodly company."

One of the many things that impressed me as a child while visiting my Grandparents at their beloved Orton Park farm was the large bell mounted on a concrete pedestal. Gran would ring the bell to summon E.J. and the grandchildren to the house at mealtime. After E.J.'s death in 1967, the farm was sold and the bell was donated to St. Margaret's in the Pines Anglican Church where it remains to this day. Gran moved with her daughter Connie to a bungalow and later to a nursing home until her death in 1976.

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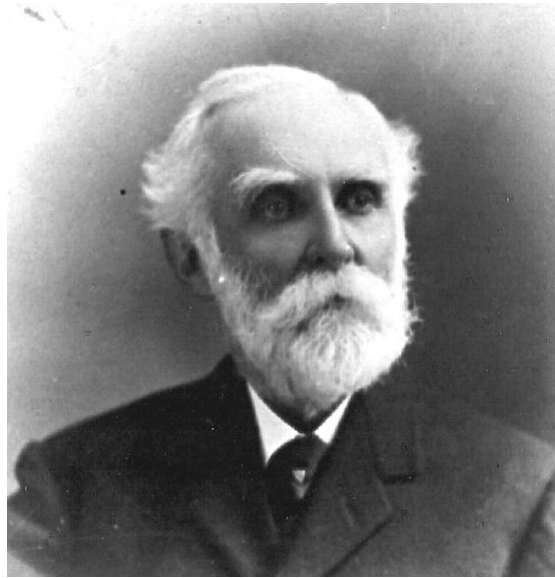
Some time ago my daughter, Elizabeth said to me, "Mother, I wish you would write the stories you tell us about your childhood. It would be so interesting to have them recorded." This is what I am starting to do now.

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

Chapter 1

I think that I ought to begin with the story of how my Father and Mother met.

My father belonged to a family of the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers. There were seven brothers and



Frederic Nicholson

one sister. They lived in Whitehaven, a town in the north of England. My Father was very strictly brought up. He wanted to join the Army. His father had died before this but his mother was very grieved and upset because the Society of Friends were most opposed to the Military Army and to war.

I do not know how long my Father was in the Army, but he spent some years with the military forces in India at the time of the Indian Mutiny. He was finally invalided home. A cousin and sister-in-law of his, the wife of his brother Theodore, met him when he landed in England.

This sister-in-law, Anna Mary, was a very religious woman. She was most anxious that the Nicholson brothers, who were all a bit wild, should get converted. She was the means of my Father's conversion. He became an earnest follower of the Lord. He finally became a well known Evangelist in the North of England. He held revival meetings and was the means of the conversion of many people.

One of my Father's brothers, Herbert

Nicholson, had immigrated to Canada. He bought a farm near the town of Norwich, Ontario, and married a girl called Sarah Walker in Norwich. He did very well as a farmer. In his letters to my Father, he urged him to come out to Canada and visit him and his wife. This, Frederic Nicholson decided to do. When he went to Canada he at once began evangelistic work among the people living in the vicinity of his brother's farm. One day, Herbert Nicholson said to his brother, "There is a minister not far from here that I'm sure you would like. His name is John Salmon. He used to be a sailor. He became converted. He went to Divinity College and finally became an ordained minister." So it happened that Herbert Nicholson drove his brother Frederic to the town of Forest and Frederic Nicholson met John Salmon. They became fast friends. My Father preached quite often in John Salmon's church.

It happened that John Salmon had a stepdaughter called Florence Large. She was a deeply religious girl and she eventually married my Father. She was my mother.

My Father and Mother did not marry in Canada. Father returned to England after he had spent some time in Canada. He went back to his Evangelistic work in the north of England. I don't think he thought of marrying my Mother when he was in Canada. He was more than twenty years older than she was. My Mother had some money of her own inherited from her father. She was not a very strong person physically. It was thought that a trip to England would be good for her health. A

sister of her Father's lived in the south of England in Northam. She went to visit her. John Salmon, her step father, wrote to Frederic Nicholson and told him that his step-daughter, Florence Large, was going to England and he would be grateful to Frederic if he could do anything to make her stay in England more pleasant.

At this time my Father was making his headquarters at the home of his brother Theodore, who was a gentleman farmer and lived in a very lovely estate called Orton Park, five miles from Carlisle, Cumberland. My Father and his brother, Theodore, wrote to my Mother and invited her to come on a visit to Orton Park. She came.

At this time Grandmother Nicholson was a widow and was living with her son, Theodore. Here is the place I must tell a little story about her.

My Father's Mother was a very strong-minded Quaker lady. Her husband had died broken-hearted because his seven sons had not turned out to be the fine men he had hoped they would. His wife hoped that the sons would improve as they grew older. It was a great disappointment to them both that Frederic joined the Army. The Society of Friends is very much opposed to anything military. They hate war. When my Father came home from the Indian Mutiny and got converted she was, of course very glad, but she did not care for the type of religion he had got. Quakers have a quiet and rather silent mode of worship. My Father was Evangelical. He became a very earnest Evangelist.

One evening soon after my Father's conversion, he and his mother were sitting and chatting by the open fire in the living room. His Mother said that she thought she

would go to bed. She was a stout old lady and she moved slowly. As she was going up the stairs, which were in sight of the room, she thought she could hear her son's voice speaking to someone in the room she had just left. She leaned over the banister and called, "Frederic, who is thee talking to?" My Father, after a pause answered slowly, "I was talking to the Lord, Mother". His Mother said "Huh" and went on upstairs.

Everybody at Orton Park fell in love with my Mother, particularly Grandmother Nicholson and it was while my Mother was staying at Orton Park that Father fell in love with her. He proposed to her in a little summer house in the beautiful garden of Orton Park. Then trouble began. Grandmother Nicholson, who had loved my Mother, was annoyed at the idea of Frederic marrying her. She said that my Mother was too delicate and she wouldn't have an invalid brought into the family. The atmosphere became unpleasant. Father wrote to his sister Mariana who lived in Leeds and explained matters to her and she invited my mother to visit her.

Father was still doing evangelistic work in the north of England. My Father and Mother were married. The wedding took place at my Mother's aunt's home in Northam. They were married in the Church of England where Mother's aunt attended. The happy couple returned to the north of England and lived in a house in Carlisle. My Mother was a great help to my Father in his evangelistic work. She played the piano or organ at the meetings he conducted. She also had a beautiful voice, and helped to lead the singing. Her health improved. She was very happy and my Father took great care of her.

I was born in Carlisle on December 9th 1881 and my Mother used to say she was a maid, a wife and a mother all in the same year. She and Father were married on February 9th 1881. Grandmother Nicholson no longer objected to Father's marriage and when two years later my brother, Edward, was born, she said, "Frederic might have married a stronger and more healthy woman, but he couldn't have married a better little breeder." Grandmother Nicholson was always delighted when she had another grandchild.

Chapter 2

My Father had a great urge to go to India. I don't know exactly what caused him to have this urge, but he felt that he could do Evangelical work among the army in India. He knew a soldier's life in India. Father had a first cousin called Henry Carr. He was the founder of the well known firm of Carr's Biscuits of Carlisle. He was a wealthy man and very religious. He knew of Father's desire to go to India and do Evangelical work in the Army. He told Father that he would be responsible for the expenses of travel to India for Father and his wife and family and would support them in India.

They sailed for India. I was about three years old. I do not remember much about this time of my life. My brother, Edward, was just a baby. My parents were very successful in India. My Mother worked among the women. My Father has told me how she took me with her when she went visiting the homes of the Indian women and how they admired my fair hair and loved to feel it with their hands. I became very ill with Indian Fever and the doctor

said if I didn't get out of the terrible heat I would die. Father took me to the hills. I was carried in a blanket fastened to two poles and carried by natives.

Father told me that Mother couldn't bear to see me go. She said, "Fred, I have a feeling that I won't see Connie again." My Mother was expecting her third child very soon. My Father told me that when we started for the hills I was very ill and listless but when we reached the cooler weather of the mountains I seemed to be better and I noticed the flowers that grew by the roadside. My

Mother's feeling that she would not see me again was prophetic. She never did. While I was in the mountains she gave birth to her third child, Henry Stanley. When he was just two weeks old she contracted the disease of Indian Cholera and died. My father was broken-hearted at her death. I have just one memory of India. It was of my Father taking my brother Edward and me to my mother's grave and of my Father kneeling down and praying.

My parents had a native married couple as servants at this time. Their names were Annie and David. A woman missionary

who knew my Father offered to take the baby. Soon after, Father went to the

missionary's home to see his baby son. The missionary was out. Father was not pleased with the way the baby looked. He asked to see the baby's bottle. The milk was sour. Father had a talk with the missionary. He was horrified at what he had seen in the baby's bottle. The missionary said, "Mr. Nicholson, you can't expect to raise a white baby on the bottle in India".



Theodore Nicholson

My Father took baby Stanley home with him and he and Annie took care of him and brought him up. My Father, writing to his brother Theodore, blamed himself for my mother's death. He said "I should never have taken her to India." My Uncle wrote back to Father; "Fred, it wasn't India. It was God."

My uncle Theodore offered to take Father's three children and care for them at his home. Father agreed to send me but kept the two boys with him in India. My younger brother, Stanley flourished under the combined care of Father and the native



Orton Park

servant, Annie. Father made arrangements for me to sail with a lady missionary who was returning to England on furlough. Her name was Miss Crittal. I don't think Father knew much about her.

I can remember some things about my journey to England with Miss Crittal. She was a disagreeable person. She didn't like children. When I asked her to button up my frock which fastened in the back she said, "You ought to be able to button your own dress." I had a hat that my Father had bought for me before I left India. It was a sort of pith helmet such as men in the tropics wear. It was round and I liked it. Miss Crittal didn't. She constantly made fun of it and one day, shortly before we landed, she took the hat and flung it out on the ocean. It broke my heart to see it floating away on the water. I was only five years old and I loved that hat.

I don't remember our landing at Liverpool, or wherever it was that we landed, but I remember being on the railway train with Aunt Mariana. She had met me where the steamer docked. My aunt was not like Miss Crittal. I loved her at

once. I suppose it was because she loved me. Aunt Mariana took me to Uncle Theodore's home at Orton Park. Here began one of the happiest periods of my life.

I don't think I can describe Orton Park. It was a lovely place. You entered it through lodge gates. The gardener lived in the lodge.

The garden was large, well looked after and very beautiful. There was a pond in it and a small boat which I soon learned to row. My uncle and aunt had two children, Ethel and Eric. They went to high school in Carlisle for five days a week. The coachman drove them to school and brought them home when school was out. There was a governess, Miss Craise, who had taught Ethel and Eric before they went into the city to school. I suppose she was kept on because I had come. She was a nice person and she was very kind to me. My education began with her. I know now that her method of teaching was very old fashioned, but I learned to read and write.

The people who worked the farm lived in cottages some distance from Orton Park. Once a week Miss Craise and I would make

a tour of these cottages and collect small sums of money from each the inhabitant which Miss Craise would give to my aunt who would deposit it in the bank under the name of the person who gave Miss Craise the money. Miss Craise would enter the amount in a little book with the name of the woman and the date. In this way my aunt encouraged the cottagers to save money.

I enjoyed going on these walks once a week with Miss Craise. I was interested in the children of the women we visited and they seemed to like me. One thing I always enjoyed when I was living at Orton Park was what was called "Cousin's Parties". There were two families of Carrs living near Carlisle and sometimes the Carr cousins would come to Orton Park for a party and sometimes the Nicholsons would drive to one of the Carr estates. We all had beautiful gardens.

I have a memory of one time when the party was at Orton Park. The Carr family had brought their governess along with them and she had her little nephew about five years old along with her. The little boy and I played together for a while. We were near the pond and the little boy was interested in the boat that was tied with a rope to the side of the pond. I asked him if he would like me to take him for a row in

the boat. He was most eager to go. I got into the boat first and untied the rope, then he got in. The pond was encircled with concrete. There were steps at the four corners. The little boy leaned over the side of the boat to give it a push off and he leaned too far and fell head first into the pond. I managed to get hold of the back of his coat. The water was deep enough to drown him. The rest of the party had gone to the tennis court. I yelled for help at the top of my lungs, still holding to the little boy's coat. It seemed a very long time to me before anyone came but perhaps it wasn't so long: the very wet and frightened little boy was out of the water.

Once a week, Uncle Theodore had a Band of Hope meeting in the big summer kitchen. Miss Craise played the organ and Uncle Theodore had speakers from Carlisle come and give addresses. All the workers on the farm came with their wives and children. The speakers impressed upon them the importance of Temperance. I enjoyed these Band of Hope meetings. Uncle Theodore also held a gospel service on Sunday evenings. The farmers all came to these meetings with their wives and children. They were dressed in their best clothes.

Chapter 3

I think I lived at Orton Park for about three years. They were very happy years. My Uncle got a letter from my Father in India telling him that he was thinking of marrying again. Uncle Theodore was very much annoyed at the news. The lady my Father was thinking of making his wife was Mary Waters. She was an American and had



been a very dear friend of my Mother's. My Father had quite a correspondence with her at the time of my Mother's death. Her letters had impressed Father so much that he thought she would be a good step-mother for his children. He paid her fare to India and she came out to see him. All this I learned from Father years after.

I don't know if my Uncle Theodore knew anything about Mary Waters or not but he wrote my father a very strong letter. He disapproved of the marriage his brother was contemplating.

Father told me of some of the things his brother said in his letter. One was, "I believe Miss Waters belongs to the Church of England. I trust she belongs to Christ." My Father didn't like his brother's letter. He was a man of quick temper. He wrote at once to my Mother's mother in Canada. He asked her if she would take care of me. In those days it took a long time for letters to cross the ocean. After some time it was arranged that I should go to Canada and live with my maternal grandmother. Father had insisted on paying Uncle Theodore something for my living expenses although Uncle didn't want him to. He told Grandmother Salmon that he would pay her the same amount and I was shipped to Canada.

A friend of my Uncle and Aunt were sailing to Canada and it was with them I took the journey. Mr. and Mrs. Kilgour and their two little boys were going to Canada. They were wealthy people and their home was in Toronto but they quite frequently made a trip to England. They had a nurse to look after their two little boys. The voyage to Canada was a very rough one. The sea

was angry and both Mrs. Kilgour and the nurse were very seasick.

I wasn't a bit seasick and I received great praise from the Kilgours for the way I managed their children. I enjoyed playing with Cecil and Ashley Kilgour. Cecil was four years old and Ashley was two. I had learned to read at Orton Park and I read stories to them.

They had lots of picture books and I enjoyed reading aloud to them. I must have been about eight years old then. Mr. Kilgour wasn't seasick and he often came to look at me and his children playing and enjoying stories. He evidently told his wife what a good time I gave their children.

There was almost a bad accident on the trip to Canada. Our ship struck an iceberg. A lot of the passengers were very frightened. I was in the big cabin when it happened. Ashley was asleep on one of the couches. When the ship hit the iceberg, Ashley woke up and said "Bump". Cecil and I were not frightened only excited. The ship was not injured in any way but it knocked a big piece of ice off the iceberg.

Chapter 4

My Grandmother Salmon lived on Scollard Street, Toronto. Scollard Street was not an attractive place. Houses were in rows close together. My Grandmother's house had a very small back yard. It was as different as possible from Orton Park. The back yard at Grandmother's house had a door at the bottom of it which opened into what is now called Ketchum Park. It was then the playground of Jesse Ketchum School. Once I said something to my Grandmother about how I missed the



Grandmother Salmon

lovely garden at Orton Park. She said, "You can get through the door at the end of my back yard and you are in a nice park—like place with green grass and trees." I said it wasn't a bit like Orton Park.

I wrote letters to my Uncle and Aunt in England. More than once I said in my letters, "I do wish I could come home." When Grandmother read these letters this made her very cross. She

said, "Your home isn't in England now. This is your home". I was kept quite busy doing little jobs about the house. My Grandmother didn't believe in idleness. I learned to peel potatoes, wash the dishes and sweep down the stairs. I have a memory of my first birthday at Grandma Salmon's house. It was so different to my birthdays at Orton Park when my place at the breakfast table was full of gifts. I said to Grandma, "Aren't there any birthday

presents for me?" She produced two pinafores and said, "Here are two nice pinafores for you. That's two birthday gifts for you." When I swept down the stairs I remember how the brass plates that held the carpet to the stair steps were blurred because my eyes were full of tears. I was feeling very sad because my birthday had been such a disappointing one. Just then my Grandfather came in the front door. He had been away attending a convention. I turned around and greeted him. (I liked my Grandfather) I said, "Grandpa today is my birthday". "Happy birthday, Connie," he said, "I've got a present for you". Then he handed me a basket. It was made of bright coloured straw. I learned afterwards that an Indian woman who made it had been selling these baskets on the train. Grandpa, being kind hearted had bought one. I treasured that basket for years. It was the first real birthday gift I'd ever had in Canada.

When Grandma couldn't find any other jobs for me she would set me to ripping old clothes. She seemed to have an inexhaustible number of old clothes. Where they came from I don't know. Grandma was the most saving person I have ever known. She insisted on me saving the threads that I ripped out and wind them on an empty spool.

I went to Sunday school at a Congregational church on Hazelton Avenue. There was no Sunday school at my Grandfather's church and he had once been the pastor of this Congregational Church on Hazelton Ave. I was in a class taught by a Miss Whiteman; I liked her, but what delighted me most of all was the library in connection with the Sunday school. I got books out of it every week and reading

them was my greatest joy. Often I would be in the dining room doing ripping. Grandma would be in the kitchen. She liked me to be in the room where she was but I always complained that the kitchen was too hot. Under the garment I was ripping I would have a library book hidden. If I heard Grandma coming I would quickly conceal the book under the garment and would be ripping industriously when she came into the room.

I was taken to Jesse Ketchum School which was very near where we lived. I was given a test before they decided which class I was to be put in. I had to read and write. I was a good reader and a fair writer and I was put in the Senior Second class. I knew no arithmetic and I didn't get on well at all. I would have been moved to a lower grade if I had stayed at that school, but I got diphtheria and of course I left the school. Grandpa and Grandma belonged to Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. They didn't believe in having a doctor in attendance during illness. Grandma blew sulphur down my throat with a paper funnel and told me I wasn't to tell Grandpa. She said that I was very ill, but I don't know how true that was. Anyway, I got better. I could not go back to school without a doctor's certificate and of course I couldn't get one because my Grandfather believed that Divine Healing had made me better.

Grandma had some wealthy friends who lived in a beautiful house on a road that surrounded Queen's Park and the Parliament Buildings. Their name was Howland. Mr. Howland had once been mayor of Toronto. The Howlands went to Grandpa's church and they believed in Divine Healing. Mrs. Howland was talking

to Grandma one Sunday after the service and Grandma told her that I couldn't go to a government school without a doctor's certificate. Mrs. Howland was very much interested and she suggested that I should have lessons with her children. They had a resident German governess called "Frauline". So my schooling began again with Frauline. She began by teaching me French. I don't think I learned much from her but Grandma had a good time telling her friends that her granddaughter was having lessons with the Howland children who had a German governess.

It was a pleasant walk from Grandma's house to the Howland's home and I enjoyed going there but I didn't learn much.

Chapter 5

I had not been taking lessons from Frauline very long when my Father came back from India bringing my two brothers with him.

The first Sunday that they were in Canada we all went to Grandpa's church. Among the members of the church was a Mrs. Hamilton, a widow with two daughters, Laura and Blanche. Blanche was a Kindergarten teacher. Laura, the elder one worked in an office. I have a letter from Laura Hamilton. She later studied medicine and became "Dr. Hamilton". I still have the letter in which she describes that first meeting of the Hamilton family with my family. I will copy part of it here.

"January 8th. 1929

Dear Connie, The notice in the *Globe* this morning faded away before the memory pictures that slipped softly



Constance, Frederic, Stanley, and Edward Nicholson

from the past. A low-ceilinged, oddly shaped room. Chairs shuffling a little. Shabby, simple people. A beautiful, picturesque gentleman with white beard and shining eyes. An exquisite baby in his arms and a nervous little lad

close to his side and the dainty little girl. All so lonely, so pathetically motherless, and coming to them my mother with the wealth of sympathy for each one of the little group, shining in her face and smile”.

Dr. Hamilton was a good and dear friend to me in my girlhood. She was just the sort of friend a motherless girl needed.

Father did not stay very long at Grandma Salmon's house. I think that Grandma hoped they would stay indefinitely. Father did not think much of my education being looked after by Frauline. He thought I did not look like a well-fed child. He rented a house on McPherson Avenue and we three children were started at Huron Street School. I was put in the Junior Second class and from that time on, my education was carried along successfully.

Father did the housekeeping and the cooking. Grandma Salmon came every two weeks with a woman to do the house cleaning. I went to school with a girl called Mabel Lea who lived quite near to us and also went to Huron Street School. She was a year older than I was. It is a pity that I did not stay at Huron Street school. I passed into the Senior Second class taught by Mr. Reid. I did very well in his class. I remember how thrilled I was when on more than one occasion he read aloud to the class one of my compositions. It was then that I decided that someday I would be a writer. If I had stayed in Mr. Reid's class I would have tried my entrance examination and if I had been successful, I could have gone to High School.

I didn't stay in Mr. Reid's class. Father got a letter from his brother Howard Nicholson in England. He was on the Board of administration of a Quaker College in Canada called Pickering College. Father did not know much about the system of education in Canada. Howard

Nicholson had sent him the money for my tuition at Pickering College so I was sent there. I was put in the Preparatory Department as I had not finished Senior Second class.

Miss Cronk was the teacher of the Preparatory Department. She was not young. She was the daughter of a Quaker farmer who lived near the village of Pickering. I do not remember much about her teaching and summer holidays began when I had been at the College a short time. In September when the College opened again, I was put into the first form. I liked it much better than the Preparatory Department. Miss Martin was in charge of the English classes. I liked her very much. She was a tall, regal looking woman. She had graduated from University and just finished the teacher training course. She was a fine Christian and she had a great influence on me. I can remember how some of us girls would gather in her room before bedtime and have sort of heart to heart talks with her. The subject of our conversations was usually of a religious nature. I loved Miss Martin.

I was one of the youngest girls in the College. I made two great friends while I was there. Margaret Dorland was the daughter of a Quaker minister from England. She was a little older than I was. We became great pals. Margaret's father had died in England and her mother had come with her children to Canada where her home was in Prince Edward County, Ontario. Bessie Sutton was the other special friend I made. She also was the daughter of a Quaker minister and she came from Norwich Ontario. Quaker ministers don't get any sort of stated salary. The Society of

Friends was paying for Bessie's education and she did not have such nice clothes as most of the other girls. Neither did I. I had no mother to look after my outfitting. Naturally, Bessie and I became fast friends. It is a friendship that has lasted all our lives. Now, we are both over 80 years old.

It was during my stay at Pickering College that two of my first cousins came on a visit to Canada. They were Gertrude and Maude Nicholson, daughters of Herbert Nicholson whom I mentioned before in this story. He came to Canada and had a farm near Norwich. He married Sarah Walker of Norwich. He had retired from farming and had returned to England with his family. Gertrude and Maude spent most of their time visiting their relations on their mother's side in Norwich. Maude undertook the job of writing weekly letters home to England. Gertrude kept a diary of what they did and where they went in Canada. Her two books written in her beautiful, clear handwriting and illustrated with watercolour paintings of the places they had visited. Years after, when the two cousins had both died, the books of the diaries were sent to me by a cousin in England. They are two of my most cherished possessions.

Gertrude and Maude visited my Father's home. We were living at that time at 790 Manning Avenue in Toronto. I was at home from Pickering College because it was the summer holidays. Gertrude made me two lovely dresses. I suppose she was sorry for me because my wardrobe was so sketchy. I think I was at Pickering College for about two and a half years. Then I was at home with Father. My uncle Howard in England sent the money, first for my brother

Edward and later for Stanley to go to Pickering College.

I still had the ambition which had started in Mr. Reid's class to be a writer. I took lessons three days a week in English at McMaster University. I've forgotten the name of the Professor of

English but I learned a lot from him. I didn't make any special friends at McMaster. They were all older than I was. About this time Father became interested in a small band of Plymouth Brethren who rented a room occupied by some Masonic Order. Stanley and I went every Sunday morning to the Plymouth Brethren's meeting. (My brother, Edward, at this time was at Pickering College). I don't know how my brother Stanley felt about the meetings but I know I didn't like them at all. The worshipers were all elderly men who made long prayers and rose to give exhortations. The meeting closed with the ceremony of the "Breaking of Bread". There was one of these Brethren called Mr. Bowen. He had started a little mission on Westmorland Avenue. He called it Grace and Truth Mission. He got Father to preach at his mission. The meetings were held every Sunday evening.

Father and I had been going on Sunday evenings to Walmer Road Baptist church where a very good preacher Rev. W.W. Weeks was pastor. While Father went to Grace and Truth Mission, I went to Walmer Road Baptist Church every Sunday at 7 P.M. and enjoyed the service. I also went to the Wednesday evening prayer service. My Father was quite busy at Grace and Truth Mission. He often preached there and he helped organize the Sunday school. He often asked me to go to the mission and

teach a Sunday school class. One day I said to him, "I'll go to Grace and Truth Mission and teach in the Sunday school if you will let me go to Walmer Baptist Church on Sunday mornings. I don't get any good out of the Brethren's meetings." Father agreed and I went every Sunday morning. Eventually I was baptized there. I was seventeen at the time. I never got to know any one very well at the Baptist church. I was not very well dressed.

A Plymouth Brother that Father knew was a baker and confectioner. He had a store quite near where we lived. I knew his daughter Edith Mayo. On Saturdays they were very busy at Mayo's store. Edith had more than she could do to serve all the customers and I got a job helping her. It gave me a little pocket money that I very much needed. On Saturday nights at closing time Mr. Mayo would give me a box full of cream puffs which would not keep until Monday. We enjoyed them at my home.

Chapter 6

I was seventeen years old when I sold my first story to the "ONWARD". It was a Sunday school paper published by the Methodist church. I was delighted and very soon after I sold another story. I forget the name of the paper. Before very long, I was selling stories to the "TORONTO STAR WEEKLY". That became my best market. My Father was very proud of my success in the story writing field and he encouraged me. During this time I saw a good deal of Evelyn Lea. Father used to tease me a little about him but I said that he came to see my brother Edward and not me. When I was baptized in Walmer Road Baptist Church by

the Rev. W.W. Weeks, Evelyn came to the service.

I don't think I was much attracted Evelyn Lea at that time and after he had been coming to see me for quite a while he came to tell us that he was engaged to a girl called Beatrice Davis. He brought her to see us one evening. It was in the winter; we entertained her in the kitchen which was the warmest room in the house. The engagement didn't last very long. Beatrice Davis' parents were very High Church and she had been educated in a high church convent. Evelyn's parents were Evangelical and his father hated the High Church. They didn't like Beatrice and the engagement was broken off. Evelyn began coming to see me again. I began to like him better.

When I was twenty years old my Father died very suddenly of Angina Pectoris. It was a very sad time for Edward and me. Stanley was at Pickering College. I woke up one morning and was surprised to see that it was daylight. Father always called me early in the morning when it was still dark. I thought that Father must be ill, I jumped out of bed and rushed to his room. There I saw him cold and stiff in his bed. I called Edward and we were both terribly shocked. We decided that we had better call Grandma and Grandpa Salmon. We had no telephone. Edward went at once to their house a distance away. The funeral was held in the living room of our house on Manning Avenue. It was not big enough to hold all the people who came. There were a lot of neighbours and friends. They overflowed into the hall. I think that Grandpa Salmon took the service but I remember that the Rev. W.W. Weeks was there and he spoke too. Stanley went back

to Pickering College after the funeral and Edward and I lived alone at 790 Manning Avenue.

Father had arranged some time before for Edward to be apprenticed to a watchmaker and jeweller called Mr. Munn. He was away all day. Our Uncle Theodore had been told by letter of Father's death and he sailed at once for Canada. He took charge of all the business of Father's estate. He arranged that I should get a stated sum to cover housekeeping expenses etc. Then he returned to England. Edward and I got along and Edward seemed to enjoy the meals I cooked.

Evelyn Lea began coming to see me quite often and the Lea family was very kind, often inviting us to their home for the evening meal. Nothing very interesting happened for some time. Evelyn and I became engaged and his family was very well pleased. My Father was a very Evangelical person and did not care much for the Church of England. I had an uncomfortable feeling about going to the Anglican Church. Evelyn knew how I felt and he made a point of taking me to the most Low Church services on Sundays. One Sunday evening he took me to St. Anne's Church on Dufferin Ave. They had a new minister there, Rev. Lawrence Skey. He had been engaged in ministering to soldiers at a camp at Niagara Falls Ontario. I lost my heart to him the first time I heard him preach. His sermon was just what my Father would have approved of. From then on we went every Sunday evening to St. Anne's Church. I think that we were instrumental in interesting Evelyn's brother George and his wife. They became earnest workers in St. Anne's. Eva, George's wife



was the president of the W. A. (now A.C.W.C.) for twenty years. George and Eva just about worshiped the Rev. Lawrence Skey.

On July 27th 1903 Evelyn and I were married in St. Anne's Church. Margaret Dorland was my bridesmaid. I think Edward was Evelyn's best man, but I am not sure. We did not have a wedding reception, but the wedding party gathered at my home on Manning Ave. We had our photographs taken by a professional photographer in the garden. We went to the Lake of Bays for our two weeks honeymoon. The Lake of Bays was not the popular tourist resort it is now. We stayed at a farm house near the lake and enjoyed ourselves very much. There were a great many raspberry bushes in the woods around the farm where we were staying. They were loaded with fruit. I bought Gem jars and sugar and canned a lot of

raspberries which we enjoyed the following winter.

After the Honeymoon Evelyn and I lived at the Manning Ave. house and Edward lived with us. Stanley was still at Pickering College. When Edward's apprenticeship was over he left Munn's Watch making store and went to Galt where he went into the jewellery business for himself.

When Stanley came home from Pickering College he decided that he would be a newspaperman. He got a job on a paper in Galt. He was interviewing a company of actors and actresses for his paper and he met a German girl that he fell desperately in love with. Her name was Mary Kribbs. She was very beautiful. She was older than Stanley. He married her to the surprise of his family and all his friends. He was only twenty years old. I saw a good deal of Mary. She confided to me that she had had lots of admirers but none of them had offered her marriage. She couldn't resist the opportunity!

Before Stanley's marriage my first child was born. Doctor Hamilton, who over the years had been a good friend to me, was nursing for a lady Doctor, Dr. Jennie Gray. She was very fond of Dr. Gray whom she said was the only woman doctor ever taken in consultation with men doctors. Laura Hamilton persuaded me to have Dr. Gray when I was confined. I had a hard confinement. I was 24 hours in labour. I didn't like the nurse I had. I think Dr. Gray engaged her. She may have been an excellent nurse but she was very bossy. We called the new baby "Florence Felton," I did not remember my mother, but I thought it would please my Mother's



mother, Grandma Salmon.

The baby was the cause of a great deal of annoyance to my mother-in-law. She didn't approve of my doctor, Jennie Gray, and she wanted me to give the baby rice water in a bottle. As the baby was constipated, I wouldn't give her the rice water. I was trying to nurse the baby myself. My mother-in-law said I was stubborn, and complained that I was taking the advice of a woman who had never had a baby. We had some unpleasant rows. However, after a



rather troubled start Florence began to thrive. She grew up to be a very beautiful child and her Grandfather adored her.

About this time or a little before, Grandpa Lea bought quite a lot of land on Blantyre Ave. His property lay on both sides of the road. I think he got it very cheaply. He built a large house on the west side of the road. They called it Brentwood. His wife's maiden name was Eliza Brent.

Soon after the house was built Grandpa Lea, his wife and daughter, went on a trip to England. It was many years since Grandpa Lea had seen his native land. The reason for their going was that his son, Arthur, a missionary in Japan was to be consecrated Bishop in Westminster Abbey. Unfortunately, Grandpa Lea never saw his son made a Bishop. He was taken very ill and went to hospital. He died and was buried in a cemetery in the village of Hales Owen where he was born. His death was a great sorrow to Evelyn. He almost worshiped his father. I was so very sorry for my husband.

Chapter 7

Evelyn's brother, Arthur came home from Japan on furlough. His father had built a nice brick house for him next to their own house, Brentwood. Arthur came to Canada by way of England and his wife was taken ill in England and died. It was very sad. She had had seven children and was expecting her eighth child. Bishop Lea came to Canada with his seven children and a nurse who had taken care of his wife in England when she was ill. They settled in the house that had been built for them next door to Brentwood. The Bishop's youngest

child was a baby, Audrey by name. He was the same age as Florence.

Grandpa Lea had been very fond of the Bishop's children and I think they were very happy. Miss Gray, the nurse who came from England with them was in charge of the children and the housekeeping. Grandma Lea was quite a business woman. She built a cottage on the land across the road from Brentwood. She also built a nice brick house a bit south of the cottage and rented it. She rented the cottage to her son, Joseph. After living in the cottage for a while Joe and his wife and child moved to another house on another street. I don't know why he moved. We were living at that time on Gladstone Ave in Toronto. We decided to move out to Blantyre Ave. and occupy the cottage Joe had vacated. I am not sure if that was before Grandpa Lea's death or after. I know that Elizabeth, my second child was born when we were living in the cottage.

My dear friend Laura Hamilton had become a doctor. Because of her great kindness to me, as a motherless young girl, I felt that I should have her attend me in my confinement. She took great care of me before the baby came and came out to the cottage once to give me a thorough examination. She said that the baby would not come for a couple of weeks and she would be able to go away to Barrie. It was very important that she should go. She put all her patients in charge of Dr. Lowena Hume, a great friend of hers. To my great surprise I began to have labour pains two days after Dr. Hamilton went away. Dr. Hume came out to the cottage on the street car and examined me. I told her that I was sure it was a false alarm. After her

examination she said, "It's no false alarm. We must get you to the hospital at once." On October 16th my second child was born in the Western Hospital. We named her Elizabeth Margaret. I was very fond of those names.

Life was not easy in the little cottage. There was no water inside. We went to a pump out of doors and with a tiny baby there was a lot of washing to do. We had



bought quite a big piece of land from Grandma Lea and we decided to build our home on it. It was on the same side of the road as the little cottage. It was a nice house and we lived in it for many happy years. Elizabeth Margaret was a good baby. I did not suffer so much as I had done at my previous confinement and she has been a great joy and comfort to me ever since.

Grandma Lea, who was a keen business woman, built a good sized brick house just south of us and rented it to Mrs. Cornish. A great friend of Bertha's rented the cottage we had lived in before our house

was built. Her name was Geneva Campbell. Her husband was Will Campbell and her daughter, Geneva Junior. They were queer people. Geneva Junior went to the Model School in Toronto and I was often told what a wonderful student she was by Bertha. Geneva Junior was about the same age as Florence. I thought that Florence was quite as clever as Geneva!

We were very happy in the house across the road from Grandma Lea. Evelyn (E.J.) had a beautiful garden and he put a fine wrought iron fence around the house and garden. It was a fine looking place altogether. He was manager of the Canadian Ornamental Iron Company. He had been ever since his father's death. Grandma Lea used to come over quite often to talk business with him. E.J.'s sister, Bertha, had a job as secretary in the office. She was always able to take time off from her office duties to go with her mother on trips. Once they went to Bermuda.

When we had lived in the Blantyre Ave. house my third child was born. We named her Constance Nicholson after me. Dr. Laura Hamilton had studied and become a doctor. She took care of me before my confinement and came out to see me every week before the baby was born at the Coranado Hospital, a new hospital that Dr. Hamilton approved of. I think perhaps it was Dr. Hamilton's great care of me was responsible for the fact that I was able to nurse Constance. She was the only child I was able to.

I went to St. Aidans Church and my children went to the Sunday school. This did not please Grandma Lea. St. Aidans Church had been started by Canon Dixon on Queen St. East in a tent in the summer.

Canon Dixon was very popular and they decided to have services in the winter when it was too cold. They put up a frame building. Grandpa Lea had been one of the first members of the church now called the Pavilion. The congregation became very large and the worshipers there talked of building a larger church. There was some discussion about this. Grandpa Lea was against it. I don't remember why. He died before things were finally settled. Grandma Lea and Bertha never went to St. Aidans Church. They went to St. Clement Church in East Toronto. Mr. (afterwards Dr.) McIntyre became the rector after Canon Dixon died. The new St. Aidans Church was built on Silverbirch Ave. just off Queen St. East. Mr. McIntyre called on Grandma Lea once at Brentwood. Grandma Lea was alone in the house. She went to answer the front door at his knock. When she saw who it was through the window of the door she wouldn't open the door to him.

I went to St. Aidans Church and my children went to the Sunday School. Grandma Lea didn't like this. E.J. didn't go to St. Aidans Church. He was afraid of his mother. There was a young divinity student called Alfred Clark who came to St. Aiden's to help Mr. McIntyre. I was introduced to him but didn't know him very well. Years later, one summer we went to a summer resort with

Grandma Lea and Bertha. When we got off the train at the rural station, Alfred Clark was on the platform meeting some people. I introduced him to Grandma Lea and Bertha. Alfred Clark fell in love with Bertha and eventually he married her.

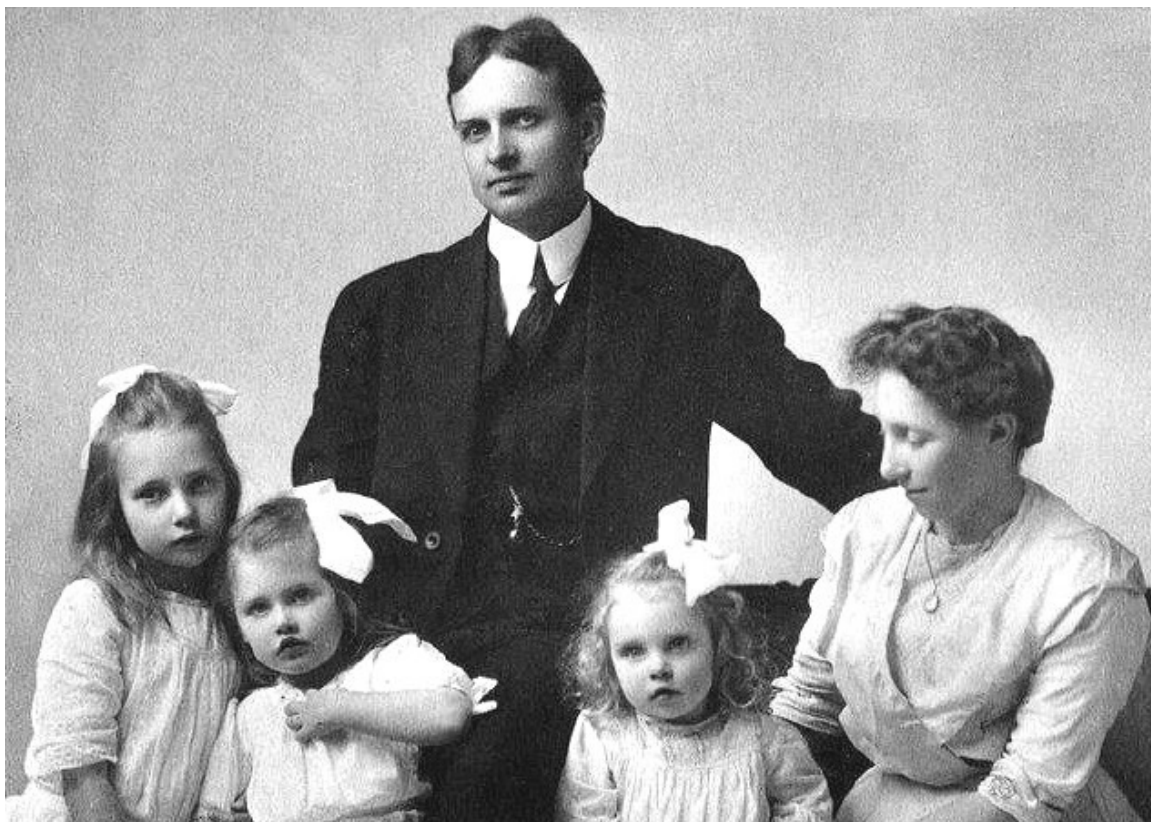
After Bertha married and Alfred Clark was ordained they went to live in the west.

Grandma's eldest daughter, Mary Perrin came to live with her mother at Brentwood. It was not a good arrangement. Mary and her brother did not get along very well. Vern, Grandma Lea's youngest son, was living at Brentwood then. He didn't like his sister Mary and they had continual rows. Vern would tell his mother things about Mary and Grandma Lea would believe them. Then there would be ructions. Vern was always a problem. I don't think he was quite right in his head. Grandma Lea said that he had got sunstroke when was a little boy. Sometime after this Alfred Clark got a church in Scarborough: St. Crispins. They lived with Grandma Lea.

Two more children were born to us when we lived on Blantyre Ave. Those were happy years. Mrs. Cornish was a good neighbour and I was very fond of her. I told her that she helped me to bring up my family. John was my son, the first boy after three girls. Dr. Young attended me. E.J. said we had had three lady doctors and three girls. We decided to have a man doctor this time.

The Lea family thought the new baby should be called Joseph after Grandpa Lea. There were already three Joseph Leas in the family and I wanted the baby called 'John'. I said that when I came out of the chloroform and was told the baby was a boy, a verse of scripture came into my mind. It was, 'There was a man sent from God whose name was John' it was a true story I told. There was no more said about calling the baby Joseph. My in-laws decided that I had had a Divine Revelation.

My last child was born at a hospital on Lea Ave. Dr. Sherk attended me. Dr. Young had died shortly before. We called her



'Kathleen'. We had a radio which often played E.J.'s favourite song. It was "I'll take you home again Kathleen." When she grew up our youngest wanted to be called Kaye. She was the only one of our children baptized by Rev. Alfred Clark. All the others were baptized by the Rev. Lawrence Skey at St. Anne's Church.

Chapter 8

We had been very happy at our Blantyre Ave. house. E.J. had a lovely garden but he longed for more land to work with. We had a car and we often went for drives in the country. Whenever we saw a sign, "This property for sale", we always called in to make inquiries. One day a neighbour asked E.J. to drive him to where some land owners were having a meeting. The neighbour hadn't a car and he asked E.J. to

take him. After the meeting was over E.J. asked the people there if any of them knew where there was a small farm for sale. One man said he knew of one for sale. It was on



rather rough land but it was not far from the city and there was a stream running through it. To E.J. and myself it sounded very much like what we wanted. We went to see it that evening. I shall never forget my first sight of the place. The sun was setting and a golden glow covered the old orchard in front of the house. We found out later that the house was in very bad shape. From the outside it looked quite nice. The sun was shining on it. We did not have a key so we could not see inside but we saw the barn and a stream of water running from a pipe into a shed at the back of the house.

We followed a road that led from the barn down a hill. It was spring time and the road was bordered with wild flowers and lovely trees. It led us to a little stream that gurgled happily through a most beautiful valley. We wondered if all this beauty belonged to the farm. We hoped that it did. We fell in love with the place at once. We lost no time in getting in touch with the owner. We paid a deposit, signed papers and felt that Orton Park was ours! We took the children to see it and they were as thrilled about it as we were. I wanted to call the farm after the place I lived in England, after my mother died in India. It was the home of my uncle Theodore Nicholson and I had such happy memories of it. E.J. thought that "Orton Park" would be a suitable name for our new property. So Orton Park it was called after a beautiful estate near Carlisle, England.

My in-laws were all very much impressed with our new home. To buy it we acquired a mortgage and sold our house on Blantyre Ave and Orton Park was ours. What happy years we spent we spent here! Elizabeth started her University courses, and Florence

went to train for a deaconess of the Anglican Church. Connie went to the nearest public school. We bought Orton Park in 1921 and we never regretted it. We attended St. Margaret's Church which was not far away.

At first we tried to work the farm with the help of a hired man. It wasn't very satisfactory. E.J. went to business every day and it was hard to get a man who would work well when the boss was not there. More than once I went to the barn and found the hired man lying sound asleep on a pile of hay. I went into the chicken business and did very well. I made enough money out of eggs and poultry to take a trip to England with my old school friend Bessie Sutton in 1948. I bought two pigs and made money when they were grown and I sold them at a profit. E.J. grew strawberries and raspberries. He did quite well at it in spite of the fact that he gave so much of the fruit to relatives and friends who came to visit us at Orton Park. We had a wonderful vegetable garden too.

We finally got a married hired man with a family to live in the farm house and we built a cottage for ourselves in the valley beside the stream. We found this more successful than having a single hired man. We enjoyed living in the cottage down in the valley. E.J. had a big strawberry patch in the valley as well as the one in the farm above. We had the largest and most delicious berries I have ever seen. We got our milk from the hired help who lived in the old farm house. Sometimes we thought that some of the cream had been taken off our milk before we got it. We didn't make any complaints. The farm was paying and it was being well worked. We spent some

happy years in the valley.

E.J. planted daffodil bulbs along the banks of the stream and in the spring the valley was a place of great beauty. E.J. found out that daffodil bulbs that had been forced for winter blooms would bloom again if left a season in the earth. He could get all the bulbs he wanted for nothing. Greenhouse men were glad to get rid of them. It didn't pay them to send them to British Columbia where gardeners would plant them out of doors. E.J. got a man with a motor cart to bring the used bulbs to our place. We had daffodils planted all over the valley; it was a beautiful sight and it became famous. Carloads of people came out to see our valley in daffodil time.

I don't remember just how many years we lived in the valley but I know that we were very happy there. I think it was the problem of having to get up and down the hill in the winter time that made us decide to build a new house where the old house stood. When the old house was torn down we found that it had huge wooden beams that had been cut out of the woods on the place. They were in splendid condition and we used them in the building of our new house. When finished the new house was most attractive. E.J. designed it himself and I was delighted with it.

277 Orton Park Rd. Scarborough (1960's) property was later sold and buildings demolished to make way for a new community center and tennis court

Curran Hall Community Centre

The Curran Hall Community Centre is one room with a capacity for 80 people. Programs provided include the arts programs, camps, fitness and wellness,

general interest and sports programming. The centre is fully accessible.

Curran Hall Community Centre is at 277 Orton Park Rd. Scarborough



E. J. and Constance Lea's property was where Botany Hill Park is now.