



*Counting
My
Blessings*

Looking Back On

My Hundredth Birthday

July 12th, 2015





Written by - Bessie Field Stallworthy

Editing and Printing - Debbie Moore

**Bessie celebrated her 100th birthday
July 12th, 2015.**

She was born in Lewisham, in London, England.

**She came to Canada, with her husband Charles,
and her two children, Margaret and Raymond,
arriving in Toronto, Ontario on June 27th, 1951.**

**They made the Beach district their home and
Kingston Road United became their church home
just a few weeks after arriving in Canada.**

Bessie is still a very active member.



COUNTING MY BLESSINGS

Looking back at my 100th Birthday
July 12th, 2015

There never was a time like this in my very long life.

Thinking about my big birthday really began on my 99th birthday.



The past few years I have spent my birthdays with my family up at the Johnston cottage where there was enough room for us all and I stayed for a week which was good.

The place is so relaxing and I just love the river in all its moods. Rain or shine it is so nice. Away from the noise of the city, the resident loons, calling to each other, the humming birds enjoying their nectar, chipmunks, squirrels and ducks galore. It is a delightful place to go.

We were celebrating and I realized that my next birthday would be on a Sunday. Right away I knew I had to celebrate my 100th in my church. I had to count my blessings. To get to this great age was special. Nothing was really mentioned and life went on. I suppose in a way for all of us it was just my next birthday.

On January 1st 2015, I started thinking about New Year's resolutions. I always try to have something new to think about or learn a new skill. So this year, I decided to look back over the previous year and think about all the big decisions and happenings that marked the milestones in my life, then write about them and work on counting my blessings.

With that theme in mind I had some good times and did a lot of writing. Then in March my church family began to ask me what I was doing for my birthday and that was when I realized it wasn't just my birthday, it belonged to everyone who was involved with me. All the people in my life who had touched me and all those whom I had touched, had made me who I am.

My idea for the day was having my whole family come to church with me to celebrate and after the service, at our friendship time, we would have a cake and everyone could sing Happy Birthday. After this my family would gather at Sheri's, my granddaughter's home for us to celebrate together. Not really any big fuss!

No way. After sixty four years at the same church, my church friends thought everyone we could reach should be invited.

A committee was set up, with four of my very good friends who had great ideas for the reception after the church service. I was fairly content to let them do what they wanted with one exception. No speeches! This wasn't all about me, it was all about us! One friend took on the task of notifying authorities so I could have letters from the Queen etc. A big e-mail went out to all our church people.

The church website was used, the local paper was used and all who were on facebook including myself, issued info and invitations.

We were all having a happy time planning.

My own family, were supportive. My daughter Margaret and her husband Bill, her daughter and son and their families would be there. My son Raymond and his wife Jo, their family would also be there from out West, so the planning went on. The actual church service was going to be mine to think out. I had known for a long time the type of service I wanted.

Life has a habit of putting in road blocks; it happened with me too. While all the good stuff was happening, winter was a bit tough, but the worst, was my lack of balance and my stumbling around my house. I would bang my leg and my paper thin skin would tear and not heal well. I had to have antibiotics because of cellulites.

Life goes on in spite of these things, my legs were healing from their bangs and I was busy with church things. Then I fell again right at the end of February. This time I really hurt myself. I gave myself a big sore spot on my leg; I took the skin off with lots of blood. I also sprained my ankle and banged up my knee. I was not a happy camper.

I felt very alone. Ray was out at home in Abbotsford. Margaret and Bill were on holiday in Florida, Sheri and her family was also away in Hilton Head. I managed to get around with the help of my tea trolley. My next door neighbour, Elaine was very good to me. My friend Debbie made sure I got to the doctor's office two or three times a week.

I was totally down. The lowest I had been for years. All birthday thoughts went out of my mind. Who wanted a birthday anyway? Hadn't I lived long enough? I sat for long time thinking through my options. Should I sell my little house and go into a senior's apartment, to be looked after when I needed it? If so where? Or stay in my little house and get a reverse mortgage on it, spruce up my downstairs apartment and pay for a live in person? This last one was the option I decided upon. I found out how this could be done, so I felt a lot better. Also my leg, knee and ankle began to heal up. It took two lots of antibiotics and numerous visits to the doctor, but after about six weeks, life went back to normal again.

Now, I am being extremely careful around my home, I can't bend either of my knees so I have three very nice women every week to help me into the shower. I go out walking each day with my walker and am again doing all my tasks at the church. One big learning curve for me with all that happened was, I have to do all I can to stay positive and stretch myself to the limit.

With these thoughts in my mind, my thoughts turned back to my birthday.

What would I truly like to do this special year?

The answer leapt into my mind.

Fly out to Abbotsford, B.C., cruise around the San Juan Island's in Ray's boat. Go up into the mountains. Take the ferry to Vancouver Island, explore the Fraser Valley and go to the seaside at White Rock. All these have been on my bucket list for years. I haven't been out West for six years because of my bad legs and lack of balance, I started using a walker five years ago and I am now very good at walking and I feel absolutely safe.

So, the next time my son Ray called me, I told him of my plan. He was skeptical and a bit worried, I also told Margaret, my daughter, when she visited me. She knows me well enough by now to know that if I really think I can do something, I will probably be able to do it. So she gave me her blessing.

So there it was a Big Birthday, with all my family coming to celebrate with my church family and then, maybe a trip to Abbotsford to stay with Ray and his wife Jo. To add to making my trip easier, my friend Jo's son, Euan, who is an Air Canada employee who loves to travel, volunteered to take me out to B.C. and take the next plane home and then he would come and get me when I was ready to come home. So I started more planning. Life was getting more exciting as the days went on.

Meanwhile the church was a very interesting place to be these days. We were searching for a new minister. We had a supply minister for a year, to help us think through to hiring the minister we thought we were looking for. Rev Douglas was a gem. He was so good at his task, we began to feel much better prepared for a new permanent minister and it was Rev Douglas who worked with me to prepare the worship service for my birthday.

I was busy and happy. There was so much to look forward to. I went on facebook telling of the plans and inviting all my friends to join me on my day. Margaret took me shopping and I bought two dresses, one to wear for my family day and one for the church day. They both looked good.

The excitement was building. Ray had confirmed he had things under control out West, his friend had built a platform with two steps to put on the dock beside the boat, on this, was placed a step ladder. He thought I could climb this and just step onto the deck. I found I could. It worked very well.

He and Jo decided it would be great to take me back to Abbotsford with them when they all went home after my birthday. So it was arranged. They took me out with them and Euan came out and brought me home.

All arrangements and preparations were going well, the church happenings were under control and I relaxed a bit. I put all I was looking forward to, onto my back burner. I was still helping the worship committee plan the services. Easter was approaching. This is always a big time, Rev Douglas and Eric, our choir director, met to discuss plans for this year. The choir started rehearsing special music. The advertising was being done. Fallingbrook Presbyterian church was asked about their involvement with us this year on Good Friday. For a number of years the two churches have met to have a combined service, either in their church or ours, this year the service was to be in our church.

All the Easter services went very well with the climax on Easter Sunday.

The singing was joyous. There is so much wonderful music out there to be sung. I love to sing. We had a brass quartet to play for us and together with the organ and the choir singing together with all of us in the congregation, it was all so inspiring, especially Handel's Hallelujah Chorus.

Spring came. The first few weeks of April were lovely, really spring-like weather. I loved it and really enjoyed the next few weeks. Anticipation is so good. I loved chatting with Margaret and Bill about all that would be happening, and also chatting with my church friends. One thing I had made up my mind about was, this birthday had become so special to me, I would do all I could to make it the way I had dreamed, so I told everyone my ideas and everyone was so nice and co-operating, I was having really nice days.

I have a lot of English relatives. We send each other messages on facebook as well as e-mail. I kept them in the loop about happenings over here. This was very nice as well for all of us.

One of the things I have always second guessed myself about over the years was our decision to emigrate in 1951. The reasons we did are still valid, but the toll they took on me, is still happening. I have spoken to my children over the years and I know they also have some regrets and have been back and visited, so they know their relatives. Chas, my husband, had no regrets. He was born in Winnipeg and left Canada when he was five years old and always wanted to come back. I was finally persuaded to come in 1951.

It was very hard and I was here seven and a half years before I was able to visit. I have been back several times since then, I saw various nephews and nieces get married. Received photos of new babies and have always felt I have one foot still on English soil and one foot here in Canada. It is a good few years since I was last there. I still have a bucket list of dreams I would like to come true. Near the top of the list is to fly home to see them all.

Learning the computer and getting onto facebook, opened up new doors. I now have my nieces and nephews, great, great nieces and nephews sending me news and pictures, so it is good. I was keeping them informed of the exciting things happening to me. It wasn't possible for any of them to join us. So the families had their own family parties to celebrate my birthday and sent me pictures. I was thrilled to receive pictures of them partying.

One thing I was puzzling about in my mind was how to say thank you to all my friends and family for all getting on board with all I wanted to do for my big year. I finally came up with the idea of a little book. I sorted out twenty of my poems and writings over the years and put them together and created a front and back cover. I printed a copy and was pleased with the results.

The front cover read 'Bessie's 100th'. Also lower on the cover 'Counting my Blessings in Prose and Rhyme'. The back page contained information about me. Our church secretary, with a blessing from the treasurer, printed out two hundred copies to be given, one to each family on my big day. People really liked them; I sent one for each family and one to my brother in England. They were all so happy to receive them. I admit I have reread one again and it truly reflects how I think about living.

I am an optimist and have always learned to see my glass as half full and it is up to me to fill it up. I can't honestly say I am always up. I also cope with down days and my pity parties. I am glad to say they don't last all day. I weep and wail mostly out loud, then I can say 'enough of this' and I get up and put the kettle on and make a cup of tea!

My friend Colleen's daughter, Kelly gave me my first birthday party. Colleen and I have been friends for years and I have watched Kelly grow up and she in turn, became my friend. She and Ken and her daughter Erin have the most exciting shop that is becoming quite famous in Burlington.

It is called 'Kelly's Kup Cake' store. The store is beautifully decorated and has an array of the most wonderful looking cupcakes. People come from all over to buy them. She has been on Canada AM showing her wares. She invited me down to see her store, Colleen would drive me down. So on June 24th I was going down to Burlington with Colleen.

Then plans were changed, Colleen told me our friends Margaret and Joan were also coming, and Kelly was sending a car to save her mother driving. I thought it was so good of Kelly to do this and was excited at the outing. I have always loved going places in the car, and since being alone for so many years, outings like this are awesome times. Colleen came to my house and the driver picked us up here. Margaret and Joan also arrived to be picked up.

What a thrill. Kelly sent a stretch limousine with a driver. It was exciting, the weather was lovely, and being June, the leaves were their brightest green. I saw so many flowering trees and so many flowers in gardens. Just about five minutes from Burlington, Kelly called her mother to know where we were. I was a bit puzzled she would be so anxious, but I soon found out. As the car stopped I saw a big sign in front of the store which read, "Happy 100th Birthday Bessie".

And there was Kelly, Ken, Erin and all their staff all lined up to welcome us. What a first birthday party! It was so exciting. I felt like a Queen.

The store was really attractive. Pink was the predominant colour. The counters had an array of Kelly's wonderful cupcakes. She is so imaginative, they were so beautifully decorated, so many colours. They all looked so inviting. She also bakes cookies of all kinds as well. Birthday and wedding cakes are also her specialty. The place was so clean and bright it made me want to try everything, even though I am not a cake person. I toured the rooms behind where everything was made, chatted to the people who worked for Kelly. I loved every minute of it.

Then we left Kelly's store to go the restaurant around the corner that Ken had recently opened. All the food was dairy and gluten free. It has become extremely popular. It seems there are many people who have this type of diet. A table was set for us all and decorated for a birthday. I can't tell you what I ate; it was all too much of a blur. I only remember the beautiful birthday cake with 'Happy 100th Birthday Bessie' written on it and perched on the top were 3 big candles numbering 100. I had to blow them out. I have to admit, I find it hard to be the centre of everything like this. I get very embarrassed really, but I keep reminding myself how blest I am that all these people love me and love doing it.

Too soon it was time to go. We left with plenty of hugs and kisses; I was handed back into the limo and came back to Toronto. I have to admit it had been one of those rare mountain top experiences I find happens to me.

For me it became the first of many. The second one was given me by my neighbours. I have really great neighbours living in our little row of bungalows. Nearest and best are the ones next door who moved in when they got married.

From the very beginning they became my friends. I always knew from the start they were on call for me, because as soon as they had their phone hooked up, I was given their phone number and was told to call day or night if I needed anything. It was such a comfort to both me and my daughter Margaret to know I had someone there for me. So it has been. We have been there for each other and have become close friends because of it. Mugsy (his nick name) and Elaine, now have two daughters Claudia age eleven and Lucy age eight. They wanted to give me a birthday party to be held in their garden. We decided to hold it on Canada Day, July 1st and it was attended by all my neighbours. As you can imagine the girls were very excited, we talked about the party for days, keeping secrets from me, telling me tiny bits and saying 'it's a secret'. It was becoming more and more plain to me, this wasn't just my birthday, it was all the folk who wanted to be part of it all with me.

This is one of the things that have made my birthday such a learning experience. It is realizing what pleasure we give others, when we allow them to do things like this for us. It has been such a hard lesson for me to learn. I am still learning. The day was lovely, warm and sunny. I sat on my deck watching the preparations underway. Elaine had the two girls running up and down the deck stairs bringing things out, putting tablecloths on, arranging chairs. I was instructed I was to wait until they came for me. I went inside to get ready and soon they rang my front door bell. They were all dressed up and brought over a crown for me to wear. When it was arranged to their satisfaction, they walked me down the driveway to the garden. There were about ten of my neighbours all there waiting for me to arrive. I did have a really happy time.

Between them, they all provided nice things to eat. We had specially decorated cupcakes made by Elaine, along with three special ones for me with number 100 candles on them that I had to blow out. I was happy it was only three candles because a hundred would have taken a lot of breath. I received many small presents in spite of saying no presents and a special one from the girls. They gave me a purple T-shirt with an inscription on the front.

Vintage 1915 Aged to perfection

We laughed, chatted and also watched the girls perform on the trampoline. It was such a happy time. It really was such a good feeling, being with all these folk who live around me and are always there for me if needed. I have known some of my neighbors for many years, we always chat when out on our decks or we meet in the street. If any of us need anything we know we can always get in touch with

each other, occasionally will see two or three of us together outside one of our homes busy discussing things. Sitting around a table celebrating like we were, brought a new dimension to our feelings for each other.

We all remarked about this, thinking we should do this more often, but life steps in again. We lead busy lives and the time goes by. We all went back home and life went back to normal. As for me, I had a bunch of lovely birthday cards and small gifts and a warm glow in my heart again for all their loving kindness to me.

Meanwhile back at the church, arrangements for my birthday service were going forward. The committee was working very hard and Bless their hearts, kept me informed because they know I hate surprises. All my life I have found anticipating beforehand definitely enhances my enjoyment of the actual happenings.

Rev Douglas and I met to plan the service. For quite a long time I had been thinking about the content of the service. First and foremost, I knew I must count my blessings to God, my family both here and away, my church family and friends from all over. There have been so many after all these years.

‘I am the sum of every bodies’ parts, has been my philosophy for a number of years. It was never more so when thinking of my birthday. This is exactly how I became a hundred. Therefore my service must reflect this. The service must belong to all of us. It is their thanksgiving as well. We must rejoice and be glad. I knew we needed lots of music.

By July 12th the choir would be on holiday. I asked if some of them could be there for my special day. They all said yes and practiced two anthems. ‘With a Voice of Singing’ which was my own favorite anthem, the other was picked especially for me by the choir themselves, ‘I Will Sing and Not be Silent’. They were so good. I chose the hymns which specially fitted my theme. One was a very old hymn I have known for years and loved to sing solo in church when I sang during the summer. We never sing it now because the beat isn’t modern enough, but the words are still great especially the chorus; ‘Count your Blessings, Name Them One by One. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.’

The other hymns, also well known old favorites, ‘Sing to God our Praises’. They are my new words to a well known old tune, Onward Christians Soldiers and ‘For the Fruit of all Creation, Thanks be to God’, finishing with ‘Savior Again to Your Dear Name we Raise’ the church was so full, the singing was absolutely electric, the sound was magnificent, everyone felt the thrill of the singing. To add to the music, my friend Colleen also sang a solo ‘You raise me up’ made famous by Josh Groban that inspired me the first time I heard it and I knew I wanted to hear it on my birthday. I found it a truly moving experience.

My Bible readings were from the writings of St. Paul to the young churches.

This is my favorite part of the Bible. He was changed by God and found his life's work travelling all over the Middle East telling people about Jesus.

He founded small groups of people who would believe and formed small churches. He chose people to lead them. He left them in charge and went on his way. His adventures were harrowing and dangerous. Stoned and left for dead. Almost drowned in a ship wreck and eventually imprisoned in Rome where he started writing letters to the churches he founded.

They would send him letters telling him of their problems and he would reply. It was these letters that have helped me for many years, so it seemed only fitting that I should use a message from them in the service. I chose one from Romans and one from Corinthians.

I have to take a detour again for a moment because other things beside my birthday were happening in the church. The search for a new minister was going on. Rev Douglas was with us until the last Sunday in June. We thought when we found the new minister he or she, would start in September. We needed to book supply preachers for July and August. We asked Rev Douglas if he would come back for my birthday, so all was well.

Guess what? We were lucky. The new minister who was chosen wanted to start with us on the first Sunday, July 7th. It was agreed we tell him about my birthday and what we had done. Rev Barry, the new minister, was happy to leave the plans as they were and agreed to assist. So now we were having two ministers at my birthday service.

Our plans were almost complete. The service felt exciting. There were certificates arriving to me from famous people. Our Queen Elizabeth II, David Johnson the Governor of Canada, Stephen Harper the Prime Minister of Canada, Elizabeth Dowdeswell the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. Kathleen Wynne the Prime Minister of Ontario, also John Tory the Mayor of Toronto. I look at the certificates all adorning my walls and wonder 'do any of these people ever know they signed these? Do they ever wonder who we are? What sort of lives we lead?'

I also had another birthday party for two of us. My friend Susan drove us out to Bluffer's Park and we had a picnic by the lake, it was really lovely and peaceful. The sun was shining on the water and there were ducks and seagulls, squirrels all out enjoying the sunshine with us. It was such a great place to be with the best of people to enjoy it all with.

Then I had another surprise. Patrick from my CIBC bank phoned me to say he needed my signature on my transaction of the day before. I had no idea why. I looked at my bills etc. and thought I was ok, so I went over to the bank anyway

and guess what? They gave me a birthday surprise. It was so special. I will never bank on-line, I enjoy going into the bank. The young tellers are all so nice it makes my day to visit with them. This day was amazing.

All the staff were there and a couple of customers who were in the bank at the time. There was a gorgeous cheesecake with all kinds of fruit on top and of course three big candles showing 100. Everyone sang Happy Birthday to me and I was given a beautiful bouquet of flowers. It was such a lovely surprise. My life was becoming full of awesome moments. I was becoming more excited every day.

By now it was July 10th the Friday before my birthday. I was all packed ready to go to my granddaughter Sheri's in Cobourg to stay over for a few days. Ray, Jo, Leslie, Adam and Andrew were coming in from Abbotsford the next day or two to be there for the celebrations.

Margaret and Bill picked me up and off we went. I love Sheri's big house with a truly beautiful garden. It is very big and so are the gardens of all her neighbours. There are no fences between them, so when you look out of the windows it seems like a big park. They live on the western outskirts of Cobourg, on a hill with a lovely view. I always feel happy and contented there and to be with family is always so good. We all spent the evening together, Margaret and Bill, Sheri my granddaughter and Jeff her husband, Trevor and Claire, my great grandchildren. There is always much laughter when we are all together. It is such a difference to living alone. I wouldn't live it any other way. My family all have their lives to live. I have lived mine and now it is their turn.

Saturday, July 11th

Ray and his family all arrived about 7.30 a.m. They flew all night. After a quick hullo, they all had a sleep. The rest of us had breakfast and got cleaned up ready for the rest of the day. Then it became officially my family birthday celebration for me. With us all together reuniting after a few months apart with everyone talking at once, it was loud and exciting. I sat back in the armchair just listening to the conversation feeling so proud of all my wonderful family and realizing how very blessed I am.

The weather was lovely so I sat out on deck. Each member of the families took turns to come and talk to me, which was so good because I was able to learn what had been happening in their lives. I do feel so blessed I have to admit, because of e-mail and facebook as well as the phone, I hear from them all fairly often.

One of the highlights of the day was all of us taking the dog for a walk. There were twelve of us and Luke the dog. He is a beautiful black Lab. It was a really happy time together with me and my walker in the midst of them all. I was proud

of myself we were out for a good long time and I kept going just like the energizer bunny!

After a really great barbecue, it became present time. I had talked a few months ago with Sheri when I had been visiting her for a very welcome weekend. She had an i-pad and Trevor and Claire had i-phones. All sitting using them for various things, I was intrigued and talked about how I could use one. I realize I am far from truly efficient on my computer I still have a lot to learn, so I wondered how I would cope with an i-pad if I got one. After some lessons from Trevor and Sheri, I asked her to buy one for me. She suggested the whole family could all buy it for me for my birthday. With all I was doing I didn't even think about it much. When I did, I decided to wait and see.

I was given my i-pad, a lovely metallic silver one engraved with my name and 100th birthday on it. I have to admit I was on cloud nine! I also have to admit I was a bit apprehensive, suppose I can't do much on it. It didn't take away the joy of receiving it. I had another very precious gift. My four grandchildren gave me a revolving digital picture screen, you switch it on and it keeps revolving over and over again. My daughter Margaret had researched for all sorts of old pictures of my life. She had mounted them beforehand on two big white cards and they had been hung on the wall outside the church office for the people to see. I had no idea about this until I got to the church the next day. She had also given the pictures to my grandchildren and they had filled the revolving screen with them. Now I spend many evenings just looking at the pictures of my life. There was me, at four years old, with my Victorian grandparents, and another picture with me at that same age, but with my parents. Then there was me growing up with my brother and sister, I now have dozens of great memories. At that moment I was absolutely happy. I felt so loved. I had hundreds of wonderful memories and felt grateful for my blessings.

Because Sunday was so special and the family would have to get up really early to get to the church on time, we all said our good-byes and Ray and Jo and I went home to stay in my little house for the night to make sure I got to church on time. Margaret and Bill went home to Pickering to come in from there.

Sunday, July 12th

I thought I might not sleep, but I did, I slept well. I woke up before Ray and Jo. I quickly got out of the bathroom to let them get ready. We had breakfast and I decided to walk to church early. I had a feeling there would be people coming early and I wanted to see the folk who I knew had been working all day on Saturday getting everything ready for the Big Day.

There was another reason as well. I wanted to be alone walking to the church just to get the feeling of anticipation, to think about the wonderful place that had witnessed so many of my joys and sorrows. I had met so many people in my life through KRU we had all meant so much to each other. So many had died and I had mourned. They had given me so much.

Many had moved and I found myself thinking about some of them. I had so much to be thankful for.

I went in up the ramp to see a transformed place. The Mitchell Hall had little flags hanging from the ceiling. Not just Canadian flags, but British ones as well. There were flowers everywhere. My birthday wishes from the Queen and all the other dignitaries that had arrived through the mail were now in frames and dotted around the room for all to see. Hanging in the hall outside the church office were pictures of my life that Margaret had so painstakingly put together for all to see. I was finding it all so exciting.

Everyone was saying “Happy birthday Bessie” and then I went into the church and found people already arriving. It was thrilling. I greeted my whole family, friends of my family and friends of mine from outside the church. There were Guiding friends, and then my church friends. Some of my former church friends had come from all over the country just to be there, and the friends who make up our congregation today. The church was full of happiness, I felt wrapped in love. I was surprised when Heidi who was opening the service, sent someone to ask me to go to my seat so the service could start.

The choir had all assembled and Heidi opened the service by introducing our new minister, Rev Barry. Then she invited me into the pulpit to do the welcome. I had been realizing for a while as I was extending greetings to everyone that there was a lot of people there, but I wasn't prepared for the sight that met my eyes. Our church was FULL! Upstairs in the gallery and downstairs in the church, there didn't seem to be a vacant seat. My reaction was to say out loud, ‘Oh my Lord!’ That was greeted by laughter and at that moment I felt the love of everyone embracing me. It was absolutely a Monumental moment. I have never felt so loved in all my very long life as I did that day. Even writing it now I am feeling how precious that moment was and I am sure it will never leave me.

It really was truly fantastic that all the people there had come to church to celebrate my birthday with me. I welcomed them and led the prayer and then announced the first hymn. It is one of my all time favorites. ‘Count your Blessings, see what God has done’. As I sang with everyone I knew how very blest I was at that moment, here I was standing looking down at about four hundred people. They all love me as I loved them, my own family, my church family and all my other friends. Special moments like these make up for heartaches and lonely times,

many times over. Rev Barry then took over the service and all the parts of it I had planned went without a hitch. The choir was superb! To think they came back from their holidays to practice and sing for me was awesome. And then my friend Colleen sang 'You Raise Me Up'. I was so grateful. I was so moved.

Rev Douglas spoke to us about counting our blessings even when sometimes we feel we don't have too many to count.

The highlight of my whole day came when my four grandchildren got up to speak. I had requested no speeches. I am not at ease when people get up to talk about me and the wonderful committee members said, "Well ok if that is what you want." So I thought it was all arranged. But my grandchildren said, "We don't care what you want, we are going to talk about you Gran". So it was arranged.

I have to admit when the four of them stood around the microphone all facing me and telling me in front of everyone how much they loved me, I felt so moved and teary eyed.

I learned after they had gotten together over the phone and wrote it between them and each had a part of it to say. When they finished I got up and we had a group hug. It was so wonderful.

It didn't finish there. Jo, one of my closest friends and a member of KRU and also part of the planning committee, was asked by the committee to speak on behalf of the church. I guess I really was thrilled. I have copies of both the speeches and when I re-read them I get just as teary eyed as did at the service.

By the end of the service with all that had gone on and singing my heart out with everyone there, I was on a high unlike anything I had ever felt before. The next part of the programme was for me to go out to Mitchell Hall to cut the cake and start lunch. But it just didn't happen.

As soon as we sang 'Amen', people came from the pews and surrounded me; I just stood at the front of the church greeting everyone. Being photographed and giving out hugs and kisses. I was sent in a sandwich and some tea. I took some sips of tea, but I couldn't talk and eat at the same time.

I didn't even need it anyway. It was so exhilarating to be there with all these people, some I hadn't seen for months and even in some cases for a few years. Many came from out of town. The amazing thing about friendships is whenever you get together, it doesn't matter how long you have been apart you connect immediately as if you had been together all the time. I found that happening all the time that day. It was such a great feeling. I wasn't aware of needing to either eat or drink. My legs got a bit tired and I was coaxed to sit down, I tried it for a while but hugging isn't nearly as effective sitting down on the task so I kept standing up. It

seemed like a long time and at last I decided the few people that were left could follow me into Mitchell Hall, so I went ready to have a bite to eat. Guess what? The sandwiches had all gone. I did sit down at a table and got a nice fresh cup of tea. I couldn't have eaten anyway because people filled up the chairs around the table and I started talking with them all.

I have never experienced anything quite like it in my life. It was a time to remember. As I look back on it, I find myself comparing it to a memorial service when one loses a loved one. In a sense it was like that except the 'loved one' me, was there celebrating too.

Altogether it was superb time. I will be so grateful for the rest of my days.

My family was all there right through to the end. It was well into late afternoon as we left to go back to my granddaughter's home after thanking my wonderful committee and my daughter for all they had done over so many weeks of preparation.

I was amazed, I didn't feel tired or even hungry, but I was glad to sit down and relax. We had 'happy time' with lots of nice things to nibble on and a glass of wine. Then it was time for us all to party. The weather was so nice we sat out in Sheri and Jeff's beautiful garden and enjoyed a beautiful barbecue dinner. There were toasts to me and a rendering of Happy Birthday by them which had to be heard to get the full effect. The rest of the evening passed happily and I remember being rather tired when we all went to bed. I know I slept well.

Monday, July 13th

It was to be another day of celebration. Jo's mother and step-dad had come down from the Haliburton area to be at my birthday as well as Janice, Jo's sister, her cousin Dearl and his wife Liz. They had all decided to spend time together after my church birthday, so they stayed the night in Coburg and came over to Sheri's right after breakfast to spend the day with us before travelling home. It was a great time together. Everyone gets along very well, so there was lots of laughter and teasing that went on. For me too, it was a time spent catching up on all they had been to me over the years as I hadn't seen some of them for several years. The weather was really great, and with us all sitting happy and relaxed, and getting some, 'one on one' time with them all, it was just as perfect as it could get.

We went to the front door to give them a send off just after dinner. For my family it was time for a game. I love it when they are all together and they sit around the table playing one of the many games they like to play together. It is always hilarious. There is so much laughter and teasing goes on. For me right then, I just needed the armchair for a time to relax. I sat back and gave myself up to thinking all the while, half listening to the din in the dining room where they were playing.

I felt so blest at that moment. The whole of the year that had just flown by had been in anticipation of the happenings of the last few days.

I also knew at that moment I would never again experience the utter Mountain Top experience, that I had in church during the service and after with all those people who lined up in the church to greet me. I have never felt so loved in my life. These thoughts keep coming back especially like now, when I am trying to remember everything.

I do feel blest that I reached this age that is considered to be so important, if one manages to get there. Now I have been living in the experience, I know how important becoming a hundred has been. And as I sat there thinking, I realized this is another beginning for me. For the next day I was going back with Ray and the family to Abbotsford for a couple of weeks, taking with me, my bucket list of things to do and places to see that I never thought I would be able to do again. Now I am so good at getting around with my walker I decided I could and I am actually going prove it! The game ended and it was decided we all should go to bed.

Tuesday, July 14th

It was still good weather. I was so happy I thought how good travelling was going to be. I had been sleeping on Sheri's very comfortably wide couch while I was there because I find it too hard to climb her stairs and also I have to get up in the night to ease my aches and pains and I hate disturbing people. I slept as well as I ever do, so it was no hardship. There was also a little bathroom on that floor, so I was well taken care of. In the morning, when I heard someone upstairs moving, I got up and folded up the bedding and made things tidy.

This morning it was Sheri who was down first and after she made the tea and coffee we settled down for a chat. It was very nice! We all lead such busy lives and we live a couple of hours distance apart, it is lovely to have a 'one on one' with her. We talked about their lives, about how well my grandchildren were doing at school, playing hockey, playing soccer. Claire will be going to high school in September and Trevor to University in Halifax. So a big change will happen in Sheri's life. We talked about my birthday, my very long life, and its ups and downs. It was a very sweet moment before everyone came down.

After breakfast we all got busy packing to be ready for the drive to the airport. Margaret and Bill were also going back home to Pickering. It was a very bustling place for a couple of hours. When we were all sorted out and the luggage stowed in car trunks, we settled down for a last chat. Last hugs were given. Good-byes said.

We were off to B.C. I was truly excited and all too soon we arrived at Pearson

Airport. I was lucky all my luggage could be stowed on-board the aircraft because my family had travelled very light coming here. They took care of my extra bag. Ray took the rented car back and we sat and waited for him. Everyone was talking together and I sat half listening, but going around in my mind were worried thoughts.

“I haven’t travelled for six years”, “I hope I won’t get too tired”, “I wonder who I will be sitting with.” Ray came back and we checked in. Gone was my apprehension replaced by excitement I am going to fly.

The flight was so good. The plane was a really new one. I had never flown on one like it before, seats were more comfortable. I had an aisle seat so I was able to stand some of the times to ease my painful knees. Ray had the window seat, Leslie sat next to him and Jo sat next to me across the aisle. All was well! I was well taken care of.

Two incidents made the trip memorable for me. The first was, when Jo had booked us, she mentioned me travelling out to celebrate my 100th birthday. I didn’t know of course, so when we were nicely air borne and the Captain spoke to us. I was astonished to hear him say “This is your Captain speaking. The flight will be easy, we might even arrive a little early as the winds are favorable and I want to welcome aboard Bessie Stallworthy who is having her hundred birthday. We all wish you a very happy birthday and we hope you enjoy your flight”. The flight attendants all came to my seat and every one sang Happy Birthday to me. I must admit, it was exciting. The second came a little into the flight when the drinks were brought round, our attendant asked first Ray and then Leslie what they wanted to drink and when they were served she looked at Leslie and asked what will your grandmother have? I couldn’t believe it! I was looking up at her ready to give my order, so with a smile I said, ”I would love some tea please, I am capable of telling you myself”. I felt afterwards that perhaps I should have sat quietly because I know I embarrassed her. But at the time I wanted her to know I had all my marbles.

It was a good flight I see my family from B.C. so little. Sitting for a few hours just casually talking to Ray and Leslie and exchanging little comments with Jo and Andrew and Adam sitting across the aisle was so good. An Awesome moment came for me when coming down towards Vancouver flying over the mountains I experienced that first view of them. And as always it was enough to take my breath away. I have no idea why mountains move me so much, I only know they make me feel God is in His Heaven and all is right with my world and at that moment I felt it couldn’t get any better. I couldn’t believe how I was still feeling so good, I was not too tired at all, in fact with my trusty walker I walked all the way out of the airport to the car feeling if I have managed all of this so far, I could definitely fulfill my big bucket list! Which of course I did!

Sitting in the front seat of the car on our way to Abbotsford was just as I had imagined. Vancouver has a completely different feeling about it. Enclosed as it is by the Pacific Ocean on one side, ringed by mountains on the other it is unique. At least it is to me. I settled back in my seat and gave myself up to my memories. I can't honestly put into words all that I was thinking.

It seemed at each curve in the road, I had a memory. So many times I had driven here to stay with Ray and his family. My overwhelming thought was absolute gratitude. I hadn't thought I would ever be doing this again and here I am. The mountains were visible part of the way and I would catch glimpses of the sea. The sun was shining and I was here.

The one big thing I was waiting for was my first view of Mount Baker. It is across the border of Canada in Washington State, USA. It dominates this corner of British Columbia especially Abbotsford where we were heading. It truly is my favorite mountain. Every time I travel here I never get tired of looking at it as soon as I am able to get a view of it. There it was! We rounded a curve in the road and I saw it. It was a delight to be gazing at it and knowing I would be driving over the border while I was there to see it again in all its glory. I relaxed in my seat knowing we were almost home. There was the turn off from the highway I could see the houses up the side of the mountain, knowing Ray lived up there. A few minutes later and we had stopped and the car was being unloaded and I walked up the path into the house.

My lovely two weeks had begun.

I really like Ray's town house. It is part way up a mountain with a great view, nice and airy. My bedroom is on the ground floor right next to the bathroom and the shower. I just love being there. I walked in feeling like I had come home. I found my usual chair by the big window complete with a footstool. Jo made my usual 'cuppa' and I sat cradling the cup in my hands feeling utterly happy and contented.

Wednesday, July 15th

This was my first full day in Abbotsford. It was warm and sunny I had breakfast with Jo and Ray. Both Jo and Ray were busy. Jo all day and Ray for the morning. Jo wasn't going to be available some of the time. She has a very interesting full-time job.

Jo is the CEO of Restorative Justice. It is a great alternative for young first time offenders. Instead of charging them and taking them through the criminal court system and them having a criminal record for life, they make restitution through negotiation with those they have wronged through a mediator. I read all about it while out on holiday with Jo several years ago when she first got interested. She has now become the CEO and Abbotsford has a very active and

successful system installed. She joined Ray and me, whenever she could.

Ray is retired from a successful career as a civil engineer in partnership with his friend Marten. The business continued without him until his partner became very sick and Ray went back to help him out until he recovered. So while I was out there Ray was also busy some of the time. On my first morning after we all had breakfast together and they were gone, I sat in my chair enjoying the sunshine and just relaxing reliving the events of the last few days and thinking about the rest of my time with Ray and Jo. Ray came home for lunch and he took me down to the Fraser Valley. It is verdant land situated between two mountain ranges through which a small river runs with very nice wooded paths to walk on and there is a canal also with a path that is good for walking. I was absolutely at ease with my walker. It was such a peaceful, restful time. I am always at ease talking with Ray, the conversation just flows. Not that we always agree. We have very opposite ideas about a great many things, politics, religion just to name a couple. We can disagree strongly and even get annoyed with each other, but I just love the challenge and so does he. The rest of the day passed happily.

Thursday, July 16th

I had a really interesting morning. Ray had a meeting, so I went with Jo to the executive meeting at the restorative office. They started with a lunch, so I got to meet the committee and enjoyed them all very much. I was also made to feel so welcome. At the beginning of the meeting I thanked them for allowing me to be there and promised not to talk. I was assured they would be interested in anything I had to say. As you can imagine, I did have a few things to say. The discussions were very interesting. I also got to meet two very nice university students who had trained to be mediators and I was most interested in the stories about cases they had dealt with. I know if I was thirty years younger I would be part of this. It really is the best way to deal with these young offenders. Our young people have it harder growing up these days than their grandparents did. I also met a parole officer and we had a chat and she told me a bit about her job. I was impressed with her dedication. I felt it was truly her life's work.

Ray picked me up from there and off we went again through the Fraser Valley to Cultis Lake. It is a very beautiful lake. Ray has a very good old convertible and riding along with the hood down and the wind blowing my hair was joyous. The valley is between two mountain ranges and Cultis Lake was on the other side of a mountain so I had the thrill of going up partway and then the road led around and down and there was the lake. It was such a thrill, it brought back so many

memories of when my grandchildren were smaller, paddling with them in the blue sparkling waters, gazing up at the mountains, watching the eagles swooping, seeing dozens of ducks. The waters were so clear we could see the fish darting through the rippling waves, we got out of the car and I wandered down to the lake shore, just standing there soaking in the view, I was utterly content.

Friday, July 17th

Today was the day! We were going down to Bellingham in Washington State, USA. We were going to stay on Ray's boat for a few days. I woke up early. The weather was bright and sunny. Jo was working from home and so was very busy at the dining room table. Ray had left to attend a meeting promising to be home at a reasonable hour. I decided this was an excellent time to try and remember how much Trevor had taught me about the use of my i-pad. I had mastered my favorite game, free cell. I wasn't much good at taking pictures, or making notes, nothing really efficient yet. There was still so much to learn. I went for a small walk up and down the road to get some exercise. I was utterly contented, I was about to embark on the best of all my bucket list dreams.

'Our Boat Trip'

Ray came home and we had lunch and then packed all that we needed for our adventure. Andrew, my grandson had taken off from work to come with us. He works in Vancouver, so we picked him up from the train station and then headed for the border. My adventure had begun. I had renewed my passport especially for this trip so I proudly showed it. I have been there over the years so many times so I was remembering little things all the way. Mount Baker was much closer as we drove down. I looked for views of this favorite mountain all the time. I have never ever grown tired of it.

We arrived, parked the car and Andrew got the big baggage handler. It is like a very big wheel barrow and all the luggage, supplies, food etc. gets stowed on it. There was a rather long walk to the boat. Along the docks, we passed the moored boats of other boating enthusiasts. People who were visible would greet us as we went by.

And there she was! Ray's boat! I was more than excited. There beside the boat on the dock was the way I was going to get on board. My son had made it possible for me do it. The base of it was a very large strong wooden step about the size of a card table I thought I could step up on it, with ease. Then, nailed very securely on this was a smaller step, about a foot smaller in diameter, I could step up there with ease as well. Then fastened very securely on the top of it, was an ordinary step ladder which I could then climb and turn my feet around and just step onto the boat. It was a masterpiece! I was blown away. Gary, Ray's brother-in-law had had been responsible for taking Ray's design and getting it built by the men in his

business. And so with Jo on deck to help me on and Ray behind me in case I stumbled and then Andrew standing on the second step to make sure I didn't miss any ladder steps, this old lady easily stepped up and aboard. As they were all busy making sure I got on board in one piece, no pictures were taken.

I was so proud of myself and I was so absolutely thankful that Ray had gone to so much trouble to get me on board. I was filled with gratitude to all of them for their care of me.

Once we were on board everyone but I had things to do. I hadn't realized how concerned Ray was about my falling on the boat until then. I found even though the boat is safely tied up in dock, there is a certain movement and I am well aware my balance wasn't that good. So I sat on the fore deck on a deck chair and just gazed at the wonderful view I had of my surroundings. It was truly something to be actually sitting there gazing out at hundreds of masts, belonging to hundreds of boats of all sizes knowing that all these people would be sailing out of the harbor at sometime soon doing just what we were going to do in the morning. In the distance looking towards the land were the coastal mountains while looking seaward was the sea beyond the break water.

I don't know how long I had been sitting there looking and listening to Ray, Jo and Andrew calling to each other downstairs as they were readying the boat, when Jo came up on deck with a mug of tea. Was that welcome! This just added to my perfect contentment.

Later that evening when we were all sitting relaxing watching the sun go down, we witnessed the most wonderful sunset I think I have ever seen. I have some pictures on my i-pad so can always see them again. Jo and Andrew took the pictures for me of my trip so I can sit and enjoy them, I am so glad I have an i-pad.

It was dark when we made our way downstairs with me holding on tightly and Ray right with me. All was well. I had the bottom bunk bed in the cabin. There was a single bed on board which is more comfortable, I have used it before. Now I find it too high for me to climb up into and impossible for me to get down. The bunk bed was comfortable and I slept well, but I had a few hard bumps before I got used to remembering to duck when I lay down. It was a small price to pay though because I was right by the shower and the head, as the toilet is called on a boat. I drifted off to sleep that night rocking slightly to the movement of the water lapping around the boat.

Saturday, July 17th

Jo is an early riser. She woke me, not even waiting to get dressed we took our tea up on the deck. The weather again was sunny and warm, and seagulls were

circling around filling the air with their squawking. It is such a raucous noise, but it fitted perfectly our surroundings. We relaxed just chatting until the men woke up. We had a quick breakfast and we were off. Ray took me up on deck to watch us leave the harbor.

I had given my promise to Ray that I would not move around the boat on my own. You have no idea how restricting I found it. Me who lived on my own and had done for years! I was obedient and I was settled on the back deck.

I have seen them and their routine many times before and I am always fascinated how they manage to maneuver this enormous boat from the dock and out of the harbor to the open sea. They did and our adventure started.

The Pacific Ocean at Bellingham is dotted about with dozens of Islands. They are called the San Juan Islands and they make a boat trip among them fascinating and extremely different. Ray is very knowledgeable about them so I sat up with Ray while he was piloting the boat and I asked many questions. I have wonderful pictures of the islands. Some of them have villages and others have holiday homes, some uninhabited. Most of them have anchorage so we can drop anchor, good sandy beaches can be seen on most islands. Our boat has its own dinghy so when Ray dropped anchor they would be able to go over to the island to explore. Ray is a very serious captain of his craft so sometimes there would be not much talking. I was happy whichever way it was. There was so much to see and the view from the pilot house was wonderful. I had a ninety degree angle of view.

One of the things I found so fascinating in sailing between the islands was seeing an island come up way ahead of us. I would ask Ray where the gap was between that one and another just coming into view. He would point to it. The space didn't seem possible there was enough room for us. I was glad I didn't voice my opinion and show my ignorance, because as we got closer the gap widened and there was room to spare. I had had many trips down there over the years with Ray and his family. I found I was remembering some of the islands.

There were a few we didn't visit where we could have docked for us to go ashore, but Ray wouldn't take a chance on me getting on and off the boat and I was wise enough to let him make the decision, knowing what it cost him in stress to get me on in the first place. Jo meanwhile was head cook and bottle washer (as the Brits say back home) the galley was her domain. She is an extremely good cook. We ate most of our meals on the back deck below the pilot house with a great view of the wake left by the engines churning the water into gigantic waves. When it caught the sunlight it really was breath taking. I don't think I will ever lose my love of the ocean.

One memory I should record because I really learned a lesson. Every time I

wanted to get down from my perch beside Ray in the wheelhouse, someone had to spring into action and when it was to the toilet it was major. First I had to get off the seat, then a few small steps to the stairs down into the cabin, across the sitting area to another set of steps down into the galley, across the galley, then another few steps to my bunk bed and the head (toilet).

What was more stressful for me was the fact when I was ready, I had to stand where I was and call for one of them to come and get me again. This particular time, I was feeling very confident about my 'sea legs' sure I could manage. Wasn't I used to managing on my own six out of seven days a week back home?

So I thought I would try. I was very careful, I hung on to the banisters, carefully moved across the galley, then up the next set of stairs, no problem, then I navigated the cabin which took a few more steps, then I climbed the last set of stairs, feeling so good. I would be independent!

Then the storm erupted! My son was angry!! He lost his temper with me. I was shattered. He told me if I disobeyed him again the boat would be turned around we would go back home. It was at that moment I realized how big the stress for him was, to even have me on the boat. He was so worried I would fall and hurt myself badly and that would mean the end of my independence. I apologized and promised I would obey orders and do as I was told.

He calmed down right away and with my heightened awareness, I saw how tense he got once in a while, which made me even more grateful than I was before for the immense effort he took to give me this amazing time sailing among the islands.

Jo's sister and husband Gary and their two teenage children, Noah and Brandy who also lived in Abbotsford, went down to their boat on Saturday morning, having arranged with Ray to join us where anchored for the night.

The island was called Spencer Spit. I watched closely the ritual of dropping the anchor. It has to be done just right so the craft is safely secure for the night.

We were anchored and sitting relaxing when Gary and the family arrived. They came aboard Ray's boat because there was no way I could get on Gary's. It was a great reunion for me, I had seen a lot of them over the years, but I hadn't seen them for six years. I really enjoyed the kids they were teenagers now so needed a different approach. Noah loved to fish. There were plenty to catch so I watched him fishing.

He was completely engrossed in the operation. The dog fish were very plentiful. They are a small shark not liked to catch and keep, but hanging from the end of a fishing line after Noah had pulled it out of the water glittering in the sunshine squirming trying to get free, was a beautiful thing to see. He would

release it and holding it in his hands, bend over the boat rail and let it go. I loved it. After he had caught three, he suggested I could try so I did. So with Andrew holding onto me around my waist, and Noah helping handle the line and Jo on the other side of me, all giving me instructions, I actually caught one! It took me, Andrew and Noah to finally get it up so Noah could release it from the hook. I took it in my hands ready to put it back into the water.

My heart was full. It was so beautiful. It is moments like this that make me so glad to be alive. I bent over the rail with everyone saying ‘Mother be careful’ and me replying “Just hang onto me I’m ok”, I watched it jump out of my hands and dart away. I only fished the once. It was such a big production.

The two families went off in their dinghies to go to the beach of the island all except Ray and myself. He is glad to have moments like these to relax. So we just sat on deck together listening to the laughter sounding across the water from the rest of them on the beach. We didn’t talk much, just enjoyed the gentle motion of the boat, the sunshine glistening on the water. For me as always it became another awesome moment. The rest of the day passed very pleasantly and Gary and his family went back to their boat after discussing where we would meet if we got separated the next day.

Sunday, July 18th

We were so lucky with the weather. It was sunny and warm again. The family came back to our boat and we had breakfast together before getting underway. I went up to my usual seat next to my son the pilot, I remembered we passed Dorcus Island, it is quite a big island, on the side we passed it was heavily wooded and Ray told me when we went back past it the next day, I would see a really different side to this island. We also passed the big San Juan Island a much bigger one from which all the islands get their names. Of the other islands I saw, some I remembered and some I didn’t, there were some with lovely summer homes, some with small villages which included an airstrip as well as marinas for small boats.

I was supremely happy and contented. Andrew would come up for a chat. Jo would join us as well. Jo made sure we were fed. Every once in a while I would get down to stretch my legs, Andrew would take the wheel to give Ray a break and so the day passed beautifully.

We dropped anchor at the really picturesque Reid Harbour on Stuart Island. We were anchored at the entrance to the bay and at the far end of the bay was the entrance to a State Park. It was nice, there were many other boats anchored around us all shouting out greetings. Gary and his family arrived soon after and all clambered on board and the fun began. Joyce joined Jo in the galley and my birthday was celebrated again. They had barbecued steaks, but for me I had a lobster tail! It was so good. It was also on my bucket list. There was a birthday

cake and they sang happy birthday. There was so much laughter and so much love. I realized once again, how blest I am.

After dinner we said good-bye to Gary, Joyce and family as they were getting an early start in the morning to sail back to Bellingham. We weren't going quite as early.

As the sun went down, the four of us sat out on deck watching a beautiful sunset and listened to the music coming from one of the other boats moored close by. None of us talked very much, I was just sitting letting the music wash over me, the sunset filled me with awe and the complete peace of my surroundings was one of those moments in time that only come once in a while. The more of my year I write about, the more I am realizing I was having a truly unique year.

Monday, July 19th

This was the last day of the boating period of my holiday, I woke up to the sound of the wind blowing in the portholes and there was much more movement by the boat. I lay there quite enjoying the new sensation wondering about the sea? I thought there must be white edges to the waves today I'll get up and look. By the time I was out of bed Jo came into the cabin telling me tea was made and it was nice out on deck. The sun was shining and there was a stiff breeze, but all was well. It was a completely different sensation sitting up on deck that morning. It wasn't cold, but I was glad of the sweater I had put on. There was more movement of the boat at anchor as well. I enjoyed the new experience and realized it might feel quite different today as we sailed back to Bellingham. It certainly was. Ray had to do different maneuvering to combat fairly high waves. I sat next to him very interested in watching him. I asked a few questions and enjoyed learning a bit about navigating a large vessel. I find always when I am travelling, although we retrace our steps the view is vastly different, I see things I missed the first time or they seem different from another angle.

One thing I found astonishing was Dorcus Island. We actually sailed around the other side of it on the way back. The side we saw going out was a heavily wooded lush looking island. Now seeing the other side it was nothing but bare rocks with absolutely no trees. We had both lunch and dinner in the cabin as the wind was strong.

One glorious moment came for me as we rounded an island and looking straight ahead, I saw Mount Baker in all its glory with the sun shining on its snow covered peaks. I was a bit sad too, I think I would have liked more days at sea, but it wasn't possible. Andrew and Jo were busy packing up down in the galley while I sat beside Ray watching the buildings on the land getting bigger and bigger. I marvel at Ray putting his boat in dock. It really is a difficult maneuver.

I sat on the front deck watching them all unload the boat and shutting windows and putting tarps over the furniture that stays on the deck. Then all was done and now the time I was dreading a bit, I didn't voice my fears but they were there. Looking down it seemed a long way. The step I had to take from the boat to the step ladder looked enormous. Ray grabbed my foot and steadied it onto the top step of the ladder and I went down with no problem.

Going back through customs waving my passport was a great end to an awesome trip!

Tuesday, July 20th

The rest of the days had memorable times in them, but both Ray and Jo were back at work. We had taken Andrew to the railway station on our way home to Vancouver last night, so I relaxed and did some sitting in the sunshine, just letting myself unwind. I was so happy and contented.

I have had to admit to myself many times over the last twenty-five years, I don't like living alone. I like sharing my life with someone, but when you can't you have to find other ways to make living meaningful and I have. Sharing Ray and Jo's space for a little while was oh so nice. I loved it. The highlight of the day came after Ray had been to work.

He took me up the smaller mountains that are part of Abbotsford. I had seen some of them in all my trips out to visit them over the years. As a matter of fact my very first holiday out there, they had a rented house up the side of the mountain. It had a 'granny' apartment and a wonderful view of Mount Baker from my own little balcony. I know this was the beginning of my love affair with my mountain.

This outing took us up Sumas and Eagle mountains that have been built up much higher since I was there last time. They are very nice homes, people are proud of them, the landscaping of their gardens is really eye catching and every turn around the mountain roads are quite spectacular, with views of the rest of the mountains with snow covered peaks. There are schools, churches and parks. Every once in a while I would get out of the car to walk around to get a feel of the whole ambiance, Ray having a convertible gave me amazing views. His condo is on a mountain road, it is about half a kilometer up the road.

It is far too high and too steep for me to walk either up or down. At the base was a shopping mall that was there when I was first going out to visit and it is still there. Just opposite Ray's turn off to his road they built a bigger mall.

I sat thinking about the engineering side of taming these rugged giants as we were driving up and down. Also everywhere we went the roads were going even higher. We went on up to see other houses in construction, and even higher to see roads being laid. It was a fun afternoon. We went back home and picked up Jo and

then went down to a restaurant and had fish and chips.

Wednesday, July 21st

This became a red letter day for me. First thing in the morning, Ray took me to Surrey to the office to see Marten, his former partner and friend, who is recovering so well from his bout with cancer. I just feel it is a miracle he is looking so well.

Ruth, his wife, was also there with him and I also met Marten's new partner. We had such a happy visit. After we said good-bye we left to drive to the border of Canada and USA for my visit to Mount Baker. We stopped for lunch and then off to fulfill the next item on my bucket list. Again the weather was warm, but a bit cloudy. We wondered what it would be like up on the mountain, but decided it was worth going to see.

The drive to the base of the mountain is very picturesque. The road led through a very fertile valley overshadowed by the mountains, some thickly wooded, some had snow covered peaks. Cottages, farms and small villages, little rivers, waterfalls all helped to inspire the magic of my day. It was helped of course riding in the convertible with the roof down. At times like this Ray and I are very content with silence between us, broken only when I asked a question about where we were. He truly is a fount of knowledge and I am an inquisitive person so we are happy.

There is no road up Mount Baker. There is another that we had to take up another mountain that leads up to the summit of the mountain range. We saw chalets, hiking trails and people's private homes as the road wound around and up the mountain. The weather was ok except for clouds obscuring a view of the tops of the peaks. We decided to go on anyway because the views on a level were great. Small lakes and rivers came into view, we saw small animals, rabbits, deer, also birds, small finches, grosbeaks, and the larger variety, hawks and my favorite, a couple of bald eagles. The higher we travelled other mountains came into view through the trees.

We arrived at the spot we usually parked the car. It is a very large parking lot. There were shops with ski equipment and over to one side of the area was a pond as small lakes are called in the States. Such a pretty place surrounded by mountains. From this place there were ski areas and hiking trails. We parked and got out of the car and we wandered about a bit and then Ray told me there was more to see. It seemed since I was there last, the road had extended way up! He also told me the road was very steep, but we could go if I liked?

I certainly liked. So off we went. The view was spectacular although the higher we got the closer the clouds and the scarier for me the ride became. I found it a bit of a nail biter, but kept quiet about it. Ray couldn't have turned the car around on that very narrow road if I had made a fuss.

All my agony was worth it. We were wet from the clouds enclosing us. We got out of the car to go walking. It was utterly awesome! The clouds were moving and every few moments they would shift and there were the snow capped peaks in all their glory and even as I looked they would be swallowed up again by the clouds.

I have to admit, part of me wanted to see the peaks basking in the sunshine. I had seen them like this many times before.

I realized this was something that was a little bit more dramatic, it gave me a little eerie feeling, just standing there turning around to see from all angles gave me feelings of awe I hadn't felt before.

There were hiking trails leading from the parking lot, very rough and stony I was wishing so much I could at least try to go a little way until I looked at my trusty walker and knew there was no way I could even suggest it, trying to push it over that rough terrain with big boulders in my path would be impossible. It was with a bit of regret that we decided it was time to go down the mountain again.

The drive back down was lovely. I managed to keep my eyes open during the top scary part of the coming down and realized looking down from the road there was nothing there just an endless drop, down, down, down!

As we drove down, the clouds started to lift and there was the view of Mount Baker that I had been trying to see all day! All was so right with my world just then. We crossed the border and were soon home and were sitting relaxing when Jo came home. The day wasn't quite finished, as we went to dinner with Jo and Ray's very close friends who live higher up the mountain with a wonderful view of the other mountains especially in the evening when the sun is setting. They have the sun setting outside their windows. Sunsets are spectacular out in B.C. I find Audrey and Dave a very interesting couple, and we spent a great evening talking together. They also wanted to know about my birthday, so we spent time on that subject as well.

Thursday, July 22nd

This was another outing I had on my bucket list. A trip to Vancouver Island on the ferry boat and today was the day it was going to happen! We caught the 11 a.m. ferry and the weather was great. Ray had booked lunch in the dining room ahead of time, which meant we could see the view while we dined. I enjoyed everything about the trip. To get to Tawwassan we took a different route into Vancouver, one that I had travelled many times before. The changes in the places were quite remarkable. Six or seven years of changes were really noticeable. We drove closer to the sea as well and that was good. We were a little early so we got into the right lane for us and parked the car and got out. The road out to the terminal was quite long and there was plenty of space to walk about so off we went. There was plenty to see as well as the ocean which I never get tired of.

Then we boarded. It is interesting watching the people directing cars and trucks into place. It is truly amazing the amount of cars and trucks a ferry will hold, as well as foot passengers and those with bicycles. Once everybody is parked there is always the rush to the stairs and elevators to go up the decks. So many people! We headed straight for the dining room and so were many others. We joined the queue and waited.

We then found with having booked our tickets, we didn't have to wait and went in. We hoped for window seats, but it looked as if they were all full so we went to another table and our waitress looked at this old lady with a walker and said "stay here, I will see if I can find you a window table". She did, and led us to a table right against the huge window where we had a super view of the ocean. I thanked her and told her about my trip. Trying to manage a buffet lunch on a ship is a bit of a problem, but Ray solved it for me. He went first with me to choose what I wanted and then carried it back to our table and then went and got his own. The food was good and so was the view! The trip across to Vancouver Island is through a number of islands. Some are big enough to have their own ferry boats. We saw other ferries and dozens of boats of all sizes. Planes and helicopters were taking off and landing on the islands.

Oh, such a change for me from just watching cars, trucks, street cars and busses day after day. I was reveling in the experience. We just sat where we were until it was time to go down to the car again. We could see us docking from our dining room seat which was also a bonus. Swartz Bay was the name of the terminal on Vancouver Island and watching the ferry boat dock was as interesting as watching us leave and I marveled at the ease of all the operations and the cheerfulness of the workers.

We were off and away quite quickly. Swartz Bay was about a half hours drive from Victoria. Once again I loved it, remembering many other times we had been this route in the past, several times in Ray's old RV in which we did so many trips. We entered Victoria and now had to find the Rialto Hotel. Jo had booked us there because it was close to my daughter Margaret's son Keith and his partner Susan's Vintage Clothes Shop. This was one of my reasons for being over here was to see him. He had left Ontario several years ago and although I had heard from him often, I hadn't seen him for a few years. We had no problem finding the hotel and were quickly checked in.

Then we went to find Keith and Susan. It was a great reunion! His youngest son Phil was also there, to see him looking so good and meeting Keith's partner Susan was an added bonus. Then we started to look around the store. It was unbelievable. Talk about vintage! I modeled some old clothes that were way back in early days, there were hats, shoes dresses, army uniforms, badges and jewelry. The place was full to overflowing and on top of all of this, they had up-to-date

second hand clothes, both men's and women's. I loved it. I walked around prying into everything and getting acquainted with the real Susan. We had been meeting on facebook, but now here we were together. It was so nice.

We left them to finish up and agreed to meet with them for dinner. We left it to Keith to pick the restaurant as he had decided it was his treat. He chose the Oak Bay yacht club and we agreed to meet them there.

Ray took me around sight seeing, we found the club with no trouble but we wondered if this was where he really meant, it was so posh! We knew they don't have much money.

They came soon after and we all went in. They found us a nice table and we were handed a menu. I knew right away it was no good for us. It was so expensive and absolutely wrong for this old lady. For me it is always no spicy foods, just plain with no sauces, etc. Ray looked at the price and was sitting wondering if Keith would let him help him with the bill. It really was a great place the view from the windows looking out over the bay and also the wonderful boats in the docks, but there was nothing for me to eat. When the waitress came I asked if they had a children's menu. I often use the children's menu when I eat out.

She was very nice and told me she was sorry but no they don't. At that moment I made up my mind, I explained it was a birthday celebration and we had to find somewhere I could eat with them. She was rather nice really and we were escorted to the door and the manager apologized to me and off we went. Not one of us was happy about it. Keith knew he couldn't afford it. Susan also confessed she wasn't used to that sort of food either.

We stood in the parking lot and discussed where to go and finally Keith told us of a small family restaurant they often go to, that is if we liked Chinese food? We did and off we went. The couple made us very welcome and the food was excellent and we sat and talked a blue streak. I hadn't met this great grandson for many years, so I got to know him. As for Susan, the woman I got to know on facebook was very nice in real life. I was now grandma! We said our good nights and we agreed to see them at the store next day before we went back across in the ferry. Both Ray and I were tired and were soon asleep when we arrived back at the hotel.

Friday, July 23rd

Keith and Phil joined us for breakfast at the hotel. We enjoyed it thoroughly. I was so happy to see them both, it had been such a long time and here was Phil almost all grown up and Keith doing well. We said goodbye after breakfast because they and Susan were too busy the rest of time of our visit for us to go to the store. I had previously phoned my friend Larry who lives in Nanaimo of my coming out to B.C. We arranged he would drive down and have lunch with us while in Victoria, so we would meet him later in the hotel restaurant.

Larry had been very good to me while he was in Toronto. He had a career that saw him work week-ends and Wednesdays, so being free during the day sometimes, he volunteered to help a senior with gardening and odd tasks around the house. The agency picked me to have the assistance and so began a wonderful friendship. He moved out West a few years ago and our friendship continued. I would see him whenever I was out to Abbotsford visiting my family.

So he drove down to lunch with us. The day was dull and misty; there was rain in the air.

We went for a drive though downtown Victoria. Like all cities these days, there were big blocks of condos everywhere all with wonderful views of the harbour. I love walking around the harbour with all the boats and watching the ferries from Seattle arriving or departing and the people all doing the same thing as us, sightseeing.

We went back to the hotel and a few minutes later Larry joined us. We had a great reunion. Connecting with old friends is precious; after a few seconds it feels like we have never been apart. Catching up on all the news of our families, exchanging views on many subjects, there wasn't a dull moment.

Then we said our goodbyes, Larry to drive back to Nanaimo and us to drive to Swartz Bay to catch the ferry.

I found it a bit hard saying goodbye again to everyone out there, it took me seven years to go this time who knows if I can ever go again? I hope I will be able to. It wasn't actually raining, but it felt damp and it was very cloudy. I didn't really mind there was still plenty to see. I find retracing the same highway is always interesting, viewed from the other side, I see different things.

We had no problem getting on board. The boat was full again and the procedure the same. I still enjoyed seeing it happen and then we were up in the restaurant seated by a window ready for dinner and enjoy the wonderful view.

We were lucky the rain waited until we got into the car in the parking lot and then it poured all the way home. Luckily for me Ray doesn't mind driving in the rain as he said, "When you live out here you are always doing it." We sat and talked with Jo telling her about the visit and amusing her with our description of the Vintage Shop.

Saturday, July 24th

We had a busy day at home. Jo had arranged for a birthday party for me tomorrow. I have been coming to Abbotsford to stay with them for twenty-five years and many of their friends have become my friends. Jo arranged for us all to have Afternoon Tea at her sister Joyce's house. She has a beautiful house with a beautiful garden way up the mountain. She also has a big deck. It was a perfect

setting.

The order of our day then became getting ready for the party. We took a trip downtown, tidied up the house, Jo did some baking and I kept out of the way. Later we went out again and we stopped in a tea shop owned by the daughter of her friend Astri. It was good to see Astri's daughter and her husband with such a successful business.

When all our chores were done we had a nice easy evening together. It was so nice being able to relax; I had been going steadily for days.

I need to tell you about my friend Kathy. I first met her about twenty years ago at the church. She was a single mother with a little girl of about five years old. We became friends and she became part of the congregation. When her daughter went to university, Kathy got the opportunity to move out to B.C. She is now living at Gibsons on the Sunshine Coast. I have kept in touch with her and when she heard about my birthday and because she couldn't afford the fare back to Toronto, she came down from Gibsons for my party.

Sunday, July 25th

I woke up early; it was a bright sunny day. Jo got busy making scones, lots of scones! The house smelled delicious. Ray was busy tidying up and I was doing absolutely nothing! All I kept hearing was, "Please go and sit down mother", whenever I tried to help. Being very old and not feeling very old has its drawbacks. So I went out for a walk. Kathy came about 11 a.m. so I had something to do. We played catch up on all that had happened to us. I was really happy with the way her life was going and how good she was feeling about herself. Her daughter had graduated as an engineer and was now employed by a good engineering firm. Then it was time to go to the party. Jo had already gone to help her sister. Ray, Kathy and I went together. I was looking forward to seeing all these folks.

Over the years I had seen a lot of them all. I walked in and the fun started. The table full of the most delectable things; looked gorgeous. Sugar cookies iced and decorated with tiny mauve flowers some had 100 written on them, some had Bessie and some with just a heart with a 'B' they were a big hit. There were so many goodies and in the centre an enormous vase of pink and cream roses. The table was the first thing I saw as I walked through the door. Then the greeting started. I was so excited and rather humbled. It is still hard for me to believe how much people care about me. I greeted the people as they walked in and later I went through to the deck where I sat on a couch big enough to hold a couple as well as me.

This became the fun part. I was sitting reminiscing with them all. Finding about how their families were doing, seeing pictures on i-phones, all the time feeling their caring of me. There was a birthday cake again and much teasing and

laughter. It was all so good. I also heard about some of their sad times. Life had been hard for some of them and in some cases it is on going. It is so true, the more involved you get with people the more you care about them, laugh with them and cry with them. It was so special. Joyce, Jo's sister, has two children. Noah her teenage son and I have had a bond since he was tiny and on this special day for me, he was there making sure I didn't need anything.

Kathy enjoyed herself, through taking my pictures she got to know the folks quickly and I have a whole set of pictures on my own i-pad.

When all the guests had gone, we stayed on to have a late dinner with Joyce and Gary. I sat in the living room with my feet up feeling so relaxed and happy. Everyone was busy talking as they got a meal ready. Noah came and sat beside me. Was there anything I wanted he asked? I needed nothing at that moment so we sat and talked. It was a truly lovely moment. I found myself wishing I lived closer so I could see Noah often. It was a truly awesome day! Kathy stayed over with us.

Monday, July 26th

This was to be the last thing on my bucket list. To go to White Rock the nearest seaside town to Abbotsford. To drive there takes just over half an hour through lovely countryside. Kathy and I went. It was planned for me to have this day with Kathy. She would be going home the next day. The weather again was sunny and warm; I just marveled everyday how lucky I was with the weather. B.C. is actually known for rainy days, but we only had the rain when coming home from the ferry. Ray gave us instructions on how to get there. We had no problem we drove right down to the front street. There was the ocean! I wanted so badly to walk on the beach, but sand isn't easy to walk on pushing a walker. So we settled with going on the pier. It is quite a long one.

This was pure pleasure, we went right out until the end where there was the deep water and the view back to the town was exciting. There were benches to sit on. I felt very relaxed as we sat and enjoyed the view also talking nineteen to the dozen in an effort to cover all we needed to say. Kathy took photos on my i-pad again so I have more wonderful photos of my trip. We walked back again to the boardwalk and found ourselves a place to have lunch outside in the sunshine. There were many people around, all seeming to be as happy as I felt. Feeling well fed; off we went walking on the promenade so close to the water. The tide had been in and was on the way out again. We came to a place that was paved with cobble stones that led down onto the beach where the big white rock resides. It is huge and there is a legend about how it got to be there in the first place. It was originally grey but people kept writing messages and names all over so the city fathers decided it should be painted white every Spring to get rid of the writings and put up signs to say 'no writing'. We were given to understand that most people

obey the signs, but there are always a few who disobey. When we were there the rock was still quite white. I left my walker close to the path and took a few steps on the sand just to tell myself I could. This was a good moment. I did it!

It was really time to retrace our steps to the parked car and think about driving home. Sitting in the car we decided to drive from one end of the promenade to the other. We were surprised how long it was, much longer than I remembered.

We also drove up around the town and that was when I realized how White Rock had grown. Driving home again I was overcome by memories of the place. Coming when the children were small, paddling with them in the ocean, eating fish and chips at the special restaurant right up one end of the town and especially a couple of times when Ray picked me up at the airport and we went to White Rock for my first view of the sea and had my favorite fish and chips. We got safely home and we all had dinner together and chatted until we went to bed. I have to admit I just laid in bed thinking about our day together realizing how very lucky I am.

Tuesday, July 27th

Kathy decided to take the afternoon ferry back to Gibsons so we set off to the Mall. This was a thrill for her living up the coast from Vancouver. I hadn't been in a mall for a while so it was fun for me too. Neither of us bought very much and we had lunch and it was time to get back to the house again. After saying good-bye to Kathy I sat out in the sunshine and waited for Ray and Jo to come home. I had very mixed feelings at that moment. I had so enjoyed being part of the family. I had been part of so many great happenings. I knew how much I would miss the fun and the excitement, yet I missed my own bed. And I missed doing! This sitting around being waited upon wasn't really who I am. I knew though I have enjoyed it and have appreciated whatever I was doing. I was also very aware of the great effort Ray and Jo had made to make sure I did all the things on my bucket list.

The list won't stay empty for long. Hope is what keeps us all living our lives to the fullest. Ray and Jo got home and after dinner we sat out on the porch chatting about my trip and how successful it had been. We had also checked with Euan who was flying out tomorrow to take me home. He had booked us a flight and would arrive at Vancouver airport a couple of hours before, Jo the worrier, worried that it wouldn't go right. I was pretty sure we would be ok. So we said good night and I went into my room packed my bags and slept fairly well.

Wednesday, July 28th

'Going Home'

Jo was taking me to the airport as Ray had a business meeting to attend. I was already packed and we had breakfast together and we were ready to go. I had a

rather tearful good-bye to him and Jo and I were on our way. Andrew met us at the airport. He had come to say good-bye to his grandmother. I was deeply touched. We found the spot Jo had agreed upon to meet with Euan, it was close to a restaurant and we took a booth where we could see him when he came. Euan was late, Jo started to worry. I wasn't; I knew he would be there and if he was late enough for us to miss this plane we would just catch the next one. He was basically on stand by.

We finished lunch and sat on a bench. Jo tried phoning and didn't get an answer, we tried again and finally he answered. He had just got off the plane; it had been an hour late and would be with us in about twenty minutes.

We arrived, I had another tearful good-bye to Jo and Andrew and we went off to check in. Euan had two seats booked for us But we found we weren't sitting together and neither of us had an aisle seat. Unfortunately I can't sit for too long without standing to give my knees a rest. I do a lot of the flight standing up. The man at the desk told us to go and sit and wait until the last call for the flight and see if any one had missed their flight. We took a seat until we heard the call. We went to the desk and we were told there were no seats, I was agreeing I would wait for the next flight in an hour when the man asked Euan where we had come from.

He told him I had been visiting my relatives to celebrate my 100th birthday, he looked over at me standing leaning on my walker and wished me a very happy birthday and handed Euan two tickets for first class and said to me "enjoy your trip" I thanked him and we went down to plane.

What a thrill! It was one of Air Canada's new planes. They weren't seats, they were pods. The seat literally wrapped you in it. The height could be adjusted sitting up or as low as lying down and it came with a duvet that fitted beautifully. There was a panel to the side with buttons to push for all your needs. The attendant was really nice and helped me get settled in. I had my own TV. I felt I could get used to this, this is living. Euan was sitting right behind me in his own pod he whispered in my ear what people paid for this seat and I quickly realized I had better not get any ideas, but enjoy this super time I was having.

My attendant came around with a drink trolley there was every drink one might need. I had already got to know her a little and told her I really just wanted a cup of tea. She left the trolley where it was and went into the galley and made me a pot of tea all nicely put on a tray with cup and saucer, milk in a jug and a cookie, it looked so nice. I thanked her and then she went on serving the drinks. I relaxed and once again I felt so special. This 100 sitting over my head is beginning to mean much more than I ever thought it would.

There was more. The Captain came over the air. Once again he talked about the flight being a good one and then he went onto say "the crew welcome Bessie

Stallworthy who is celebrating her hundredth birthday, We wish you many happy returns of the day” and the attendants all gathered round and sang happy birthday to me and the people in other pods joined in. I sat just luxuriating in my surroundings and thinking “Enjoy it while it lasts, you will come down to earth with a bang in a day or two”. We enjoyed a lovely dinner, more tea and the attendants were so nice the flight went by so quickly.

Euan asked me to stay seated until the rest of the passenger got off the plane. So I stayed seated and passengers as they passed by told me happy birthday, some asked for a photograph with me as they had never met a 100 year old lady before. Some members of the crew said good-bye to me and we went from the plane with them waving calling out Happy Birthday! Euan drove me safely home.

The end of a Magical July One I will never forget.

August 2016

I came down to earth with a bang! The first few days of coming home I was feeling good about being on my own, to be sleeping in my own bed, and making my own decisions. I was able to go out walking. Then depression set in. Here I was at the beginning of August with the rest of the summer ahead of me. All church activities on hold until September, my family and many of my friends were away. I didn't feel like being on the computer when the weather was so good and there was really nowhere to go. What a pity party I had. I got out of it in a few hours and re-adjusted my thinking. ‘You my dear, have just had the best July of your life. Get on with writing your book and add what you are feeling about everything in the writing of it’ so I did. There has been some good times, awesome moments since then for me to write about. There is nothing like writing things down to remind you how good things are and how unique we are.

Sunday, August 2nd - My friend Alison took me out to the Guild Inn to see an amateur theatre performance of Romeo and Juliet. It was very well done in the grounds of the inn. The play is staged between the column and the sculptures, the place is so well known for. The chairs were arranged in rows. There was no shade there and it was hot! I sat for a few minutes and looking behind me I saw a group of trees and although I couldn't see half as well and had to strain hard to hear, it was so much better. It had been worthwhile in spite of the heat. I am a lover of Shakespeare and have spent many happy days over the years at Stratford during the summer season.

Alison is also responsible for my beautiful gardens. Being able to sit out and enjoy them is so great. Especially when I sit on my front stoop and watch people passing by and having them tell me what a lovely garden I have. My garden at the back is really nice too and goes right down to the ravine beyond the fence. I enjoy

seeing the people out walking their dogs. It also means I have many gorgeous trees making a huge canopy surrounding me. This is why I love my little house so much, I was certainly happy it was all so nice and the weather really was good. I wasn't kept in by rainy weather.

On Sunday, August 16th I had another birthday celebration. I had known it was coming. There hadn't been a time it could be fitted in before. Sheila and Jan my very dear friends have found different ways to celebrate my birthday for years.

This year, they suggested the races at Woodbine Race Track. It was the Breeders Cup. I had never been there, so I was really happy to be going. They picked me up at the church right after the service which was great. I leave you to imagine the teasing I got for going off to gamble on the horses right after being in church. I had my walker with me to make sure I was steady and ready to go where ever.

The drive was quite a long one. I had never been there all the years the race track was moved from the beach district. It is impressive as you get close. Sheila and Jan had booked us in for lunch. So after the car had been taken for parking, (I did feel special!), we went in and found this huge restaurant. Our seats had been reserved and as we took our seats I realized how good it was. The table was long ways from the huge window looking out on to the racetrack

Our seats were either side of the table and we could see everything perfectly. We also had a small TV on the table so we could watch it all and not miss anything. The first thing on our agenda was lunch. They served a good buffet luncheon. I can't comment on the variety of dishes and how they tasted because my taste buds have left me long ago. I manage to eat anyway; I was far too interested in my surroundings to be bothered. This huge building with I don't know how many floors, has only these seats that look out over the track. The track goes around a big grass filled area comes close to edge by the stands where the people sit outside and above them, we who are in the restaurant.

There is a big notice board in the center part where as you watch this, various notices are displayed. I was sitting watching and a notice came on the board which read, '**Wishing Bessie Stallworthy best wishes on her hundredth birthday**'. It was just about the time a bunch of waiters appeared at our table with a cake and three 100 candles on it and sang *Happy Birthday* to me. The people around us all joined in. When Sheila had booked she had mentioned my birthday.

Then came the fun part! We finished lunch as the racing was due to start and furnished with our booklets started to study the horses entered in to race. I didn't know any thing about horse racing at Woodbine so it was all new to me. The name of the horses and the names of the jockeys who rode them were completely

unknown. Each horse had a different colour blanket which for became what I used to pick my horse. We had lots of help from the booklet; there was a page of advice from an expert telling those most likely to win and details about them and then it became up to me!

That was the tough part. My friends had given me money to bet with. How much should I bet? Bet just win? Win and place? The more you bet the more you win and the more you use!

I found out right away I am not a gambler, but I must admit I love watching the racing. We could either sit at our table and watch through the windows or the little TV or walk along to the steps down to stand outside on a platform with a railing to lean on where the view was really good. This was fun as well, because there was only room for about four people, others could go down more steps to a lower level. We decided to go outside and when we got out there, it was full and we were going to go back inside when someone called, "Bessie come here, we can go down the steps, you stay here" I once again felt like a queen.

I truly enjoyed seeing the horse racing. Talk about poetry in motion, it was exhilarating to watch them all. These beautiful animals are such a joy to watch. For me, I had mostly picked my horse by the colours he wore. I found myself screaming with everyone else. We were so lucky we were right close to the finishing line. I won one or two races. I lost more, so when I had lost twenty dollars I couldn't stand it any longer and stopped betting. It didn't matter I picked out my horse for each race and cheered my head off for him. I have decided this year I would like to go again and this time sit outside in the stands. Not to bet, just to watch and enjoy. I hope someone will invite me. This was one more memorable birthday celebration I will never forget.

The last birthday celebration was on Sunday, August 23rd

This one was given me by my friend Debbie. We have been friends for many years and she has been my willing driver to doctor's appointments, shopping and great days out exploring Southern Ontario, never using main highways. We have found the prettiest places, the quaintest stores we had some great adventures, and over the years I have made friends with some of her friends as well. So Debbie invited me to afternoon tea with them, British style. It was lovely. I love small parties like this everyone gets a chance to speak and we all had lots of laughs. It was a lovely way to end my very long birthday celebrations.

I must admit I came down from my highs with a bit of a bang. I was ok though, I didn't go into a decline or anything I just had to work a bit harder with keeping a happy attitude. Life regained its rhythm. The weather was good my garden thanks to Alison, was full of colour. I sat on my porch out front in the shade and enjoyed comments from passers-by. All loved my garden. People dropped in

to see me and the kettle was put on. I also served cold drinks in very warm weather. We finished the last weekend in August with a family get-together to celebrate my son-in-law Bill's birthday and say good-bye to my great grandson Trevor who was off to Halifax to University at Dalhousie and also rejoice with my great granddaughter Claire, who was starting high school. We had a good time and parted knowing everyone was going to be busy. Our fall season was beginning and we knew how really busy we were going to be.

September 2016

KRU (my church) got into full swing with plenty of enthusiasm. We were starting with a new minister, Barry, who came with new ideas and plenty of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is catching and I think everyone felt like it was great to be back and I know we were doing very well.

We started with Rally Day, enrolling children into Sunday school, and had the first council meeting where we made plans for the year. I find I generate new energy and enthusiasm that keeps me grounded in what I do. I was asked a few times this last year why I keep so busy. I know I need to, my mind hasn't retired. It is only my old body letting me down. So I take note of my body and take frequent rests. I make sure I use my walker and find as many things to do as I can and keep as busy as possible. I don't find much pleasure just sitting.

The fall time of the year is not my best time. I am a spring and summer person. I like the long days and sunshine. The fall colors are gorgeous and I enjoy being driven out to see them, so when Debbie suggested a couple of trips out to see them, I was gladly on board and this year the colours were really spectacular. How fortunate I am I can get around with friends who will take me travelling in this wonderful land. I also had a picnic again at Bluffer's park with Susan. It was the last before the cold weather came.

I really do know what a busy person I am when I write like this. I walk every day to keep me mobile. I feel absolutely steady and walk upright when using the walker. I am a member of the pastoral care committee. I am in the faith, joy unit of KRU women. I am part of the King's Folk group who meet monthly and I go to church every Sunday.

I have been asked why I find it so necessary to go each week. My reply always is 'I go to be reminded that God is' so I don't forget when I get busy during the next week. I love singing the hymns, and listening to the choir, we have a great choir and when our organist plays, I listen in awe. It is always such a good experience. I began enjoying Barry's sermons from the beginning which added to my contentment. Last and also important I go to be with all my friends.

There is so much love, caring and opportunities to enjoy ourselves together in making the world a better place to live in. The last Sunday the 27th was Rev

Barry's induction into KRU. Now he was officially our minister. We had pledged our support and he had promised to lead us to find or enrich our faith we need to live by.

October 2015

This month was very much like September. I was busy with church activities and having folk dropping in for tea with me. I didn't see too much of my family. Sheri was busy getting adjusted to her life without Trevor and the extra duties she had taken on as vice-president of Claire's school's parent's association. My daughter Margaret and husband Bill went for a holiday for a couple of weeks.

We had a very special Thanksgiving service at the church. I love to see us decorated for the occasion and applaud the generosity of our people with gifts of vegetables, fruit and groceries for the local food bank. We need to give thanks for all our blessings. I despair sometimes thinking of all the problems in this world of ours and find I just have to do all I can in my corner to make things easier for folks around me.

I was invited to Thanksgiving dinner with Elaine, Mugsy, Claudia and Lucy next door. I had a really happy time and as always I am so thankful for all the loving people in my life. I had a heart breaking time as well. Over the years I have enjoyed a really great friendship with Evelyn and Don. Don sang tenor in the choir while I sang soprano and Evelyn and I worked together with the pastoral care committee and with united church women. I had known Don was very sick, but wasn't quite prepared for him to die. My thoughts were all about Evelyn and how utterly lonely she will be. The awful part of being so old is remembering all the friends that have gone before me. I think of all I have been to them and remember all they have been to me. Our lives go on and we try to pick up the pieces and go on doing what I have been for years, living one day at a time. It doesn't hurt to have a few things to look forward to as long as each day you make it the best day one can, as long as our attitude is gratitude and forever remembering how lucky we are. I know we can always find someone to envy, and we can always find many who would give anything to be us.

October flew by, I had been busy and getting out every day the weather was really nice, watching the leaves turn colour and seeing birds assembling on the telephone wires above my head, listening to the noisy chirping sounds they made and imagining they were busy planning their route down south and not always agreeing where to go. I was into my fall blahs a bit, days getting shorter. Trees

were losing leaves, birds were flying off. It was dark by supper time. Going to meetings in the dark wasn't much fun either. I never needed to walk to the church. Someone would pick me up and drive me.

I like to walk though, especially if I hadn't been out during the day. I did well though this year. I was finding my new status of being 100 was still very important! I was still being celebrated everywhere.

I still expect that sometime during the day when I am with people, one person will say, "guess how old Bessie is?" and I stand and smile.

I do have a feeling now that I have to help people feel that they too can do the same. There are many more of us who are 100 these days. It isn't such a big deal. I am going to enjoy each day to the fullest. I heard a rabbi who is very well know in New York talking on TV the other day, explaining he felt one of the very important words in our language is - Curiosity - from the time they are born children want to explore everything. The big thing for all of us is to never stop trying to find out about new things, this will always open up new doors. So guess what? I have added another mantra to my list. 'Staying curious' will help me explore new ideas and try other ideas out.

November 2015

There were a few highlights in November. I was completely into the rhythm of my days again. I had become aware over the last few years that I was finding it easier to enjoy life on my own. November was a good example for me. I came home from meetings and settled down to relax and found I would sit thinking how good it was to be by myself for a while. Do I slip down again sometimes? Yes of course, but get back fairly quickly.

The bazaar took place on November 6th. The whole building is taken over. So much work goes into this. Downstairs we have a big jewelry section - food - wonderful baking of all kinds – jams, jellies and pickles - books of all kinds. Upstairs there were all sorts of homemade items scarves - knitted hats - baby clothes - Christmas ornaments and presents, there was such a variety. Also we had another jewelry table with handmade jewelry made by Jane who gave all the proceeds from her sale to our refugee committee who are busy helping their latest refugee. There was a tea room upstairs, the busiest room in the building. I had a great time! I dressed up as Mrs. Claus to sell children's jewelry. We didn't make much money; I gave most of it away. I think I will give suckers next year.

The other important day was Remembrance Sunday. I still after all these years, find myself sad with so many memories. They were such desperate years for me. Twenty five years old with a six-week old daughter, Margaret to care for with

my husband Chas in the army. I look back and realize the war completely altered the course of our lives. As it did for so many people and I can't get past that we are still dealing with war going on all over the planet. Will we ever get peace? Not in my time I am afraid.

As I sat here thinking of these last two months, I just felt I had to mention my daughter Margaret and her husband Bill my son-in-law. Tuesday is the red letter day of my week. They drive for almost an hour each way every Tuesday to spend the day with me.

They take me shopping help me keep my finances in order, changing light bulbs, Just taking care of me. They have been there for me for twenty seven years ever since I became a widow. My son Ray from out West gets to see me whenever he can manage it and all my grandchildren and my great grandchildren keep in touch. My heart goes out to people who have no family because it is a very lonely life.

A big day at church starting our Christmas Season, was on November 29th White Gift Sunday. We bring gifts to send for the Centre 55 who send baskets at Christmas for needy families. It is also the Sunday our children take over the service. They do it all. The junior choir sings the anthems. The youth are responsible to do the speaking parts of the service. All the members of the Sunday school put on a play. I was honored this year to be given the part of Grandma in the play. It was fun. My day didn't finish there. The day was also my son Ray's birthday. So later that day we had a long chat on the telephone when he laughed at my efforts at singing Happy Birthday I also chatted with Jo and Andrew. These moments are always my awesome moments.

December 2015

The last month of my wonderful year

Through looking back like this I realize what an awesome year it has been and December was also a very happy month as well. I have settled in to the fact of 100 years. I still quite can't believe how important it is. It opens doors to wonderful conversations. I am certain people are curious to learn what keeps me going. I really don't have an answer. I have lived on one day at a time for years and the older I get I realize how true it is. I love being one hundred. I have been meeting all sorts of interesting people just for being one hundred years. I am introduced by people who know me to someone who hasn't met me before with a question "this is Bessie, take a guess how old she is?" and having that person reply they have no idea or words to that effect. Then they are given the answer "Bessie is one hundred" and then I smile and wait for their cries of astonishment. I was a little embarrassed at first, now I enjoy it.

To go back to December, it is Advent the preparation for the Christmas

Season at the church .Our Sunday services all reminding us that Christ came into the world. When I was growing up it was so easy to get into the spirit of Christmas, we all took part in celebrating. Santa Claus was also part of the scene and the anticipation was great. Now we are integrating with the faiths of many nations all very different to mine. We all are faced with people with no faith at all.

Somehow I feel our task as a church is to help everyone to find for themselves, a faith to live by. I know for myself I couldn't have survived all the trials and hardships I did without knowing there was someone or something stronger than me, that I call God. So I began making plans and enjoying the Sunday services. We had a carol sing before each service an antidote to just hearing the Christmas songs while shopping at the Malls. I talked about Christmas plans with my daughter Margaret. My son and his family weren't going to join us this year it was Jo's sister's turn to host the other side of the family. It was decided we would all spend Christmas with my granddaughter Sheri and Jeff's home in Cobourg.

Something happened to shake me to the core. The war in Syria is absolutely awful and not getting any better, the news showed refugees fleeing by the thousands; I was heart broken. Here we were with the same awful situation as I lived through during the Second World War. My daughter Margaret was just six weeks old when London was bombed. We lived on the outskirts of London and the planes flew over us on their way into the city. It was terrifying. The fighter planes took them on and we had our share of the bombing. I had to evacuate and move into the country. I was away from my home for the rest of the war. I had been feeling really bad. My heart was aching, but I had to keep watching the news and then it happened.

It was an article on the news of thousands of refugees marching to try to get to Germany. It was teeming with rain they were ankle deep in mud and there was a young woman with a baby in a sling of some sort, being held on in front of her and walking beside her covered in mud, was a very small child. I could tell the child was crying, I could see the tears, they were making clean lines on his face as they ran down. I sat and cried my heart out. We haven't stopped all these cruel things happening. I was born during the First World War. I was in England and endured the Second World War, and here we are with even worse atrocities happening. Why can't we create a peaceful world? I sat in my chair a long time and then made up my mind. I don't need presents and my family didn't either. I am going to send them all a Christmas card and tell them they aren't getting a gift from me and would they give money to a refugee fund for me

It all worked out well. I felt better as I had a plan. I researched the organizations helping refugees in Europe and picked out the United Church of Canada and that was where my money was sent. My family looked after their own donations. I really must record one donation that truly touched my heart. My bachelor grandson had a celebration dinner with a bunch of his friends and told them of his grandmother's Christmas idea. Before their party ended they had collected \$500.00 which went to their local refugee fund. I was so touched.

For our choir Christmas service, we all joined in a sing-a-long version of Handel's Messiah. It was inspiring especially with brass accompaniment we have each year and when we all sang together The Hallelujah Chorus, we filled the church with wonderful music. The service on the Sunday right before Christmas Eve always centers me to the meaning of Christmas Love, Peace and Joy. The age old carols, the wonderful story that I have been hearing for as long as I can remember. It still give me the feeling of awe.

Christmas Eve is 'My' Christmas. For a long time now my friend Phyllis has invited some of her friends to dinner before the Christmas Eve children's birthday party for Jesus. This year after we celebrated around the dinner table we went to church. This is the one service the church is full. The service is done completely by our Sunday school children including the Nativity play. Every child in the audience can be in it. We have enough angel and shepherds costumes to fit each child out. The main characters were picked beforehand and have been practicing their parts. We have a donkey which was made years ago by a former minister. It is on a platform with wheels and when it is time for Mary to arrive, Joseph hoists her up on the donkey and someone crawls and pushes the platform down the centre aisle with Mary being held on very tightly by Joseph. As the play proceeds, the wise men from afar start coming in followed by the camel. We had two older boys don the costume specially made for the occasion.

I am afraid the camel becomes the star of the play as it walks down the aisle swaying to the singing of 'We Three Kings of Orient Are'. Everyone loves to see this happening; it brings laughter every year. To many of us it brings back memories of when we were in the pageant and now we are seeing our children, grandchildren and some like me, great grandchildren. The climax as always is having a candle in our hands watching long candles being lighted from the Christ candle we have had up in the front of the church waiting for this moment of lighting. The long candles in turn light the candle held by the person at the beginning of each pew, so we all hold a lighted candle. The organ plays 'Silent Night, 'Holy Night', lights go out and by the light of the candles we sing! My Christmas has truly begun.

After going home for a while I was back at church for our Christmas communion. We start the night off with a choir concert. All our members who would like to sing a Christmas hymn or carol of their own choice get to perform. We had duets, solos, and quartets a true feast of sound. I find it awesome. Then it is the service when after singing, praying and listening to the age old words of the story again, we have communion right at midnight. Christmas has begun.

I always find it hard to sleep that night when I get home. I do so much remembering. Margaret and Bill came to take me to Sheri's on Christmas morning. My family Christmas had begun.

It started as always lots of greetings between all of us including the dog, Luke a beautiful black lab, who when he stands up on his hind legs to greet me, is tall as I am and someone always jumps to my rescue in case I fall.

Then it became a little different. Sheri apologized for lunch being a little late. The next thing that happened was Trevor setting his computer up on the kitchen table. Chairs were placed in front and I was asked to sit on the chair directly in front of it then the phone rang. Sheri answered it and there on the screen in front of me was my ninety-seven years old brother Bill who said 'Merry Christmas Bessie'. I was absolutely thrilled. It has been eight years since I had seen him. I phone him often and we keep up sharing our lives this way, but to actually see him it was awesome.

There he was sitting in front of me almost nose to nose, he surrounded by some of his family and me sitting there surrounded by some of my family. It was such a fabulous time. Tears and laughter were all in the mix, I couldn't believe how good Bill looked. He assured me he is not as active as am, I already knew. We said good-bye, with his daughter assuring me that she and Sheri will arrange this again. I know the problem will be to arrange for Bill to be visiting with her and for me to be visiting with Sheri that will not be easy, considering the busy lives everyone lives. The rest of the day was great. Jeff's parents joined us after lunch and a Christmas dinner was thoroughly enjoyed with much teasing and laughter. We stayed over for Boxing Day. The same thing happened. Lunch was delayed and I knew what was happening this time. The computer set up, with me sitting in front of it, the phone rang and there in front of me were my son Ray, his wife Jo, Leslie and Andrew their children from B.C. This time it became hilarious. The teasing and the laughter that is always present when these two families get together has to be experienced. I loved it.

It made this Christmas a really memorable one. Margaret and Bill drove me home that evening. Later I sat in my chair as I always do and thought about my lovely time. I am so thankful I have such loving family on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and as always I found myself wishing it could be possible for me to

get over to visit them all, especially my brother Bill. The other event that blew me away was talking and seeing everybody like I did. Me who was born before we had telephones, computers and all the wonderful inventions we take for granted now. I have seen evolution at it's finest.

The rest of the week was a happy one. Going to a party on Sunday evening, lunch with a friend and the year was over. On New Years Eve I was alone. The friend I usually celebrate with was busy and when I heard I decided I would stay by myself. I needed time to think about my year and get some perspective on it.

This is exactly what transpired. I made myself a nice dinner and settled down to watch TV and watch the ball go down in Times Square. I saw New Year being celebrated around the world. I was contented and at peace in my soul. The one thing I missed though, I had sat for a long time watching the count down of the ball and fell asleep and missed it actually happen. Oh well. I was awake and not feeling like going to bed. I made a pot of tea and sat down to enjoy my first tea of the New Year.

What a year this has been! I look back now and realize there never was a year like it. What a privilege it has been to live through it. What a joy to be meeting old friends and greeting each other as if we had never been apart; I have met many new friends through this big birthday and most of all to experience the love of my family, who loved me enough to help make all my dreams come true. My bucket list became a reality.

My dream was fulfilled. I am now embarking on a new millennium. I don't know how far along the road I will get. I love being 100. I will continue to live it to the full for as long as I can. I send my blessings to you all who travelled with me on this exciting journey.

God Bless You All.