

# Art exhibit tells war brides' stories

Jillian Pavlin, The StarPhoenix

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## **War bride Terry England is seen with a painting of herself at the Diefenbaker Centre Saturday**

Photograph by : Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix

"It was a rotten crossing," Terry England said as images of Saskatchewan war brides and their husbands flashed across a drooping parachute behind her. "I was seasick the whole way over. I wondered what I had done."

Nearby, hers was one of 52 images painted on long wood panels -- war brides on their wedding day. Some were in gowns, others in simple but elegant dresses. On a long knotted plank, England stood smiling in her air force uniform, holding a silver horseshoe for good luck because flowers weren't appropriate for a woman in uniform.

On April 3, 1946, England joined the some 45,000 war brides who would make the trip from Great Britain and Europe to Canada, and her young son was one of nearly 21,000 children who did the same.

Her painting is part of a Diefenbaker Canada

Centre exhibit by Bev Tosh, titled One-way Passage: Canada's War Brides.

Tosh says she never expected a painting she did of her mother as a young war bride five years ago would evolve into entire an exhibit featuring England and other European war brides. But "it's become a labour of love," and "a passion" in her life.

Her mother was one of the more uncommon brides who took the opposite route, leaving Canada to follow their new husbands from overseas. She left Saskatoon for New Zealand in 1946, but returned in '57 when her marriage failed.

"It's very personal for me to have this exhibition here in Saskatoon," said Tosh. "In terms of my mother's story . . . it feels like bringing it home."

As a figure-painter, Tosh looks to the whole body to express emotion and feels that the brides in her paintings have much to say.

"I think they are saying, 'we're a body of women, we're a unique population in Canadian history and we're a population that's perhaps just now being recognized.'"

England's story has much in common with the thousands of brides who shared her journey, but is also unique to her personal experience.

She married her husband, Mark, in 1943. He was an RCAF gunner and she was a parachute packer and safety equipment assistant. She wasn't quite 19 and he wasn't quite 21.

With the war going on, "you didn't worry about finding out everything about them. You loved them and that was it, you got married."

Like most war brides, she landed at Pier 21 in Halifax, N.S. The train ride to Saskatoon was almost as bad as the boat had been. We just

"kept going and going and going," she said, and "I was very homesick." Things were better when she arrived to her husband and his family, but not right away. The food was strange, the money was strange and she learned quickly not to say things like "I'll knock you up about six," if she was going to meet someone.

Today, after 62 years of marriage and three sons together, she says she has no regrets. "I'm English by birth but I'm a Canadian by choice."

Feb. 9 marked the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the first official "bride ship" at Pier 21, when the Mauretania II carried 943 war brides and their children to Canada. Most immigrated in 1946 after troops were demobilized home.

The Saskatchewan War Brides Association, of which England is president, is also celebrating its 31st anniversary and will hold a reunion at the Hilton Garden Inn from May 5-7.

"This year is 60 years being in Canada for most of us, and we call it home," said Agnes Salikin, who also emigrated from England in 1946.

At 21, and after only five months knowing the man, she followed her husband, Fred, from London, England, to Kuroki. "Well, that's what love does, you know."

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