

FUNERAL EULOGY

Bessie Marion Roffey (nee Cazaly) March 2 1897 – June 17, 2008.

Bessie was born over 111 years ago, on March 2nd, 1897, in Tottenham, in the north end of the city of London, England.

Her parents were both talented musicians and artists. Her father, James Cazaly, was a lead player at the biggest music hall in London in the 1890s, the Empire Theatre Leicester Square. He was of Huguenot descent, his great great grandfather Jean Pierre Cazaly having escaped from persecution in France to England in about 1740.

Bessie's mother, Rosalie Louisa Henrietta Montagu Archdeacon, was also a singer, and a pianist, and, as her name perhaps suggests, a strong woman.

(Bessie was named after her aunt (Rosalie's sister), Bessie Montagu, another music hall singer, who was tragically murdered in 1893 by a jealous suitor. The sad fellow, having done the dreadful deed, then turned the gun on himself.)

Bessie's early days were carefree ones. She was looked after by her parents, her two older brothers, Bert and Ted, and had regular visits to play with her young cousins in London. Among her cousins were my grandfather, Robert Wood. Tales of the children sliding down several floors of bannisters in the big house, and climbing up on the garden fence to watch the horse-drawn carriages go by (for there were no cars in those days) were among the ones Bessie enjoyed re-telling.

However, things changed for the family just before Christmas in 1904, when meningitis claimed the life of Bessie's father James. Bessie was just 7 years old, and Rosalie had to think about starting a new life for herself and the three children.

And this is what they did. In the summer of 1906, Rosalie put the boys in boarding school in London, and she and Bessie sailed on the steam ship "Lake Manitoba", bound for Quebec City, Canada. After a train ride with her mother to Winnipeg, Bessie started her life on the prairies, which is where she spent the remaining 102 years of her life.

There was much traveling around, with her mother earning a living singing, playing the piano and working in hotels and kitchens. She saved what money she could so that the brothers could join them in Canada, which they did – Bert in 1907, and Ted two years later.

Bessie's own words vividly convey how those times were:

“Happy childhood days till my dad died, then so much change, a new country, strange schools and children, and never staying in one place long enough to make friends, until mother married again. It was a lonely life for a child, but in so many ways it was a happy life, for I learned to be independent of other company, and make my own happiness. I've

wandered alone over a good part of this lovely country, enjoying the wild. One thing mother never taught me to be afraid to be alone, so I've seen many things and places others miss, I love to wander in the bush, but hate towns and cities."

"I love this land that is Canada that mother and I came to; hardship yes, but such wonderful people, all ready to help the other fellow. In the isolated communities we were dependent on ourselves and on our neighbors; no doctor, no nurse, so it was do your best. In those times I saved the life of my best friend, of Don, and of a wee girl. But I saw 3 babies lost – one burnt, one because of the wrong food for its age, and one because its mother didn't know that she had to keep it warm."

Bessie was married in Kitscoty, Alberta in 1923 to William Roffey (Billy). Don of course came along soon after. Bessie and Billy enjoyed 70 years of marriage before Billy's passing in 1994.

Bessie again:

"We started with nothing but four horses his dad gave him, at first he worked at anything he could get, then went in to forestry/logging for a company, when he left they gave him the things he had used, this was our life for eleven years, he away from home 6 months out of 12. When the last company sold out I persuaded him to put his savings into a farm, as this was his love. We had 5 years to pay for it and did it in two and a half. We knew what it was to work and go without.

I don't usually brag, but I'm proud that I with a good man have earned our right to say we did our best, and asked for no help, and now I'm reaping the reward by having a comfortable old age. I wonder how these present day youths would like to sleep under a spruce tree in 35 degrees below zero (fahrenheit, not centigrade) and cut their breakfast with an axe. Billy did, he was a man, not a hothouse flower, and I loved him. "

The farm that they purchased of course was right here in Kinuso. Bessie and Billy moved here in 1938, and Bessie only left when she moved to the JB Wood centre in High Prairie in 2004.

"We live a quiet life in this little village," she said, "but I wouldn't live elsewhere."

Bessie saw a huge amount in her lifetime – the first cars, the first aeroplanes, the coronation of King Edward 7th (on her father's shoulders, back in 1902) and many, many things in this great and vast country over the last century and more. Not to mention of course the joy of 4 grandchildren, and 5 great grandchildren.

Bessie was proud to be Canadian and to live in Kinuso, and I think that is something that everyone here can be proud of, as we can also all be, of course, of Bessie.

BRIAN MACKIE

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