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Jean Foster, 80, arrived from Scotland as a war bride 60 years ago and has loved her life in Canada

By LAVERNE STEWART
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Jean Foster is as busy as she wants to be. Foster, who will soon turn 81, is not an early riser. After working for many years and having to be up early, she now likes to take her time in the morning.

"I promised myself I was going to take my time over my breakfast," says Foster.

She doesn't rush unless she has to. But it seems there is always somewhere to go and much to do.

Foster belongs to many organizations. Whenever she attends one of her club meetings or is somewhere with a piano, she usually ends up at the keyboard, playing and singing.

She's the pianist for the singing war brides who love to entertain audiences around the city.

Music remains one of her passions. Whenever the singing war brides perform, she is there, playing all of the golden oldies and wartime songs on the piano. She doesn't need to look at sheet music; most of these songs are committed to memory after playing for more than 70 years.

Growing up in Aboyne, Scotland, Jean Laing never dreamed one day she would end up living in Fredericton and married to a Canadian.

In 1939, she graduated high school and was ready to go to work. She got a job in a clothing store. In 1942 there were many Canadian soldiers in her village - she remembers that she used to watch them from the shop window.

One of them was a good-looking soldier named Eugene Foster from Burtts Corner. One day he said hello to her while she was on her way to the bank to make a deposit.

"I thought he was a pretty nice-looking fellow," she says.

She was a talented pianist who often played at community dances. It was a wonderful time when everyone came out to square dance and listen to highland music, she says. He started to show up at the dance hall. He couldn't dance but he liked to listen to the music and watch her while she played. Then he'd wait until she stopped playing and would sit and speak to her. There was a mutual attraction.

"He asked if he could see me Saturday night," she says.

It wasn't long before they got engaged. In 1942 they were married. She was only 17.

During that time, everything was rationed. Wedding cakes were a rarity but somehow her mother managed to find enough white flour to give to the bakery to make a single layer cake for the wedding reception, she recalls.

Even though she was still a child, it didn't seem that way at the time. With the war, teens had to grow up very fast.

"I grew up with my kids," says Foster.

Their first baby, Audrey, was born in 1943.
This Scottish young lady had no reservations about becoming a Canadian. Her in-laws were excited to welcome her into the family. His parents wrote to her and whenever they could, they'd send packages of homebaking and always a special present just for her.

During this time, her husband worked in saw mills with the Canadian Forestry Corps.

And the next year, he was sent to Inverness to continue this part of the war effort. Inverness was a day's train ride away for Foster so the couple was separated until the end of the war.

The forestry corps was preparing to go to Germany but before it left, Victory in Europe (VE) Day was announced in 1945.

"He didn't have to go. He was lucky," says Foster.

By September, he boarded a ship bound for Canada but she stayed behind with their daughter, waiting for a space on a ship to join him.

It took 10 months to prepare the paperwork and get a ship's boarding pass. She passed the time playing at dances four nights a week.

Every day, she showed her daughter her father's picture so she would know who he was when she arrived in Canada. In June, 1946 she made the trip.

"I hated to leave home but I was young and anxious to see my husband again, being apart for 10 months."

It stormed all the way across the Atlantic ocean. She was very seasick and managed to survive it by sipping on black tea.

She arrived with their two-and-a-half-year-old in tow at Pier 21 in Halifax and then boarded an overnight train for Saint John. Wearing a wool, tweed suit, she nearly fainted from the extreme heat, she remembers.

While Foster waited for her husband to arrive for her, she decided to go shopping for cooler, cotton dresses for herself and Audrey.

While she was gone, Eugene Foster arrived at a Salvation Army hostel looking for her.

When they finally found one another, their reunion was emotional - he grabbed her and kissed her passionately.

When they arrived in Fredericton they stayed on Shore Street with one of his aunts. His mother was there to meet her. Meeting his family was better than she could ever have hoped.

"I did get a wonderful family. I can't say I was ever homesick."

The Fosters bought their first home in Nashwaaksis and it was where they lived for their entire marriage.

In 1947, their second baby, Robert, was born. She stayed at home with the children and her husband worked in the woods at a lumber camp. When Eugene Foster started to suffer from extreme allergies, he had to stop working in the woods and find another job.

"The only thing he wasn't allergic to was me!"

So he began driving a truck. Sometimes, when the children were in school, she would drive with him. Soon she decided she wanted to get a job of her own.
She got a job at a drycleaning store. She remained there until 1971. After that, she took a business course and then went to work for the Forestry Association.

In 1984, she lost her husband. One bitterly cold night in March, he died in his sleep after suffering a heart attack.

The next morning, she realized he was gone.

"I got up out of bed and turned around and looked at him and he still didn't move. I thought, 'there's something wrong here.' So I leaned over and touched him. He was ice-cold. The doctor told me when he went to sleep that night, everything shut off. I was 58 when he died. I would have liked to have had him a lot longer."

It was a difficult time for her but she consoled herself that he didn't suffer in sickness before he died.

Her work kept her busy; it helped keep her mind occupied which helped her through her mourning, she recalls.

She retired at age 65 in 1990. For the past 16 years, she's remained active.

While she would have hoped to have had her husband with her longer, she says, she wouldn't change a thing about her life these days.

She has many friends and many hobbies including knitting, reading and doing crossword puzzles and, of course, the piano. She now lives with her granddaughter, Susan and her family.

She came to live with them after she sold her house in 1996. It's a great arrangement - she comes and goes as she pleases.

She enjoys spending time with her family including her daughter and son, three grandchildren and three great-grandkids.

Foster has returned to Scotland to visit but she's considered this her home ever since she arrived here 60 years ago.

"I like Canada. It has been a wonderful country and I'm proud to be a Canadian citizen"