


reminiscing
from our readers

Leaving

By Joseph Seaward
Wolfville, Nova Scotia





It was Friday, June 27, 1952.

I had already said goodbye to my siblings and friends. At 10:15 p.m., accompanied by Mom and Dad, we walked the short distance to the train station. After a hug from Dad, a tearful goodbye, and a hug from Mom, I boarded the westbound train. Because of its slow speed, it was nicknamed the Newfie Bullet. I was on my way to a new adventure, into which God only knows.

When the train reached Grand Falls, I washed up and went to the dining car for breakfast. After that, I settled in for the rest of the west trip. During the ride, I had time to think about what I had done. Except for a week in the Come-By-Chance hospital and two weeks at the recruiting centre, I was never alone in my seventeen years, but here I was, heading into a future I knew not what or where. I already miss my family and have been away for only one night.

As I stare out the window, watching the landscape blur into a tapestry of colours, I cannot help but think back to a whirlwind of events that led me here. Two weeks ago, the decision to join the army was still fresh, a beacon of change on the horizon. The recruiter was enthusiastic, speaking of duty, honour, and the adventures that awaited. I listened, heart pounding, as the future was painted with broad, bold strokes of possibility.

The days that followed were a blur of paperwork and preparation. My supportive yet sombre family stood by me as I packed my life into a suitcase. Their faces, etched with pride and worry, remain vivid.

Now, on this train, those memories are bittersweet companions. The excitement of the journey ahead is tempered by the loneliness of leaving everything familiar behind. The rhythmic clatter of the train wheels is a steady reminder of the passage of time and distance, carrying me away from the life I have known into the embrace of the unknown.

In 1950, after much family illness and a poor fishing season, my family moved to the larger community of Clarenville. This brings me to where I am now, on a train taking me away from my home and family.



Gooseberry Cove in the 1950s

I thought about the places I had lived: My genesis, Gooseberry Cove, a small village surrounded on three sides by low hills facing the rigours of Trinity Bay's waters. My great-great-grandfather, Robert Seward, established the catholic faith in the community in the mid-1800s. When I was six, my family moved to Southport, a village whose harbour was protected by three islands from the Southwest Arm's open waters. I learned to fish with my grandfather, Ivany, and later my father, Martin Seward and decided that fishing would be my life's vocation.

My memory takes me back just three weeks, when I boarded the eastbound train at 4 a.m. for the five-hour ride to St. John's. On arriving, I took a taxi to my dad's sister's place and was greeted by Aunt Bertha Locke. After a hearty breakfast, I was escorted around St. John's by my cousin, Catherine. I visited my other aunt, Catherine Manuel, at the Battery, a

fishing village on the north side of St. John's harbour entrance. My cousin Catherine also showed me the way to the entrance to Buckmaster's Field, the recruiting centre for the Canadian Armed Forces in Newfoundland and Labrador. On entering the recruiting centre, I noticed three buildings: Navy, Army, and RCAF; later, I learned they were listed in order of seniority, with the Navy being the senior service.

Being a middle-of-the-road kind of guy, I chose the Army. Little did I know how that decision would affect my future in the Canadian Armed Forces. I did not have the minimum education requirements (an eighth-grade certificate) to enter the Armed Forces. For the first of many times, luck was on my side. The Korean conflict was on (It was not yet called a war), and the Army was recruiting to fill the ranks of Battalions for service in this conflict. I do not remember being asked for proof of education. I

suspect the recruiters were advised not to enforce the education requirement policy on applicants applying from the outposts. (My opinion. There would be few who would qualify, including me.) When I was asked for my birth certificate, which I did not have, I told the interviewer that it was lost in a fire in Heart's Content, NL. I did not tell her the fire occurred 39 years before I was born.

During the next five days, I went through all the requirements for entry into the Army, including oral, written, medical and physical examinations. On Tuesday morning, I was told I had been accepted as a recruit. The swearing-in ceremony came next. Now I was a real soldier, all five feet four inches and one hundred and eighteen pounds.

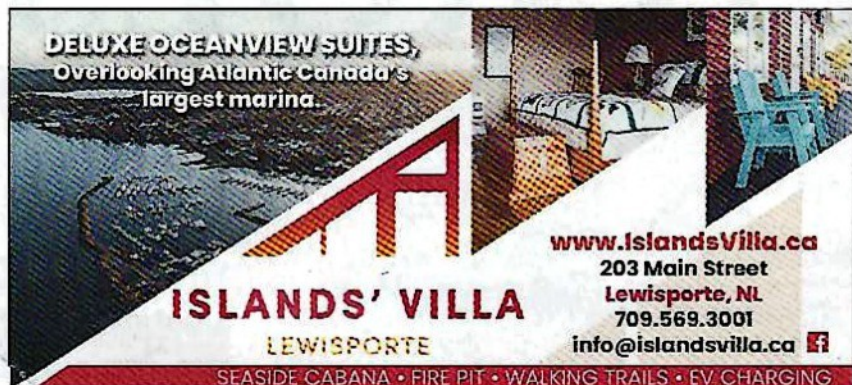
I was presented with my pay record book, service book, tickets for travel and meals to Halifax, Nova Scotia and a four-day pass to spend time with my family in Clarenville.

Mom and Dad were still apprehensive about my joining the Army. Later, I learned that Dad had consented to my joining because he believed I would not pass the medical examination and would soon be home again.

Dad soon changed his mind and became my most supportive and proud fan.

I am back on my westbound voyage. We left Grand Falls and explored central Newfoundland, which has beautiful lakes and forests. Then, we travelled to the west coast. I was amazed by the vastness and beauty of the majestic mountains. Finally, we arrived at the Port-aux-Basques terminal. We boarded the passenger ferry, were assigned a berth, and settled in for the nine-hour overnight voyage to North Sydney, Nova Scotia.

I watched the land that held everybody and everything I loved fade into the distance. My decision weighed heavily on my heart, but I knew there was no turning back. I had charted a new course for my life, one filled with uncertainty and possibility. With each passing wave, I felt the pull of fear and excitement. This journey into the unknown would shape the man I was to become, testing my resolve and pushing me to grow in ways I could not yet fathom. Though the uncertain future, I was ready to embrace it, trusting that my chosen path would lead to something extraordinary. ☐



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