

# Eleventh Child



Louise Tunstead

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The first edition of this book was edited, designed and produced in 1982 by Jan Kutcher, Elaine Gober-Katz and Angela Crichlow.

The second edition was prepared in 1986 by Sally McBeth with editorial assistance from Anne Goheen and Pamela Cornell.

### **Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Tunstead, Louise.  
Eleventh child

ISBN 0-920013-02-3

1. Tunstead, louise. 2. Toronto (Ont.) - Biography.  
I. East End literacy (Association). II. Title.

FC3097.26.T86A3 1982 971.3'54106'0924 C85-098581 -1F1059.5.T6853T85 1985

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## Chapter 1: My Arrival

I was the eleventh child. I was a premature baby and weighed in at three pounds. I was taken to Sick Children's Hospital and was under the care of a pediatrician. My mother had to give me blood so I would live. The transfusions were given to me from her leg to mine. I was one of the first babies to be fed Pablum; babies were normally fed mother's milk until they were a year old.

When I came home, I had to be carried around on a pillow so that I would not get bruised. Two of my sisters had me out in the carriage but I fell out when they took me down a curb. They teased me and said I was lucky because I landed on my head.

My oldest brother would take me with him all over the place. When he was dating his future wife, he would go to her house during the day and take me with him. The neighbours thought he had a nerve - a married man like him with a child and going out with a young girl! It took him a long time to convince them that I was his sister. You see, we were 22 years apart in age.

I had six brothers and four sisters. One of my brothers died when I was two. I only know about him what I have been told: he was my big brother and he looked after me.



## Chapter 2: The Depression

I don't remember much about the Depression but I remember going to a red brick building downtown. That was where my mum got milk, bread and tokens. We were on the "pogey" or welfare, as they call it now.

I had a happy life until I was seven. I would go everywhere with my mum. Dad did not work during the Depression. He too would take me places, like the Zoo or the Island. But when the second world war broke out, my dad got a job. That is when all hell broke loose.

For the first time in years my dad had money and he spent it on beer and his friends. I can still remember the first time I saw him drunk. I was very scared. I thought he was sick, but I soon found out that this was going to be a part of my life. I will always remember my eighth birthday. My dad came home drunk and my friends and I saw my cake pushed onto the floor. He was mad because his dinner was not on the table.

When I was in school I would worry that my dad was hurting my mum. Sometimes I would go home to: find the police at my house and my mum with black eyes or a broken or bloody nose. Then there was the time my youngest brother was thrown through the window because he would not let my dad hit my sister. I was ashamed to walk down the street in case the neighbours saw me.

My older brothers came home from the war and they had no idea how my dad had changed. They found out when my youngest brother got married. My other brothers had a stag for him. Dad got drunk and wanted to fight with everybody; that broke the party up. If we had people in, we worried that he would come in drunk.

Unlike my brothers and sisters, I had lots of nice clothes and shoes. My mum and sisters and brothers were working, so Mum had more money to buy me things. But clothes can't make up for sleepless nights or not being able to have friends come to the house.



## Chapter 3: Growing Up

I must say I had a good time with one special friend. We would go to the community centre on Saturday night for the dance. I loved ice skating; I went skating all year round, since my girlfriend and I found a place to go skating even in the summer.

I met my husband, George, at a bowling alley when I was 16. He played for his workplace, and I played for mine. It was my girlfriend who liked him. But his boyfriend liked her, so George walked me home so that his boyfriend could take her home. It was not long before we were going together.

My mum thought I should be in by 10 o'clock. I can remember going to a dance and I had asked my mum to let me stay out later. She said I could but I was to be home by 1:30 a.m. I came home at 1 o'clock and as I was about to kiss my boyfriend good night the door flew open. My mum pulled me in. George said it was a great disappearing act.

When I got in, she hit me with the broom until my legs were black and blue. Mum said she had not said I could stay out that late. If I asked to go to other places, like Buffalo, with my friends, she would say, "No, good girls don't go to places like that." George and I got married when I was 18.



## Chapter 4: New Beginnings

When I look back on my life, my mum was a lady who worked hard, but she would never say she was sorry, even if she was wrong. She would buy a present for you instead.



My husband and I have often said we would not have gotten married so young if things had been different.

The day I got married it rained, snowed and hailed. Do you think the weather was telling me something? I told my dad if he got drunk he could not walk me down the aisle. He said it was the proudest day of his life. The thought that went through my head that day was that I was getting away from my mum and dad and was going to have a place of my own with some privacy. Boy, was I wrong.

We went to Ottawa for our honeymoon. We had a compartment on a train that we thought had a separate bathroom. Boy, did I get a surprise! Instead, we had a toilet with a sink right in the compartment. I had put the cases on the toilet and didn't know I had it hidden. When I found out that I would have to use the toilet while George was in the room, I went down the hall. The porters laughed and laughed. My face looked like a stop light.



## Chapter 5: Family Life

We had our own place till our daughter was born in August, 1951. We were told we had to find somewhere else to live. We went to live with my brother and his wife. They had three children and we had fun living with them. But the house was sold and we all had to move. We had two children by then: our daughter and a son born in March, 1953. We had a hard time finding a place to live, so we went to live with my mum and dad. It was when we lived with them that my dad quit drinking. He was beaten up and had to be in the hospital for two weeks. Afterwards he would tell my husband the ills of drinking. It was funny that way.



I never told my children about their grandad. My oldest son thought his grandad was the best thing around. My dad just loved him. My daughter was Mum's girl and she would take her out with her everywhere. My mum said she must have been on this earth before because of the way she talked. My second son was born in 1954, while we lived with my parents.



My husband and I bought our first home in 1955. It was good to finally have a place of our own. We worked hard. I looked after children for people during the day. My husband worked for a dairy.

Soon we sold this house and bought a bigger house. I went out to work at night when the kids were still little. However, my husband thought I should be home with them, so I looked after children again, this time for Metro Children's Aid.

I had worked for them for five years when our daughter got very ill. We had no medical plan to cover her home care, but that is where the doctor wanted her. After she got better I went out to work in a factory.

We had a good life, but we were not perfect people. We all made mistakes. My husband had worked at the dairy for 16 years when he decided to quit and go into real estate. That was in 1966. Then he decided we should all go out west. Boy, was that a mistake! The kids and I hated it. We told him Calgary was a nice place to visit but we did not want to live there, thank you! Soon after, we all came back to Toronto.

My husband had a hard time finding a job. My daughter and I told him to go back into real estate, so he did. Things were much better then. I went to work for the Catholic Children's Aid. When I say I worked for the Aid, I should say we *all* worked for the Aid.



## Chapter 6: Foster Mother

We ran a receiving home. That's where kids are first brought when they are put in the Aid. We looked after kids from age three to 16. Some of them were pretty mixed up kids. I guess when, I look back, it was one of the best times of our lives, and the worst too.

Once we had a little boy who was seven and retarded. My daughter took him out all the time. She would come home and tell us all the things he had done. There was the time he turned off all the lights in the Eatons lamp department. He told her that he just thought it was a button for him to play with. He used to do things like that all the time.

He would get up at night so he could sleep in my daughter's bed, or at least he called it "sleep". All he needed was four hours of sleep. He would keep my husband and daughter and myself up in shifts all night long. My daughter called her oldest son after him.

And we had a little Spanish boy. When he first came to us he didn't speak English. Needless to say, he learned all the "wrong" words first. And he had his own way of saying things. He told the social worker he had to come home so he could have "soap and cruckers". We just loved him.

Once we had two brothers. The oldest boy was quiet but the youngest one was my little investigator. Once we had a man in to fix the wiring. The poor man spent a whole hour trying to put a wire up the wall and through a hole. I asked what was the matter. He told me how surprised he was that the wire would not go through the hole in the wall. When I went in the kitchen to watch, I saw my little helper pushing the wire back down the hole. That was our boy. I could go on for hours telling about the kids we had.





**LOUISE AND GEORGE TUNSTEAD, foster parents to more than 80 children in the past two years, find themselves the centre of a controversy because they want to offer a permanent home to youngsters**

We won our fight with City Hall and the narrow-minded people. The home was officially opened on November 9, 1971. It was because of us that the Aids were allowed to open more receiving and group homes in Scarborough.

We had our home for three-and-a-half years. Then my husband had a heart attack, and the Aid thought we should give up our work with them. My husband and I thought the Aid should give us a leave of absence and let *us* decide what we wanted to do. After all, we had fought so long and hard to get the group and receiving homes for them. But their answer was no.

The day I moved from my beautiful home in Scarborough, I was angry. My husband was in the hospital again and I felt so alone. George had an angina attack that the doctor said could have been brought on by hostility he felt for the Aid.

I can remember standing in the room at the hospital and hearing the doctor say that if my husband did not stay in there he would not live. I went home to that big empty house and cried and cried. I felt I had worked for nothing.

I moved to a town house. The two young men who moved the furniture were so nice; they even put up the bed and the kitchen table. My kids came that night to help me. Our best friends, whom we have known for 26 years, came over.

## Chapter 8: Reflections

My kids are all married now and we have three beautiful grandchildren - a little girl who is three and two boys, 11 and two. We have since moved to an apartment. I am out working but I don't like my job that much. It gives me something to do. However, I am looking for something better. As my husband puts it, I can bitch about it, but not at him. I started taking classes for spelling and I realize there is a lot out there that I would like to do. I hope that life is good to me and lets me still do it. My husband and I are very happy people. I thank God we are alive.

*Louise Margaret Gordon Bell Tunstead  
Toronto, 1982*



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