

**In My Father's
Footsteps**



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Foreward

This is one of a series of four books. They all began in a workshop where writers shared ideas and life stories, as well as thoughts about the fears and joys of writing itself. During the workshop, writers used photographs of people and places as doorways to the past, as ways to get at their memories and the stories that are important to them. Writers wrote about whatever the photographs brought to mind, then read their drafts aloud. Other writers and workshop leaders gave comments and asked questions. Then the writers went home to face the winter and the work of rewriting alone. Like most writing, this book is a product of both community and solitary work.

Beatrice White knows what it is like to have to leave what you love behind and go away to make a living. *In My Father's Footsteps* tells of how three generations have had to leave family and community behind in search of work. From her father's trips home from Labrador bringing Jersey Milk bars for the children to a Christmas in the present where the family knows they will not be able to stay together, the longing and loneliness and love in this story are well-known to many families. You've heard the expression "Still waters run deep." That's what Beatrice White's writing is like. Here is a quiet story of few words and deep emotions.

1

I think back sometimes about how my life was growing up and the way it is today.



Working away from home
Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives

My memories are so clear. I come from a family of nine children. Our father worked in Labrador to provide for our family. We didn't get to see him very much. He would get home for a couple of months through the year. I remember each time he returned and how excited we were.

Watching through the window, we would scream when we saw him. "Dad's home!" "Dad's home!" Our screams echoed through the house.

We couldn't wait for our hugs and kisses. Dad always carried a shiny blue trunk that held all his belongings. We couldn't wait for this to be opened, too. As he opened it, Dad teased us about what was inside. Sure enough, he'd pull out Jersey Milk bars for us all. What a treat!



Kitchen party
Pauline Thornhill

After supper it was time for Dad to get out the accordion. He had learned to play it when he was just a little boy. We sang and danced until late into the night. The whole family was complete, enjoying every minute, and wishing it could last forever. But before long Dad had to leave for work again.



Scrubbing mats was hard work.
Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador

Now, I think about how hard he worked and how he must have felt each time he had to leave his wife and children. I think of my mother too, how strong and loving she was to raise us alone.

2

As the years went by our family got smaller. Like my father, my older sisters and brother moved away to find work. I knew my day would soon come.

I'll never forget the day I left. It was Sept 8, 1975. The tears were streaming down my cheeks as I said goodbye to my mother. I thought they wouldn't stop. With her love and encouragement, I got aboard the taxi and started to drive away. Still crying, I looked back until I could no longer see her.



Bonavista
Helen Woodrow

I was headed for the big city, Toronto. My sister was already living there so I had her to lean on. What a change of lifestyle from growing up in a small town!

Jobs were plentiful. I started working after only a week. But even though I was working and living with my sister, I missed home. We called home every weekend.

I got married after a couple of years. My husband is from my home town. I knew him as a child growing up. He worked for a steel company.



Lisa and Sherry White
Beatrice White

We had two beautiful little girls. Our hearts were set on moving home, especially since we had the children.

In 1986 my husband came home from work with the news that the steel plant was closing. It was then that we both decided to move back to Newfoundland.

The children were ages three and nine. We had mixed feelings about our future, but we took the chance. We felt we had done the right thing as we watched our children play outside. They had never had so much freedom before.



Bonavista is a fishing port.
Helen Woodrow

We were both fortunate. My husband got a job at the fishplant, and I worked at a convenience store. This was our dream come true.



The moratorium was announced on July 2, 1992.
Jamie Lewis

Then in 1992 there was devastating news. The fishery was being closed. It was so hard for everybody to bear. It was sad to see people who worked all their lives having to pack up and leave their homes. With me still working and my husband getting moratorium cheques, we managed to stay.

3

But another generation was getting ready to follow in my father's footsteps. Our eldest daughter graduated from high school and moved away to Calgary to find work. There was no work at home. Saying goodbye to her is the hardest thing I have ever had to do.

We talked on the phone just about every night. Her experiences were so similar to my own. This is why her leaving is so difficult for me: I know how I felt and how she must feel.

In 1999, my husband's cheques ran out. He too had to pack up and move to Calgary with our daughter. I stayed home with our youngest daughter who would be graduating from high school in a year.

My husband worked for a roofing company. When the weather got too bad to work outside, he got laid off.



The White family
Beatrice White

It is Christmas Eve now and everybody is home. The house is packed; even my nieces and nephews are here as the music plays, the stories are being told. I find myself wishing as I did when I was a child that this would last. But any day now the phone will ring and it will be my husband's call to return to work again.

Acknowledgements

This book was developed for Exploring Memory, Finding Meaning, a special project of the Adult Basic Education Writing Network. We offer our thanks to the National Literacy Secretariat for their financial support of the book series.

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Participants and staff at the Rabbittown Leaners Program in St. John's, the Learning Centre in Edmonton, and the Discovery Centre in Bay Roberts field tested earlier drafts of the books. Their comments and suggestions helped us improve the series.



In My Father's Footsteps is Beatrice White's touching story of three generations in a family whose members must go away to work. Forced apart, they are held together by the bonds of love.

Readers say...

"This story is all too familiar to many families."

"A story everyone can relate to."

Beatrice White lives in Bonavista, Newfoundland. In 1996, she graduated from the ABE program at the Provincial Learning Centre. Beatrice's work has been published in *A Newfoundland Spell* (1995), a collection of student writing from the ABE Writing Network.