

The basement suite was adequate, private and convenient and gave me a space to write but I should have moved out long ago.

“It’s time,” my father knocked on my door and suggested I come upstairs.

My maternal Grandmother lay on the flower print couch, in a makeshift hospice room awash with family photos. Curtains open, lights off so the graying of her lips was less visible. I took a stool and leant forward.

“Hats always suited your Uncle Eric,” she said patting my knee, “you remind me of him.” A sigh and she closed her eyes.

I scanned the walls but couldn't see what caught her eye. Perhaps it was the Eiffel Tower photo or maybe just that I was his namesake.

Mother, her short gray hair permed into tight curls, turned her head and bit her lip to make the pain physical, while father squeezed her shoulders and got up to make the call. I held Gran’s hand as it cooled.

Eric, my mother’s brother, eleven years her junior, was rarely mentioned. The last I remember was when the Berlin Wall came down and he sent a post card saying if the world didn’t blow up, he’d finally come for a visit. In '61, after high school, he left Toronto to make it in European theatre. He stayed in Paris. Mom said he liked the climate. Gran told me once, he liked to have his cake and eat it too.

One week later, the day was full with mourning relatives, flowers, phone calls and family gossip. The service at the funeral home was short and dignified. Aunt Mabel played piano and I played the flute. At home, the wake featured reminiscing and accordion music. Dad served the alcohol.

“I thought Eric would at least show up for this”, Mabel said. “The last time he was here, in ’65, you wanted to go back with him.” I was only 10 at the time.

“He said he wouldn’t come alone,” my Mother whispered sliding onto the couch, sandwiching me between Mabel and herself.

I paged through the photo album on the coffee table and stopped at some early shots of my Grandmother and her children just before they immigrated to Canada in '46. Eric rode the rails to Wales as part of the Pied Piper operation but was back with the family in less than a year. Gran’s arm enveloped Eric and pressed him to her side. He wore a bonnet.

“If he hasn’t come back up to now, then he can stay where he is,” my father countered. “He’s more comfortable there”.

“That was a bit harsh,” I said.

“At least you haven’t left home to follow your fancy.”

“Think I’ll go buy a hat,” was all I said as I left the house. My contact info arrived in the mail a year later on the back of a postcard of the Lion's Gate Bridge. Love and kisses, Eric.