

On work days I usually had a picnic lunch either in the shade of a maple tree on The Mountain, or in a small public garden, the Percy Walters Park with trees, mown grass, dogs, weeded flower beds and children. The atmosphere was quiet and gentle and suburban.

By the beginning of July the weather had grown much hotter and had become very humid. One weekend I took the train to Sherbrooke to visit an old friend from England whose husband was finishing his medical studies in the hospital there. They lived in a small apartment on the edge of the town with several cats and two small children and they had the use of the garden. Early in the morning I stood on the balcony and watched two cats chase a grey squirrel up into the highest branches of a tree. The squirrel was frightened; the cats prowled upon the lower branches. The squirrel made a bold leap onto a light twig. The cats slunk back down the tree trunk and sat morosely upon the grass. Already the day was very hot.

We drove into the country and picnicked on a hillside. The children filled baskets with wild strawberries which grew so plentifully that it was difficult to sit down without squashing them. My friend picked armfuls of wild flowers for her house and I picked several specimens to dry for myself. The countryside is surprisingly unspoiled and is still pastoral without trappings of modernity. The roads are small and have verges instead of kerbs, the fields are rife with poppies, Indian paintbrush, wild lilies and bedstraw because they have not been sprayed with insecticide. In the valleys the cows mooch and chew cud and vetch, and the milk tastes of wild flowers like the milk on the Isle of Mull.

White roads

The following day we drove to Lake Memphremagog along tiny white roads little more than tracks through mountains and forests. The lake was large and the waters dark. We stopped at a small jetty deserted except for single fisherman who had already caught a couple of bass. We swam in the lake. It was cold but refreshing. After we had towelled ourselves dry and bundled the children into the back of the car, the weather suddenly broke from a prolonged and intense heat into a violent storm. Lightning. Then thunder. After a tremendous downpour of hail and rain. It was more like lions and tigers than cats and dogs.

We drove on through the storm and across the mountains until we reached America where we crossed the border, and being very hungry after our swim, we searched for a restaurant in the first town we reached in Vermont. We had both entirely forgotten that across the border it was Independence Day (July 4).

Independence Day is a national holiday. All shops were shut. Only one tiny restaurant was open. We went in and sat at a table close to a large stuffed polar bear and ate fried bass fresh from Lake Memphre-

magog. The children drank Coca-Cola and my friend and I drank Planter's Punch.

We left the United States and returned to Canada.

Back in Montreal it was still oppressively hot and humid. Everyone in Montreal was finding it difficult to work under such conditions. We were all in the same chateau or boat.

Towards the end of July I took a train to Quebec. Quebec City is French. Built in the seventeenth century by the French and captured by the English in 1759, it has changed little since. In Quebec City, French is the predominant language, although the inhabitants are a *mélange* of Scots-Irish, English and French Canadians. The food is French. Coffee and *croissants* for breakfast; excellent dinners. I spent the day walking through the Plains of Abraham which were the battlefields where both French and English had fought. Quebec is a beautiful town; a citadel with a splendid view overlooking the St. Lawrence River. It is hard to believe one is not in a town in France.

After a couple of days in Quebec, I travelled further down the St. Lawrence River and arrived in Murray Bay. The French call Murray Bay "La Malbaie"

Below: There are moments when it could be in France . . .



because at low tide there is a distinctly unpleasant odour coming from the river. The English call "La Malbaie," Murray Bay, after a Scotsman.

Northern Lights

La Malbaie is beautiful; mountains reminiscent of the Scottish Highlands, the St. Lawrence and the Murray Rivers, an enormous Victorian gothic grand hotel, a collection of quiet and picturesque houses. The river is so wide at this point of the estuary that one cannot see to the opposite shore. Murray Bay has been a seaside resort since the eighteen sixties. It is still very small and has not altered much.

I stayed with English Canadian friends who had a delightful holiday house just outside the town with a wonderful view overlooking the Bay. The house was furnished with early French Canadiana (patchwork quilts, wooden furniture, painted shutters and beams), the garden profuse and sweet smelling.

One night we sat outside late and watched the Northern Lights. It was an extraordinary sight. A beautiful aurora.

During the days at La Malbaie we swam, went for long walks over the steep hillsides covered in wild flowers and we visited friends. One of the most beautiful houses I saw belonged to Pat Morgan, a landscape gardener working in New York and living at home during his holidays. His house is simple, built of wood and stone. His gardens remarkable. One is a perfectly enchanting wild garden planted with specimens from the immediate countryside, running with streams and underground springs. The other is a formal garden where there is a pond.

Evening music

During the evenings we quite often went out and sometimes we were visited by friends. Every evening there was music.

The French Canadians are an intensely musical race. So are the Scots-Irish. One of the barriers between the two races is the language barrier. Equally, one of the things that unites them is their music which belongs to them both.

*"Par derrier' chez ma tant'
"Il lui ya-t-un étang,
"Je me mettrai anguille,
"Anguille dans l'étang."*

Another version of this song is also found in England:

*"Then she became a duck, a duck all on
the stream,
"And he became a water-dog and fetched
her back again.
"Then she became a hare, a hare upon
the plain,
"And he became a greyhound dog and
fetched her back again.
"Then she became a fly, a fly all in the air,
"And he became a spider, and fetched her
to his lair."*