

Channing's
dollhouse

*A mother packs
up her daughters'
dollhouse*

By **MARIE TORRES (MARBESTI)**

CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL: POWER MOMS

"There came a moment quite suddenly when a mother realized that a child was no longer hers ... without bothering to ask or even give notice, her daughter had just grown up."
— Alice Hoffman

Today I started putting away Channing's dollhouse. The truth is, she hasn't played with it for ages. It is dusty, and I needed to make room for possessions more suited to her "tween" years, marked by her rapidly approaching 10th birthday.

The dollhouse was filled with miniatures of all types. In the drawer of a wooden dresser, I found a lavender foam heart. I put it in a Ziploc bag along with some pieces of furniture. In another bag went a mismatched set of the dollhouse residents: everything from a fabric Goldilocks to a plastic dolphin. I smiled at a white comforter made from a folded tissue. I wondered if I should save it. When in doubt, throw it out, except where I'm concerned. I better keep it, dust mites and all, so that when she's a grown-up I can remember how cute and resourceful she was during her early years.

As I worked, I remembered the excited look on her face when she received the dollhouse at age 3. We bought one that would hold up over time. One that her children could play with one day. I wondered what Channing's children would be like. Will she have a girl to enjoy her dollhouse? I wondered if I would be lucky enough to enjoy grandmotherhood.

In my youth, I had devised the perfect plan for my life. I would graduate from college at 22, then travel in Europe and return home in time to get married by 25. Next, I'd have two children before turning 30. My actual graduation was delayed by a year, and the domino effect of that pushed out every other date in my master plan, exponentially. That's OK, because I learned in time that there was a better path for my life.

In my 20s, I had a definite view of success, and it was something that was achieved in one's career. My goal was to be self-suffi-

How a Calgary doctor plans to beat seasonal affective disorder

Margaret Prouse's column

Heritage circle remembers SRW

Artist paints Charlottetown streetscape

Community news

A story of survival

A new book, Dark Side of the Sun: George Palmer and Canadian POWs in Hong Kong and the Omine Camp, is a grandson's literary tribute to his P.E.I. grandfather and those who served with him.

By **MARY MCKAY**
THE GUARDIAN

Second World War veteran George Palmer was a hero, albeit a quietly unstung one.

But the late Cable Head man had a story within him of the experiences of the Battle of Hong Kong in late 1941 and almost four years as a prisoner of war (POW).

For whatever reason, he remained for the most part silent on all the unimaginable details. But now his grandson Michael Palmer has come forth with a book that tells the story of George's survival. And as a matter of research he uncovered the memories of others who became a band of brothers in their quest for survival and freedom.

From the words of those service men whom he encountered during his quest, this first-time author experienced his own exploration into the man who was his grandfather.

"I admired him back then but to know (what I know) now, all the things that he'd done, like helping guys survive, I just admire him that much more," says Michael, who has just released *Dark Side of the Sun: George Palmer and Canadian POWs in Hong Kong and the Omine Camp*, which is published by Borealis Press Ltd. with financial assistance from the federal Book Publishing Industry Development Program.

Now living in Calgary, Alta., Michael grew up in Antigonish, N.S. but spent countless summer hours in his parents' Lou (Kilmer) and Mary Palmer's home province of P.E.I.

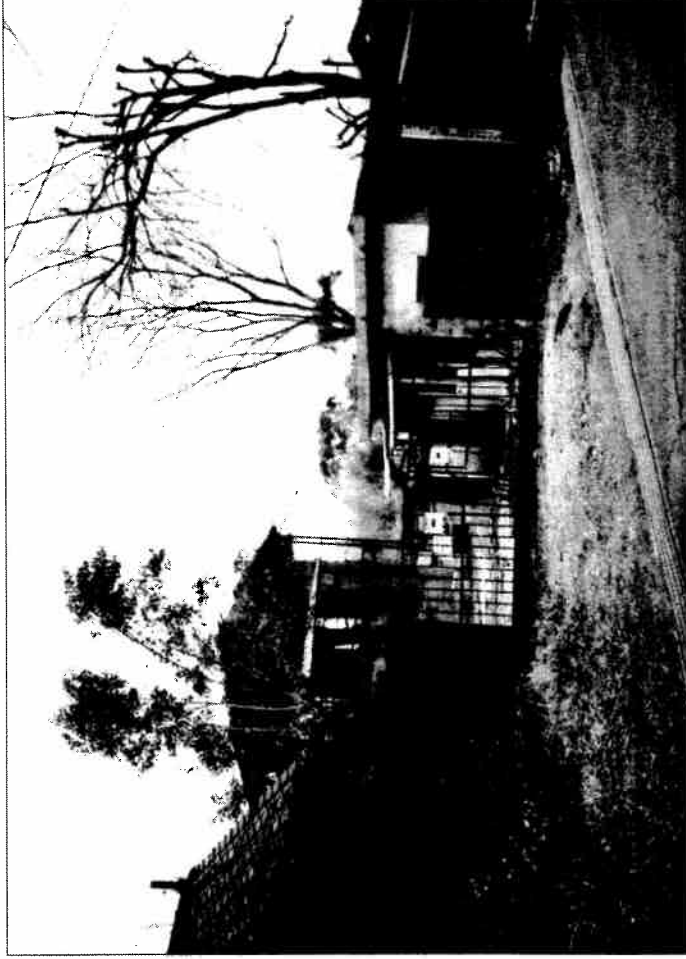
Of course, those visits included time with his grandfather, George, who had to be prompted to speak about his Second World War experiences.

"Everyone always knew some of the stories of him but never the whole story because he never talked about it much," Michael says.

George's life story starts with his birth in New Brunswick, followed by his childhood in Kings County, P.E.I.

In 1940 he volunteered for active service with the West Nova Scotia Regiment and then transferred to the Royal Rifles of Canada battalion.

He and his sweetheart, Jeanette, who by then was



This 2005 photo shows a view of the former front entrance to the Omine Camp in Japan where hundreds of Allied servicemen were held. Many died as a result of their imprisonment. SUBMITTED PHOTO

AT A GLANCE

Fast facts

► Michael Palmer's book *Dark Side of the Sun: George Palmer and Canadian POWs in Hong Kong and the Omine Camp* is available at www.borealispress.com, online at Chapters, Indigo and Coles, or locally at Indigo.

his book's beginning.

When the battalion arrived in Hong Kong in November 1941, it seemed relatively untouched by the war that raged.

But weeks later, all hell broke loose when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. The Allied Forces, which numbered 14,000, including 1,974 Canadians, fought hard against the 60,000 Japanese troops but couldn't hold them off. In all, 290 Canadians were killed and 493 wounded.

Hong Kong surrendered on Christmas Day 1941.

The Japanese imprisoned 8,500 Allied soldiers, including more than 1,680 Canadians, in POW camps in Hong Kong and Japan where they endured foul conditions, brutal treatment and torture and near-starvation rations.

George spent 1,349 days in captivity at three camps: North Point and Sham Shui Po in Hong Kong and finally

See A story, C2



Michael Palmer of Calgary, Alta. has written a book that details the story of his grandfather and other servicemen who were prisoners of war after the Battle of Hong Kong. His grandparents, the late George and Jeanette Palmer, were longtime residents of Cable Head. SUBMITTED PHOTO

mother to their seven-year-old son, married just before he was shipped overseas in the fall of 1941.

"Unfortunately my grandfather and the rest of

the men (with the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers - C Force) . . . were heading towards the Pacific and unknowingly straight into

the greatest calamity that ever befell Commonwealth forces — the Japanese assaults in the winter of 1941-42 on Britain's Far East colonies," Michael wrote in

Students prepare for next year and end of this year's activities

Community happenings

March 9-10

TUESDAY

ple with Arthritis Can Exercise class is at Atlantic Fitness East, Morell Maples Mall, Tuesdays, 9:45 a.m., Phone 739-3047.

Exercise class is Tuesdays, 10 a.m., at the Senior Active Living Centre, CARL complex, UPEL. The cost is \$1.

New Beginnings prenatal and postnatal group program is offered by Family Place, 75 Central St., Summerside, Tuesdays, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (postnatal) and 12-2:30 p.m. (prenatal). This free program is for all expectant and new parents of all ages. Onsite childcare for older children is available. To register, drop in to Family Place, call 436-1348 or familyplace@eastlink.ca mail-to:familyplace@eastlink.ca

Pool/snooker sessions and lessons are at the Seniors Active Living Centre, CARL complex, UPEL, Tuesdays, 9 a.m. Call the centre in advance at 628-8388 for pool lessons. The cost is \$1. All members are welcome.

Euchre at played on Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m., at the Seniors Active Living Centre, CARL complex, UPEL. Cost is \$1.

Mayflower seniors Tuesday afternoon cards are every Tuesday at the Cotton Centre in Sunbury, 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$2.

Beginner bridge lessons with Dave MacDonald are at the Seniors Active Living Centre, CARL complex, UPEL, Tuesdays, 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$1 per session. Call 628-8388.

Bridge is played at the Silver Threads Club in Souris on Tuesdays at 7 p.m.

Ladies Auxiliary Branch #1 Royal Canadian Legion cards are every Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., with prizes, lunch and a 50/50 draw.

Public cribbage is held at the Kingston Legion Branch No. 30, New Haven, every Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.

A stitching night of the Lady Slipper Needle Arts Guild is on the second Tuesday of each month at Beach Grove Home in Charlottetown. All visitors are welcome.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 10

Living A Healthy Life is a six-

week chronic disease self-management program scheduled to start March 10 in Hunter River running from 1-3:30 p.m. For more information or to register, call 1-888-854-7244.

Aging Well - Finding Balance is a presentation to be held Wednesday, March 10 from 9:30-11:30 a.m. Dr. Elaine Galagher from British Columbia will be here for a presentation.

aimed at seniors and the preventability of falls. Information will be provided on how to minimize the risk for falls and how to maintain your independence. Refreshments will be served. Open to the public.

The March meeting for the Garden Club of P.E.I. will take place on Wednesday, March 10, 7 p.m. in the Hermitage Room in the West Royalty Community Centre, (across from Honda) Lower Malpeque Road, Charlottetown. For details call 892-3839.

Family Time is offered by Family Place, 75 Central St., Summerside, Wednesdays, 5-7 p.m., an opportunity to learn from and share with other parents. This program also includes a supper and an onsite children's program. To register, drop in to Family Place or contact 436-1348 or familyplace@eastlink.ca.

Breastfeeding Moms Group is offered by Family Place, 75 Central St., Summerside, Wednesdays, 10-11:30 a.m.

This informal yet informative group is offered in partnership with East Prince Health. Nursing babies and toddlers are welcome to attend. To register, drop in to Family Place or contact 436-1348 or familyplace@eastlink.ca.

Pathways to Wellness Workshops are every Wednesday, 9:30-11:30 a.m., presented by Dr. Marilyn J. Yap-Yu. Learn the benefit of using complementary and alternative management and a holistic approach in healing. Each week, topics will vary. Call Sunrays Holistic care, 628-1501.

Kensington Play Group is offered by Family Place at the Lions Club, 30 Garden Dr., Kensington, Wednesdays, 10 a.m.-noon. Enjoy free-play, circle time, a nutrition break, arts and crafts and activities. To register, drop in to Family Place or contact 436-1348 or familyplace@eastlink.ca.

A Story ... Cont. from C1

Omine Camp in Japan.

One major caveat in being captured by the Japanese was their ancient rules of conduct, known as Bushido, or the "way of the warrior."

"According to the Japanese, if you're going to be captured, then you're better off committing suicide. Being captured from the Japanese standpoint meant you had no honour and that you were a coward. You were looked upon as being lower than a snake's belly. So because of that mindset, they treated POWs inhumanely," Michael says.

"They basically only allowed them to live to work, to be their slave labourers and even then they were slowly being starved to death. I remember my grandfather saying they were only served three teacups of rice per day and they were working 12-hour days doing hard work."

Personal interviews and diary excerpts from George's fellow servicemen were essential in helping Michael flesh out details of life in the POW camps. One gem was Winnipeg Grenadier veteran George Coult of Melita, Man., who was also imprisoned at Omine.

"It just so happens he

was one of the most high ranking POWs in that camp so he knew a lot of what went on in that camp," Michael says.

The late Lance Ross of Paspebiac, Que. actually kept a diary of his POW ordeal.

"(At one point he and my grandfather) were going to escape together from the Hong Kong camp across China," Michael adds.

When the POWs were finally liberated in when Japan surrendered to the Allies on Sept. 2, 1945, most weighed less than 45 kilograms (100 pounds).

More than 260 Canadians were either killed, died from starvation or disease or ended their life due to the awful conditions of prison camps in Hong Kong and Japan. But thankfully more than 1,400 lived.

"How all of those guys survived I have no idea," says Michael.

"My grandfather said mentally he was strong but he admitted physically he took a beating in those camps. He said, 'I always just had hope. One of his friends, Allison Pollock (of Tide Head, N.B.) mentioned that my grandfather used to laugh and joke all the time when they went (to work) in the mines (at Omine)."

After the war, George returned to Cable Head. He worked in the farming and fishing industries and in

1965 became the postmaster in St. Peter's. He and his wife also raised seven more children.

He died in 1991. Although he had some physical ailments, he never showed outwardly any lasting mental effects of the war except for one avid aversion.

"I remember one story (that happened in the 1960s). He was at some kind of a dinner and they actually served him rice and he took the plate and threw it out the window or something to that effect," Michael says.

"I don't think he enjoyed rice too much after the war." Even though George was a very quiet man, his grandson believes he would have been quietly pleased that his story and that of others who fought the Battle of Hong Kong was being told.

"... Not so much that I told his story but because I made some extra efforts to throw in some pages of information on sort of a bigger picture level to explain the hell that not only he had to endure but also the hellish journey so many of his friends and comrades had to endure alongside him," Michael says.

"He was a hero and so were the others. And these stories shouldn't go to the grave, they should be honoured."

Channings ... Cont. from C1

stay at home with my child. As it turned out, the better plan for my life was still unfolding. Two days before my daughter was born, I got an offer on my manuscript for a children's book. If a character in a movie became a mother and a published author in the same week, I would say it was too unbelievable, but there I was.

First and foremost, I find my fulfillment in my family. To think that I could have that and also do the job of my dreams in my 'spare time' was not a plan I would have dared to imagine. I'm certain that I wouldn't be a writer today had I chosen the corporate world over being a stay-at-home mom. I would have missed out on so much of the joy of my true calling — being Channing's mother.

I am grateful. Really

www.chickensoup.com.

grateful. I didn't miss a thing during the first 10 years of my daughter's life. I got to witness every milestone.

While reaching into the dollhouse to remove the little Canadian geese, I still ached at closing this chapter and packing away the tangible evidence of Channing's early childhood.

This evening, when I returned from a meeting at her school, I went back to the dollhouse to finish my task. I smiled when I saw the floor next to her feet were three empty Ziploc bags. She hadn't noticed me walk in. She was too busy putting all the furniture and residents back into the dollhouse, where they belonged.

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