

Elizabeth Nyburg was born on January 23rd, 1955, in the university town of Keele, England, named after her favourite aunt. She lived in the small town with her parents, along with her older sister Anna. There they enjoyed the staples of childhood : drawing, painting, singing songs, making clothes for their dolls, and of course, attending school. “All the kids had university teachers as their parents, and you can imagine being a teacher at a local school and having all these university employees stare, breathing down your back.”

When she was 9, her father got a job in Toronto, thus the family left for the Canadian city on a boat, the Cunard Carmania. One would think a seven day trip aboard a big steamship would be overwhelming for a young girl, but having already been on a round trip to and from America, one becomes pretty accustomed to life on the deck.

Living first in Don Mills, “the kids were just as funny” as they had been back home, and the Beatles were almost as prevalent. The move eventually manifested its own revelations, with “the whole family [being] very disappointed that nobody spoke much French.”

By middle school, she moved to North York, where she still resides today. In Canadian schools, she “could skip a couple years, because the kids don’t start so young in Canada, and [she] was always the youngest in the class”. Her teenage years were relatively calm, “we were all in love with the English teacher, and he gave me 100% on one of my stories, so of course I thought I was going to be a writer from then on.” During this time, she babysat, worked part-time in the library at school, as well as volunteered at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) for a summer.

While at the University of Toronto (U of T), she took physics, English, and philosophy courses; though she was very depressed at the time. One of her first jobs was cleaning offices at night, which led her to work in the mailroom of an insurance company — “it was kind of fun, but not challenging.”

Elizabeth wanted to be a writer, but also an architect, “being an architect, or doing anything like that was pretty rare at the time for women” — she did get into architecture school, but it coincided with the height of her depression. “You had to have had a huge ego to be an architect, you had to be a leader [...] I wasn’t like that, I was kind of a quiet draftsman”, so she went back to arts at U of T, where she met her husband. “He was very good for my ego, and he encouraged me in my studies”; she also credits the support she received from her peers, her roommate, and her mother, who had gone through depression herself.

Environmentalism was also a great passion of hers, taking a course, and working for a company that built solar houses. But after developing epilepsy from a hit and run accident, in conjunction with the drop in oil prices, a career in that field was not as possible.

Still wanting to be a writer of some sort, she applied for a technical writing course at Glendon College, being interviewed in French, and even getting in. At the same time, she got into the Ryerson Journalism course, “and that was amazing because it’s hard to get into, so I took journalism and graduated in that after three years.” She ended up in market research, which was what she was doing when she retired.

Nowadays, she sings in a choir at church, and belongs to a group by the name of the Raging Grannies of Toronto, activists composed of older women with strong passions for social justice, “we make a big deal about looking very feminine, we wear funny flowery hats [...] it’s feminis[m], but in a different way.”