

# REMINISCENCES OF DIANA AND MICHAEL PRIESTLY

DIANA PRIESTLY, 503 - 240 Douglas Street, Victoria, British Columbia. V8V  
2P3

Stuart Houston has asked me to write down my memories of my mother, Isabel May Priestly (née Adnams). It was not something I felt very willing to do. My memories of her are by now very personal and somewhat ethereal, and I was not sure I wanted to share them or to make them concrete by writing about them. That is not to say that I do not talk about her. All my friends are aware of what my mother meant in my life, but stories told to friends come up naturally in the course of conversations. To sit down and start writing without the warmth of a particular setting seemed cold and mechanical — a denial of the very essence of what my mother has come to mean to me as the years have gone by. Stuart in one of his requests used the word "biography." "Oh dear," I said, "I will have to write something if only to tell Stuart what I can not tell him."

We have in the family almost no records about Mother's life before *The Blue Jay* began to be published. I know she was born in England, in Newbury in the County of Berkshire. Her mother, my grandmother, had been born Isabel Mary Dreweatt in 1864. She was my grandfather Frank Havell Adnams' second wife and there were three children of his first marriage, so my mother had teen-aged half-sisters and a half-brother. My grandfather was killed as the result of a riding accident when my mother was about seven years old

and I know nothing about the early years of that family.

Newbury is in a beautiful part of England (*Watership Down* country) and I know that Mother retained a deep love for the downs and the countryside around her first home. I have a vague recollection of her mentioning an older cousin or young uncle who used to take her for walks and rambles. Later she attended high school in Newbury — I believe it was called the Newbury High School for Girls. My grandmother was rather proud of having insisted that my mother attend this school. All her family had told her that it was not necessary for a girl to have a higher education. My mother used to speak fondly and with admiration of one of her teachers at the school — a Miss Leeder. I have a small hand-carved table which my grandmother told me was the work of Miss Leeder. It may have been Miss Leeder who instilled in Mother her deep love of English literature, particularly the poetry of the Romantic and Victorian periods. I remember how she loved Wordsworth and Browning, but she also loved Meredith and Swinburne. We used to quote favourite lines of poetry as we went about our tasks at home and when we went out for walks after dinner up to the cemetery hill in Yorkton: — "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," "Enter these enchanted woods, You who dare...", etc. Those were the days when we memorized poetry in school, and



*Diana and Isabel Priestly.*

Ruth Beck and I used to recite favourite poems to each other as we walked to and from school.

My mother also enjoyed the craft of writing and she had a good partner in my father who was a newspaper editor. Between them we children were assured of a high standard of criticism of anything we wrote for school. Those were also the days when grammar was a subject taught in schools. I loved it, encouraged as I was at home to think it was of the utmost importance.

Just before the 1914-18 war my

mother was at school in Germany — in Berlin, I think. I do not know what sort of school it was or how long she was there, but I do know she got home by way of Switzerland and my grandmother went out to join her there and they had a holiday in one of those hotels on one of the Swiss lakes which are described in so many novels of the time.

During the war my mother and my grandmother did volunteer nursing in England for the Red Cross. Father had been wounded in France with the Canadian army and invalided back to England where he was sent

to the hospital in which my mother served. My parents were married on 31 December 1918.

After the wedding they went up to London and saw the famous musical "Chu-Chin-Chow." My father's family were all very musical and my father had a lovely baritone voice. Because of their anniversary, New Year's Eve was always a family affair for us. My parents came out to Canada as soon as they could and went to Calgary where my Priestly grandparents lived. My brother Frank and I were born in Calgary. Grandmother Adnams came out from England to Calgary a few years after the end of the war but she soon moved to Victoria, British Columbia.

The years after the First World War were difficult for the returned men, and for a few years Father went down East to look for work as a journalist while my mother, with Frank and me, came to live with my grandmother in Victoria. My mother was active in the Victoria Natural History Society. I remember the campaign to protect the Lily (British Columbia's native *Erythronium*), or Dog Tooth Violet as it is sometimes called. Mother found a cartoon in *Punch* which was used in the campaign. It showed an English couple, their arms full to overflowing with daffodils, about to get into their little car, leaving an empty field with one lone plant sticking up in the middle of it. The woman is saying, "Look, George, we forgot one." I recall Mother explaining the irony of it to me.

I have a packet of articles written by Mother from this period in Victoria. The articles are about Vancouver Island flowers and each is headed "Nature Notes" above the title. Perhaps they were written for

the Society or even the local newspaper, but I have not been able to ascertain either. The articles are informative and are charmingly written in my mother's easily recognizable style. They tell of the history and origin of each plant, and show her keen love of that kind of knowledge, her curiosity, and her longing to share what she learned.

I have since come to realize that my mother was an example of the English amateur — with broad interests and indefatigable curiosity, to which is applied a stern appreciation of discipline and logic. Years later, when she was explaining to me how they counted the birds in a flock during a Christmas bird count, I said, "Oh, you're quite honest about this, then," and she turned, grinned, and said, "My dear child, we're not honest, we are scientific."

In 1930, when I was eight, my father secured a position with the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and we moved to Winnipeg. That seems to be when Mother's interest changed from botany to birds, although she was always a botanist as well as a bird lover. (She did botanical studies for Ducks Unlimited when we were in Yorkton.) In Winnipeg I remember Dr. H.M. Speechly, a medical doctor as well as a naturalist, giving us cold vaccine. Speechly also pioneered mosquito control, using oil to cover sloughs and wet areas. I began to be aware of how interesting my mother was as a person and this awareness grew as I grew. So much of what I do and think and enjoy today are, I think, a direct inheritance from my mother.

She had a wonderful enthusiasm for life and a profound belief in God as seen in all created things. Everything and everybody were God's

creatures and deserved respect and interest. She loved the recurring seasons of the year and she had the same love for and found endless joy in the seasons of the Church year. We looked forward to the collects and hymns of the special days and festivals as they came around. She owned all sorts of books about the origins of pagan and Christian festivals. She encouraged me in an early interest in pre-historic times and archaeology.

Together as a family we became excited about all the discoveries which had been made and were still taking place in South America, Mexico, Greece and Egypt. Those years between the wars have tended to be overshadowed by the dreadfulness of the Depression but there were also exciting ideas abroad. I have always appreciated the fact that I was educated by people who had worked on or had been influenced by the idea of a League of Nations and who believed that lasting peace was possible. (For instance our high-school history text was entitled *World Progress*. The word "progress" was of the utmost significance.) My father and men like him had high hopes for Canada as it emerged after the Statute of Westminster. I heard a radio program not long ago about the people in the thirties in Canada who were beginning to be interested in birds and their ways, and I thought of my mother and her interests. She was certainly a vibrant participant of the times in which we lived.

During the years in Winnipeg my mother wrote articles on birds and bird-life for both the *Winnipeg Tribune* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*. She was an active member of the Manitoba Natural History Society. That organization sponsored talks in the evenings in the old University

buildings on Broadway; sometimes Frank and I would be taken to hear them. Once Grey Owl spoke and we were enchanted. Also the museum contained the skeleton of a dinosaur from Alberta where we had been born.

I was an asthmatic child and I remember how my mother used to sit up with me all night when the attacks were at their worst, conscious of how terrifying it is to a child to be sitting up unable to breathe at four o'clock in the morning.

My brother Michael was born in Winnipeg when Frank and I were nine and ten. We adored him. About this time, too, I remember all the interest mothers like ours were taking in vitamins (pronounced "vittamins" then) and my mother thereafter cooked vegetables for a very short time in very little water.

In 1934, my father moved to Yorkton to become the local representative of the three Sifton newspapers, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, and the *Regina Leader-Post*. My mother loved the rolling prairies and the parkland bluff country. She always said she was much happier with the openness of the prairies than she was surrounded by the forests and mountains of the west coast.

I cannot clearly remember the chronology of events of her life in Yorkton. Frank and I went into high school and, of course, became absorbed in our lives in the Yorkton Collegiate Institute (YCI). The YCI then was famous for its highly qualified teachers and its imaginative principal, William Steinson, who initiated the "Yo-Co-In Plan" with a three week review period when the

better students, excused from the review, could instead study extra topics. Both my parents were involved in the enriched curricula which occurred three times a year. (I remember being questioned about the program by members of the College of Education years later, when I was on faculty at the University of British Columbia.)

At that time, mother began writing a weekly nature column for the *Yorkton Enterprise* and taking boys such as Stuart Houston and Harvey Beck out for walks. I recall mother commenting on Harvey's careful observation and note-taking as he gradually became more and more interested in insects.

Mother became involved in the work of the Benevolent Society as the representative of the Anglican Womens' Auxiliary and thereby became very concerned about ameliorating the conditions of the Indians and Metis living in tents south of the cemetery hill. I have a recollection that she went down to Regina to speak to our Member of the Legislative Assembly about their plight.

During the war she became the local representative of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. I remember her explaining rationing to Mr. Just, the farmer who brought us our butter and eggs. (And one of the clear memories I have of her funeral service is of Mr. and Mrs. Just driving up and securing their horse and cart outside Holy Trinity Church.)

An early wartime memory is of the call which came out for people to turn in their binoculars as there was a shortage of them for the Armed Services personnel. With great sadness my mother took hers down to the assigned depot, only to be told

that they were not the correct size, so she returned home rejoicing.

During the Second World War, my brother Frank and I joined up. Frank went off with the 64th Field Battery in Yorkton when it mobilized. He was not quite 18 but had finished high school at my father's insistence. I went into the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (W.R.C.N.S.) as soon as they began recruiting. Frank went overseas while I served in H.M.C.S. Cornwallis in Nova Scotia.

*The Blue Jay* began in October 1942. I was still at home for the first few issues, and remember father coming home to find Norma Beck and me coloring covers with blue crayons around our kitchen table, putting it together with even little Michael helping as best he could.

People have often asked me why it was called *The Blue Jay*. To anyone brought up on the *Burgess Bedtime Stories* this seems a strange question. Sammy Jay was the one who brought the news through the green forest. *The Blue Jay* was the bulletin of the Yorkton Natural History Society. It seemed so obvious. I am told that these days the Burgess stories are held in low regard by educators and librarians. Dear me! We loved them.

Besides the worry of having my brother's regiment fighting in Europe, my mother was greatly concerned over the welfare of her two half-sisters. One had married and gone to live in Jersey in the Channel Islands, so they were under German occupation, and the other had become a member of the Community of the Precious Blood and had gone to Japan and been interned by the Japanese on an island in the Pacific Ocean. They were anxious times.

My brother Michael was at home still and was a great source of joy. Mother used to tease us and say it was amazing how Michael developed after we had joined up and gone away. I expect we were sometimes rather bossy with our little brother.

After the war there was all the excitement of Frank and me being able to go to University with our Veterans' allowances. Frank went into Electrical Engineering at the University of Alberta and I went into the Faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia, both of us in the special January class which each Canadian University set up. Mother was so interested in what we were planning to do and the courses we were taking. And then she died suddenly — just as exams were about to start at the end of the first term. I remember travelling home from Vancouver for her funeral by train just as the crocuses were beginning to come out on the prairies.

It was my grandmother Adnams who thought of the phrase "She builded better than she knew" for Mother's tombstone in the Yorkton cemetery. The words have become even more true than we realized they

would at the time. It was wonderful for Michael's family, when they went back to Saskatchewan for the celebrations in 1980, to visit the Isabel Priestly Nature Trail at York Lake. We were all very proud and pleased to see the picture and account of our mother (and now grandmother) in *Herstory* in 1987. And our gratitude goes out to Stuart Houston for his work in putting together this special issue of *The Blue Jay*.

I hope these remarks have helped to give some idea of the person Mother was. Appropriate adjectives to describe my mother would include "marvellous, wonderful, undaunted."

I am sorry I have so little factual information about her early years, but when she died we were entering exciting new phases of our lives and so were looking ahead, not back. My grandmother could have supplied the kind of detail Stuart wants, but we had not troubled to ask her for the information prior to her death in 1962. The passion for facts about "roots" was not yet prevalent. In any case I think Mother would have preferred to think we have happy memories rather than precise dates and names.



Which are the good hawks? Just before he went overseas, Cpl. Culver made the following suggestion in a letter from New York... "Could you not prepare a chart showing the amount of good and the amount of harm done annually by the various species of hawks and owls? I remember when Frank and I caused some poor farmer to tear his hair and the gophers to rejoice, when we shot a Swainson's Hawk!" ... (By the way Cpl. Culver very tactfully makes no reference to the severe lecture he and Frank also received at the hands of Mrs. Priestly following the above mentioned episode, apparently it made a lasting impression!) Isabel Priestly, 1943. *The Blue Jay* 2:2.

My personal recollections of mother are few and hazy as I was only twelve years old when she died.

I grew up in the home of a keen naturalist. Housekeeping was not for mother. Many a dish of our good Limoges china set crashed on our kitchen floor as she caught sight of a bird in the garden and promptly forgot all about what she was supposed to be doing.

Probably her most prized possession was her metal plant gathering case or vasculum which she carried over her shoulder on every expedition she took. Her lunch — and mine too, if I was allowed to go along — was packed inside on the outward journey to be replaced later by flowers and grasses which were carried home to be pressed and labelled. Coming a close second to this case were her binoculars. So precious were they to her that she ignored a wartime plea to civilians to surrender binoculars for use by the armed forces. I think she always felt a little guilty about this act of defiance.

Although I had no great interest in her projects, I was often allowed to tag along on the hopes, I'm sure, that the interest would kindle — either that or there was no babysitter available! I remember the thrill of standing beside Mum as she would flag down the C.N.R. train to take us home the three miles from a bird watching trip to York Lake. I also remember how much I used to look forward to the bean soup which always awaited us at the Houstons after a bird count on Boxing Day.

Bird banding also played an important part in her life for numerous trips to Rousay Lake with Mum and Stuart are clearly fixed in my mind. I also recall going into the hardware store in Yorkton and helping Mum choose the cutlery and china that was to be used to stock the newly-built Ducks Unlimited banding cabin at Rousay Lake. I vaguely recall J.H. Wilson from Indian Head who came to band birds for Ducks Unlimited at Leech Lake and how he and mother would compare notes.

Mother was also very knowledgeable about astronomy and would often go star gazing up beside the water tower. During the war when a watchman was posted there, she was challenged one evening; as bent upon star gazing she was suspected of sabotaging the water tower. This amused me no end.

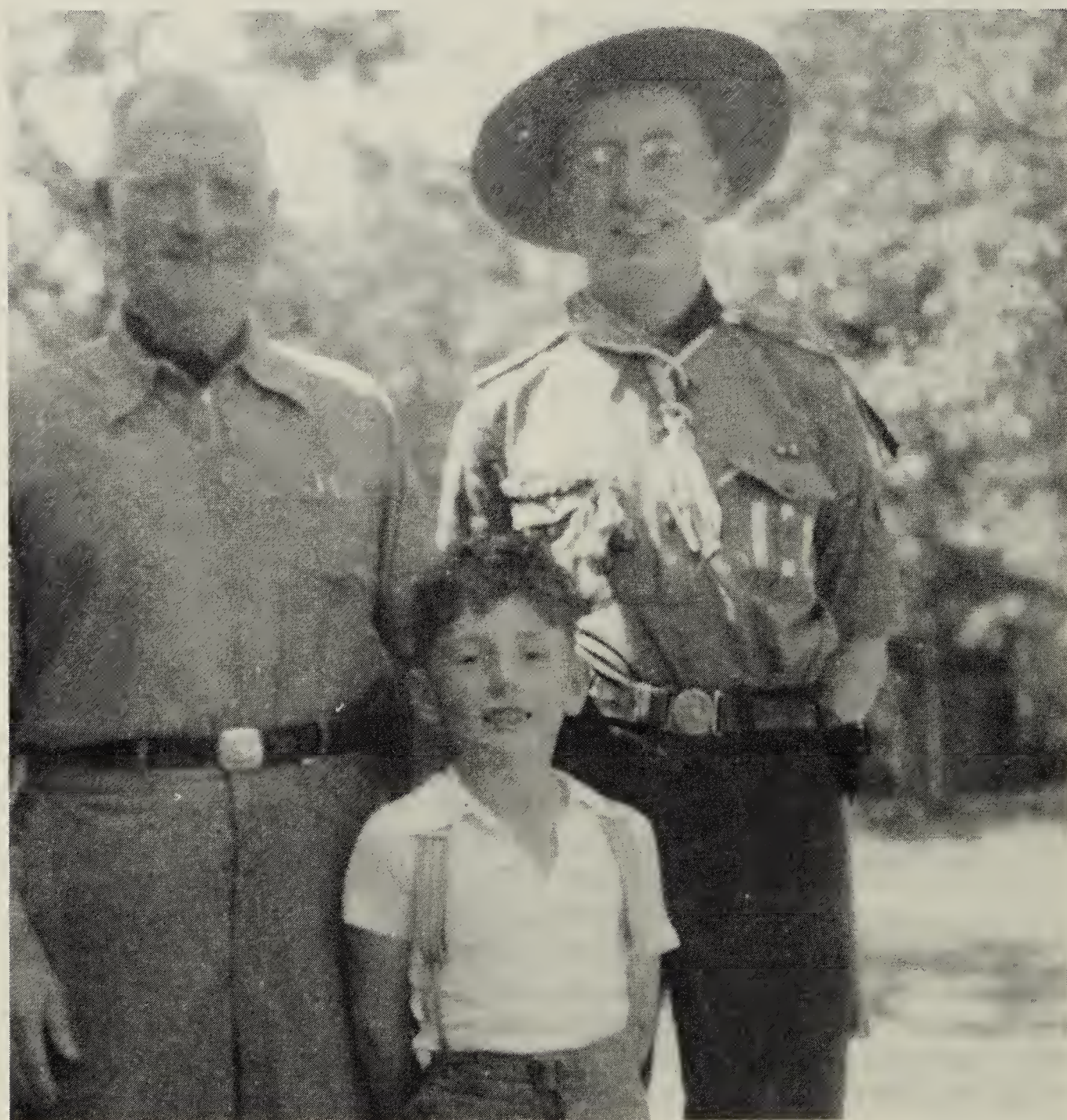
As a youngster in primary school, I remember mother coming into the schools to give nature talks or to take classes on nature walks out beyond where the fairgrounds were. I also remember being wakened once in the wee small hours of the morning so that I might accompany my mother to Bredenbury where the army had helped some scientists set up equipment to observe a total eclipse of the sun. Dad covered this event for C.B.C. radio and Mum was there out of general interest. What remains vividly in my mind is the chirping of the birds in the early dawn, the eerie stillness as the eclipse took place and the gradual renewal of the morning chorus as the eclipse passed.

Interspersed with all this I remember knitting needles clicking frantically as socks and mittens were turned out as part of our contribution to the Red Cross for the troops overseas. The Wartime Prices and Trade Board also took up a large portion of mother's time as did her work with Holy Trinity Anglican Church. I recall showings of her plant collections in the basement of St. Andrew's United Church.

A much more exciting basement to me at that age was in the Yorkton Enterprise building. There Mother

would help put together Christmas hampers as part of her involvement with the Yorkton Benevolent Society. The toys that went in these hampers intrigued me.

My growing up years were certainly never dull for Mother's interests filled each day to the brim. The excitement when *The Blue Jay* was being prepared for publication was second to none. How important I felt as I went around the Houston's kitchen table picking up pages in their correct order after they had been run off and made them ready to



*Bob, Frank and Michael Priestly.*



be stapled together. When an enquiry came from The British Natural History Museum with regards to subscribing to *The Blue Jay*, the level of excitement reached its peak.

These are only a few schoolboy recollections of a most remarkable mother. Now I am the father of two daughters and two sons and what is equally remarkable is that one daughter has inherited her grandmother's deep love of nature. As a little child she collected and

labelled seaweed and shells found here on the west coast, she pressed flowers and grasses, and ended up studying Marine Biology at the University of Victoria. One of my sons showed an early interest in birds and had quite a library of books about them when still very young. The outdoors always held a fascination for him and he is presently studying Forestry as a career. How I wish that my Mother had been spared to see her grandchildren follow in her footsteps.



*Physalis heterophylla*

B. DeVries

# OTHERS WHO REMEMBER ISABEL M. PRIESTLY

BILL ARMSTRONG, 3551 Allen Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 0Z8

My first recollection of Mrs. Priestly stands out. It was a Saturday morning in June. I was eight or nine years old at the time. The company, as I recall, consisted of Mrs. Priestly, Stuart Houston, Larry Millar (and his dog, Pal), my sister, Rhoda, and myself. We walked to the "muskeg," west along the railroad tracks from

Yorkton, north of the Exhibition Grounds. Departure time was 7 a.m. and each participant was to bring a lunch. I am ashamed to admit that I cannot recall one single bird that we encountered that morning. My only memory is the incredibly awful taste of cornflakes eaten out of a sealer with condensed milk and no sugar.

ANSGAR O. ASCHIM, RR#5, Site 17, Box 21, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. S6V 5R3

I sent in my twenty-five cents in the fall of 1944 and received Volume 1, Number 1, and all subsequent issues of *The Blue Jay*. I sent in observations to Mrs. Priestly when I was a Timber Cruiser for the Department of Natural Resources, based at Love,

Saskatchewan.

[Editor's Note: In 1991, Mr. Aschim kindly donated his complete set of *Blue Jay* issues to the editor of the magazine as a reference set.]

HARVEY BECK, Box 485, Strathmore, Alberta. T0J 3H0

I'm afraid that with the passage of time my memories of Mrs. Priestly have become somewhat blurred. I still remember her with a deep feeling of warmth because she was the first adult to treat me as an equal and one of the few adults with whom, as a teenager, I felt completely at ease.

Isolated incidents that remain vivid in my mind include my first sighting of an avocet that we shared standing knee-deep in a road-side ditch in a

cloud of mosquitoes; flushing a bird while chasing butterflies with my net and having Mrs. Priestly call to me to catch it — which to my surprise, and I'm sure to the bird's and Mrs. Priestly's, I "bagged" my first and only Upland Sandpiper; rushing down to the railway station on Broadway together one evening in answer to a report of a strange hummingbird and finding ourselves watching the uncoiling of the "tongue" on various Hawk Moths, the reported "birds,"

feeding on *Nicotiana* flowers; and having my first alcoholic drink — a thimble-full of sherry — at the Priestly's to celebrate with Ruth and Cliff Shaw their move to Yorkton from Regina. Mrs. Priestly, Cliff and I shared many field trips and Cliff was

always armed with a 35 mm camera.

[Note: Harvey is the author of *The Mammals of Saskatchewan*. For many years he has compiled the annual index for *Canadian Field-Naturalist*.]

J. NEIL BLACK, 922 Whitton Avenue, London, Ontario. N6H 4H5

My most vivid memory involves seeking, and finding, a nighthawk

nest with two eggs on the gravel roof of Victoria School.

MRS. E. K. FORSBERG (née MISS E. K. JONES), 302 - 41 Bison Avenue, Weyburn, Saskatchewan. S4H 0H9

As Miss E.K. Jones of Raymore, I subscribed to *The Blue Jay* in its early years. My brother, Clayton Jones, was also a member. Clayton knew the birds, fed them all winter and had chickadees eat from his hand. A short note telling how the chickadees would perch on my head and feed from my hand was publish-

ed in the third issue of *The Blue Jay* in June 1943. Now I feed peanuts and sunflower seeds to the squirrels in the trees behind my apartment block.

Later I sent several notes to L.T. Carmichael, which he published in 1951 and 1952.

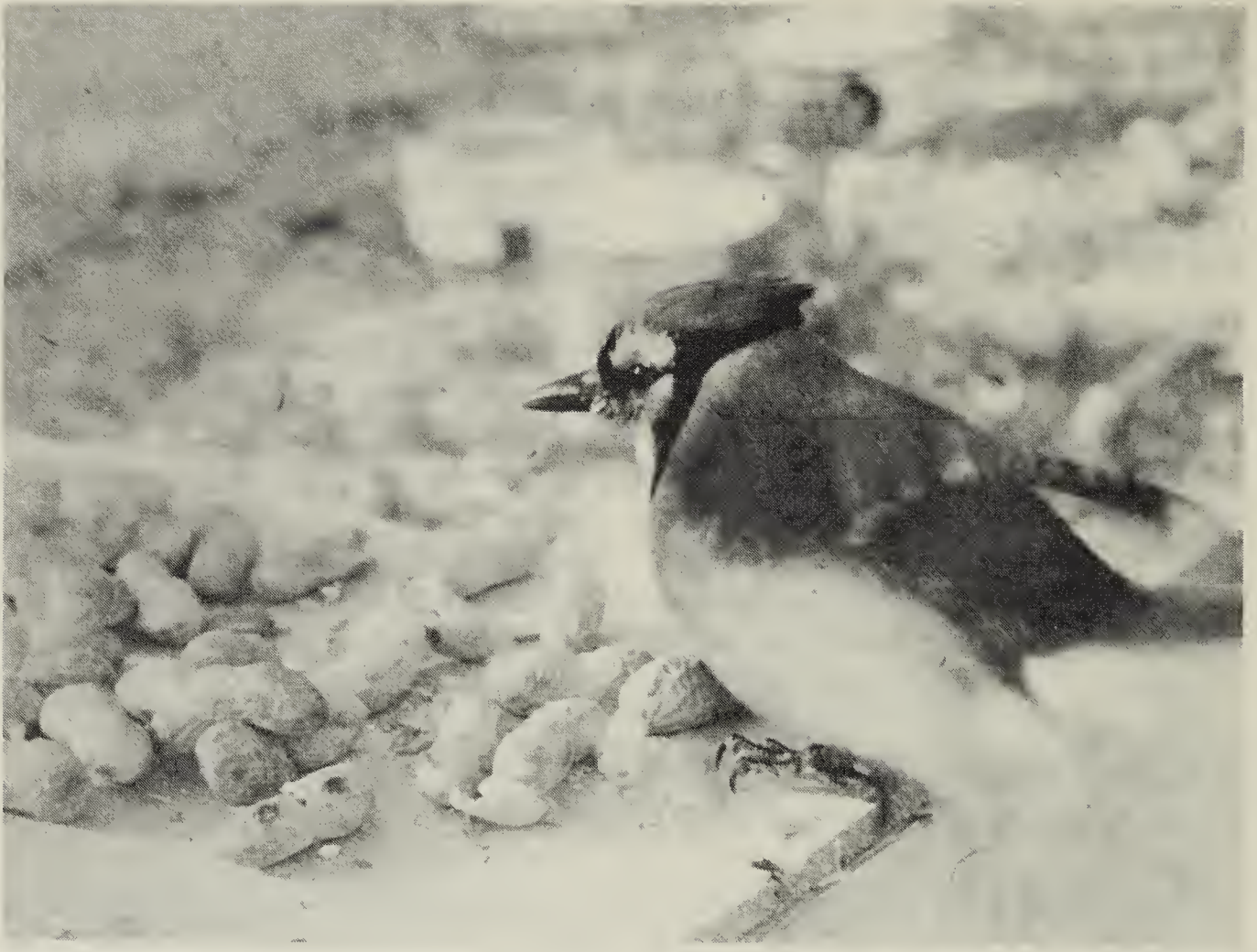
MAUREEN FULLER (née MAUREEN COLBECK), 406 - 401 Queen's Quay West, Toronto, Ontario. M5V 2Y2

I remember Mrs. Priestly as a woman who wore sensible shoes

and watched birds.



Too often people tend to lump all the wild mice together as "field mice," but there are some eight or more different species of mice in Saskatchewan, all interesting and some, like the White-footed Mouse, really beautiful little creatures. Isabel M. Priestly, 1943. *The Blue Jay* 1:6.



*Blue Jay at Houston's feeding tray, Yorkton, 1959.*

NORMA HAWKINS (née NORMA BECK), 2772 Spruce Street, Vancouver, British Columbia. V6H 2R2

The first issues of *The Blue Jay* had the title in large stencilled capitals. It was my job to colour the inside of the letters with a blue pencil-crayon. I did go on a couple of nature treks with Mrs. Priestly, and I remember that as soon as I got her binoculars trained on something interesting, she would snatch them from me because she had spotted something even more exciting.

I loved Mrs. Priestly because she treated me as a grown-up and always made me welcome in her home. And how well I remember her

marvellous sense of humour and her recognition of, and tolerance for, other people's eccentricities. We were all absolutely devastated when she died suddenly. Poor Harvey, my brother, had to write his most difficult university exam immediately after learning the news. I remember that Dr. Sigga Houston phoned to Stuart Houston's landlady in Winnipeg and had her clip out the obituary from the *Winnipeg Tribune* before Stuart could see it; he was writing exams that week that would determine whether he would be accepted into Medicine.

It wasn't until Dr. Houston asked me for some recollections of Mrs. Priestly, and I began digging back into the first three volumes of *The Blue Jay*, that I realised what a tremendous debt I owed this lady whom I never met.

When in 1941 I left the Indian Head Experimental Farm to be married and live 11 miles from Grenfell, I might have found myself an isolated observer had it not been for a fortuitous happening. Someone from Indian Head sent me the second issue of *The Blue Jay*. (I have never seen the first issue).

What a world of interest opened. The editor, Mrs. Priestly, was interested in all aspects of nature. She asked for information on the presence, behaviour, abundance and welfare of everything — birds, flowers, bats, snakes and insects. People responded — and how they responded! What an opportunity to share your enthusiasm and observations with others of like or differing mind. Not all were amateurs. Scientists contributed and asked for our observations and statistics. We shared, we learned, and were

forerunners of things to come.

Mrs. Priestly enlisted the help of C.L. Patch of the National Museum in Ottawa to identify what my husband and I took to be mud-puppies. We were told that mud-puppies had not been recorded west of Manitoba, and that we had the larval or immature form of the salamander, sometimes larger than the adult. Mud-puppies have four toes on the hindfoot and salamanders five. Patch advised that salamander specimens could be placed alive in a tin can containing damp moss or damp excelsior, well wrapped in paper or string, and sent by mail!

A letter from Mrs. Priestly dated 22 April 1945 told how her son, Frank, was with the British Second Army for the Rhine crossing, after taking time to clean up all the pockets of Nazi resistance. Frank's letter to his mother said it was good to be in Holland and see smiles on all sides.

Through Mrs. Priestly and her dedicated helpers in the Yorkton Natural History Society, we came to have the Saskatchewan Natural History Society.



Editorial Policy: We have always tried to present material in *The Blue Jay* in an informal manner, just as if two or three nature lovers had got together and were exchanging experiences. At the same time we have always tried to present facts which are scientifically correct. Isabel Priestly, 1944. *The Blue Jay* 1:1.

In the fall of 1942 I saw mention of *The Blue Jay* and sent in my 25 cents and have been a subscriber ever since. I was "frozen" on the farm near Moose Jaw during the war years. Regina College persisted during the war years but they gave up their buildings, including residences for students, to the Royal Canadian Air Force. College lectures were in the old Trading Company building downtown — I taught the biology class in January-March 1943 and then began fulltime in the fall of 1945, when I became a member of the Regina Natural History Society. I had attended a few meetings during 1939-40 and two in early 1943.

Mrs. Priestly wrote to me for identification of plants a few times; I append one of her letters.

40 Agricultural Avenue  
Yorkton, July 18 [1944]

Dear Mr. Ledingham:

Many thanks for identifying the sedges — I also heard from Dr. Russell.

I would gladly dig up one or two Red Lily bulbs for you but have not happened to be any place where they were growing and saw that they are past flowering. It is difficult to spot the plants unless one notices a big capsule. However I can get some seed for you later on from a lady

here who has some in her garden and possibly I can persuade her to let me have a bulb. Last year she gave me seed to send to my brother in England — incidentally these are very anxious days for me as all my people live in the south of England. I had a letter yesterday from my sister-in-law, both it and one received from my son last week, are so very serious in tone — so different from the general atmosphere here in western Canada! It makes me realize how different world settlement will be with the vast population on this continent practically untouched by war.

But to return to botany, I am sending along a sedge which I did not find last year, it was growing at the edge of a marsh in company with *C. lanuginosa* and *C. atherodes* — the latter seems to tolerate deeper water than the former. I felt quite pleased with myself last week. I recognized *C. praticola* from the specimens you sent me last year!

Mr. Dick Bird was up here this week taking pictures of our colony of Black-crowned Night Herons. I suppose you have seen his films at some time or other. Starlings are still uncommon here although I had a letter last week saying how abundant they had become up at Nipawin.

Yours very truly,  
Isabel M. Priestly

When I first read Mrs. Priestly's weekly column in the *Yorkton Enterprise*, I was interested and became a member. I corresponded with her and took part in the Christmas Bird Count for many years.

One incident that does stand out in my memory was my first observation of two colonies of Chestnut-collared Longspurs, on 31 May 1942. One colony was on my farm north of Sheho and the other about 1.5 miles northwest on similar land east of Silver Lake. There were about 15 or 20

pairs in each colony. Mrs. Priestly admonished me to be sure that I had not seen Bobolinks, since both species sing on the wing. A few Chestnut-collared Longspurs returned in 1943, 1944, 1945, and again in 1949 and one pair was seen on 6 June 1971. Not one has been seen since.

I also saw fairly large flocks of Smith's Longspur in the field in both spring and fall, in 1944, 1946 and 1949. None of these have been seen since.

LLOYD O.T. PETERSON, Box 866, Indian Head, Saskatchewan. S0G 2K0

I concur fully that Mrs. Priestly deserves recognition. I had some business correspondence with her in my capacity as a public employee in Entomology. I met her only once, when away from the laboratory on insect survey work, in 1942 or 1943. I purposely returned through Yorkton to meet her. It was late afternoon. I found her with two high school students, Harvey Beck and Stuart Houston, in her home busily assembling the letter-sized pages of what

was then the Yorkton Natural History Society bulletin, *The Blue Jay*. Time was of crucial importance so my visit was short.

My memory is of a tall, spare woman, dressed very informally, totally absorbed in the task at hand. I wish I could have become better acquainted with Mrs. Priestly, for her dedication and leadership have served as a great stimulus to our local and provincial societies.



God has given us the earth for our life. It is a great entail. IT BELONGS AS MUCH TO THOSE WHO COME AFTER US AS TO US; and we have no right, by anything we do, or neglect to do, to involve them in unnecessary penalties or to deprive them of benefits which are theirs by right. John Ruskin (quoted by I. M. Priestly in editorial comments), 1944. *The Blue Jay* 3:1.

A.L. RAND, Acting Chief, Biological Division, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa. [June 8, 1946]

The news of Mrs. Priestly's death came to me as a great shock. Though I had not the pleasure of her personal acquaintance, I had corresponded with her for some years, and had a great appreciation of her ability and of the good work she was doing in fostering an interest in wild

life in the prairies.

Through her sponsoring *The Blue Jay* and her correspondence, Mrs. Priestly had endeared herself to a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, and the loss we have suffered will be keenly felt.

J. FRANK ROY, 650 Costigan Way, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7J 3R2

It was the fall of 1942. Picture a 14-year-old farmboy from Tullis, Saskatchewan, attending a country school seven miles from the nearest town, Lucky Lake. From his earliest days fascinated by birds, he had finally saved enough money to buy a pair of 3-power field glasses and for \$3.50, a copy of Taverner's *Birds of Canada*. One day he read an article in the *Western Producer*, a Mrs. I. M. Priestly in Yorkton had founded the Yorkton Natural History Society. Nature lovers across the prairies were invited to become members of the society and subscribe to a new mimeographed bulletin called *The Blue Jay*. A quarterly in more ways than one, it would appear four times a year and the four issues would cost a quarter!

Imagine, there were others in the province with similar interests and there would be a chance to share and learn. He immediately mailed off his quarter to the secretary-treasurer. A week later he received a kindly letter of encouragement from Mrs. Priestly herself and the first edition of *The Blue Jay* (seven pages including the cover with its banner masthead pencil-crayoned in blue). And what a

mine of information it was: a bear had been seen on the streets of Yorkton; an albino blackbird was reported from Wroxton; a Mr. Arthur Ward was banding birds "right on the bare prairie apart from any bush" not far south of where he lived. In addition, readers were invited to take part in a Christmas Bird Count. At last, a chance to share with others what he was seeing!

And, to top it off, Frank discovered that the treasurer, C. Stuart Houston, was another boy as young as he. For the next 13 years they would exchange letters although they would not meet until 1955 when chance directed their careers to Saskatoon. To this day both agree that Mrs. Priestly and *The Blue Jay* were formative influences in their lives.

May *The Blue Jay* which she founded continue to promote and expand the aims she set out in 1942: "to foster an active interest in all branches of nature study, ... to promote the conservation of all wildlife, [and] to act as a connecting link between nature lovers in Saskatchewan."



I remember Mrs. Priestly as a kindly, energetic English woman who had the knack of getting the most out of young people (us). I always enjoyed going out in the field with her. I

still have a negative of her holding an American Bittern at Rousay Lake — though I had to go through about two thousand negatives before I found it.

RUTH SMITH (née RUTH BECK), 85 Logan Crescent East, Yorkton, Saskatchewan. S3N 0V8

It is hard to believe *The Blue Jay* has been in existence for 50 years!

I knew Mrs. Priestly as Di's mother and my friend. She was not like other women I knew. She seemed so much more interesting because she led a different kind of life. In those days, women were usually housewives, with few outside interests. Mrs. Priestly was the only woman I knew who tramped around the countryside on snowshoes — once she got caught in a barbed-wire fence — or who carried binoculars.

What is now Logan Crescent was then known to us as Crocus Hill and she told us that from there she could see the grain elevators at Rokeby through her binoculars.

One of my earliest recollections of her took place the day Di and I started Grade 9. This was also the day the Priestlys moved to Tupper Avenue. We were excited about beginning high school, and raced home to get money to buy our books. Mrs. Priestly was standing on the front porch, surrounded by boxes and moving men. Yet she read the book list carefully, telling us how interesting they looked, and how much we would enjoy them — especially

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. She said it was a wonderful book, and then leaning against the porch railing, she recited from memory the opening lines "When that Aprille with hir shoures sote..." I have loved Chaucer to this day.

I was too young to appreciate how much work she did for the Benevolent Society. However, I do remember going door to door selling paper violets and carnations — Was it for Mother's Day? — to raise money for the Society. The usual donation was ten cents. Then I helped her to roll the money for the bank afterwards.

Mr. Priestly I knew less well. He was kind and jolly when we met, but he was usually at work during the hours that I visited Di after school. The day he arrived in Yorkton, a deranged farmer shot several of the brothers at St. Joseph's College. Not only did he file his story with his newspapers, but since he had not had time to locate a house for his family, he sent a copy back to Mrs. Priestly in Winnipeg. She thought she was coming to the Wild West, but fortunately nothing that dreadful happened after her arrival in Yorkton.

Bob Priestly had a stiff knee, a war injury, and if he fell down he could not get up without help. In the winter, when he left his office after dark, he always phoned home so that Mrs. Priestly could come to his aid if he slipped and fell and did not get home on time. He never did fall. She asked him to "edit" everything she wrote for *The Blue Jay*, though I doubt if he ever had to change one word.

One summer I spent a week with the Priestlys in a cottage at Madge Lake, in Duck Mountain Provincial Park. One of my most vivid memories is of Mrs. Priestly standing in the middle of a marshy area, intently watching two Turkey Vultures through her binoculars, completely oblivious to the vast horde of mosquitoes surrounding her.

Although we usually remember her in connection with birds, she had been trained as a botanist. When she discovered my interest in wild flowers, she taught me how to mount my specimens properly, and loaned me her vasculum. At the time of her death she was working on a survey of the plants at the Ducks Unlimited project southwest of Yorkton. She was keenly interested in the changes in plant life, year by year, as the

water levels rose.

As secretary-treasurer of the Yorkton Natural History Society for a couple of years before her death, I was surprised at the wide distribution of *The Blue Jay*. I remember the Museum of Natural History in London taking a subscription and asking for back copies. I used to type the stencils for *The Blue Jay* and run them off on the Gestetner at the City Office where I worked. I had permission to do so after hours.

Once I typed an article about "ruffled" grouse. Mrs. Priestly laughed and said she felt ruffled when she noticed the misspelling, and printed a correction in the next issue. She worked very hard in preparing *The Blue Jay* and did a lot of work arranging speakers for Yorkton Natural History Society meetings, a difficult task in wartime.

Mrs. Priestly had a sister in one of the Channel Isles that was occupied by Germany throughout the war. Although she never spoke of it, she must have worried a great deal, for I remember her joy when a letter arrived, soon after the war ended, telling her they had survived.

PAULINE SUMMERS, 206 - 160 Government, Victoria, British Columbia.  
V8V 2K7

It is a great privilege to provide some of my recollections of Mrs. Isabel M. Priestly.

When I first returned to Yorkton to teach, Michael, her younger son, was a pupil in my room at Simpson School. We became close friends. I admired, respected and loved her.

She exerted a most beneficent influence on my life. To me, Mrs. Priestly was a rare soul, who "possessed much knowledge without ostentation," and was always generous in sharing it with others.

Before coming to Yorkton she had been a valued member of the

Though from my youth I had been curious about nature — trees, flowers, birds, insects and rocks — it was not until I met Mrs. Priestly that nature became for me an absorbing and lasting subject of interest and study. I remember the thrill when she showed me my first grebe nest.

On our frequent hikes together she taught me to observe carefully, to identify birds by sight, sound and flight patterns, and to identify prairie plants. She shared nature lore gained from her own study, observation and experience. On one of the hikes when she was collecting wild flowers for Ducks Unlimited, we were on a poor road with a deep, water-filled ditch along one side. Spotting some Bladderwort in the middle of the ditch, and undeterred by any possibility of stepping on broken glass, or by the sight of a garter snake which was swimming about, she waded in and secured a good

specimen of the plant. She demonstrated "... an undeviating steadiness of purpose."

Our last short hike together was taken only a few days before her death, after her recovery from an attack of influenza.

Some of her natural history material was stored in boxes with the Becks, then with me, then with Larry Morgotch when he became president of the Yorkton Natural History Society.

Her sudden death was a great blow to her family and friends and a severe loss to nature-lovers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. She possessed not only great knowledge but also wisdom.

Mrs. Priestly was my greatly valued friend. She opened up the world of birds and flowers to me. I owe her a huge debt of gratitude.



The day is long past when museums were "dry as dust" affairs, — nowadays museums are recognized as an important factor in the educational and cultural life of a community — even during the war years new museums were being opened in England. The collections already in the Provincial Museum are second to none and we may well be proud of them. They must, however, be steadily augmented if the museum is to take its place as an effective educational force in the province, and, since the museum is a provincial institution, it is up to all of us to take an active interest in its development. Priestly, 1946. *The Blue Jay* 4:13.