

The Story  
of My Life  
as I Remember It

*Vivian Halliday*

To  
BILL BAYER, MY GRANDSON:  
*this is written at your request*

## *Family Background*

My grandparents (the William Richardsons<sup>1</sup>) had six children:

*Wallace*, the eldest, was the first mayor of Sydney, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. He was reelected eight times. He was a staunch Baptist, but when the people of Sydney wanted to send the nuns who taught school there out of Sydney he was their salvation. He was married to the nicest woman it has ever been my good fortune to know and love. They had four children—all real smart and, best of all, good.

Next came *Macilla* (note: spelled *Miscella* or *Marcella* in other genealogy references), my mother. It was my great loss that I never knew her, but whenever in later years I mentioned her name people always said, "A wonderful woman." She attended Acadia College in Kentville, Nova Scotia, and, later, the Boston Conservatory of Music. She was a gifted pianist and also a good painter. (She died at age thirty. She taught piano until about a week before she died.) She was engaged to be married to my uncle, Captain John Meech. He was away at sea and he told her he would be back in a year. Well, the year passed, but in the meantime she fell in love with my dad, William Meech, a brother of John, and they got married. They were only married a short time when John returned to claim his bride.

Perhaps one wonders how a minister's daughter could go to college; well my grandfather's brother, Samuel Richardson, was dean of the college.

Next came *Laura*. She married a Mr. Gordon. He died real young, so she kept house for her father and mother.

*Ernest* lived most of his life in Saskatchewan, Canada. He married, but his wife died in childbirth. He was a successful business man. His one son was killed in the First World War. When I was real young, my brother and I looked forward to his visits to us when he came to Sydney. I remember he always gave us a quarter to spend. Years later, he met my children—was especially taken with Betty. He died in 1944 and left me some money.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix

I never knew *Arthur* very well. He was a member of parliament from Cape Breton for several years. He had something to do with the pilots in Sydney Harbor.

*Chesley* was bright as a silver dollar. He put himself through McGill in medicine, and then practiced in Somerville, Massachusetts for many years. He was a fine doctor, kind and good. He was like a father to me, and his wife, Eleanor—well, words cannot tell how much I loved her. She was beautiful, talented, and good. She treated me like a daughter, and always kept telling me how much she loved me. To my dying day, I shall never forget her. When I trained at the Somerville Hospital, Chesley and Eleanor's house was my home. She died a few months after he died, in 1944.

There are many stories I could tell about my relatives, but it's too late to bother. Let me say only this—they were well-educated people who spent their lives doing good.

I now turn to my father's family. His father, William Meech, came to St. John's Newfoundland for a company in his home town of Dorset, England. He was born in Dorset. I had his bank statement and several papers telling about him, but I loaned them to someone and don't have them now. He married in Canada and bought a farm on the Sydney River. He paid \$700.00 for the farm, which was a lot in those days. One may see the deed in Sydney. He had three sons—John, William (my father) and Mike. His wife died, and he married Amelia Sutherland of Stewiacke, Nova Scotia. She was a niece of Grandfather Richardson, which is how she met the little Englishman, Meech. I could go back much further, but think it better that I go on to myself.

I was born December 10th, 1895 in Sydney, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. My dad owned a house on Townsend Street, Sydney. My only memory of my real early years is that of a bunch of women standing talking at the foot of the stairs. I started to go up, and they grabbed me and took me away. I was just two years old and my mother had just died. She died of pneumonia. My father had a sister in Boston who came home and kept house for him for one year. She left to marry the Reverend Carter, a Baptist minister

in Truro, Nova Scotia, or right near there; I think the place was Brookfield, about four miles from Truro. Then my Dad took my older brother, Lloyd, and me to Grandmother Richardson's in South Bar (a suburb of Sydney) and he broke up his house. We were there only a short time when Uncle Ernest's wife died and left a little boy. He came to Grandmother Richardson's, and then my dad took us to Grandmother Meech in South Bar, where we stayed for almost three years. I remember many things about my life there. My dad's stepsister was sixteen, and of course she resented two small kids. The least thing we did, she punished us. She would put us in corners of the dining room, with our faces to the wall—we used to run back and forth, touching each other as soon as she left the room. (Oh! She was good to us.)

The big event of every Sunday—our Dad came back from North Sydney, where he worked, and he was like Santa. Early Sunday a.m., we would go to the river's edge and wait for the ferry to pass on its way to Sydney. My dad was always there waving to us. As soon as the boat passed, we would beat it to the road in front of the house and wait for him to come.

Well, things were not working out too well, I guess, so my dad, after five years a widower, married Mary Shean, a North Sydney girl. My stepmother was good to us. She was one of a large, well-to-do family, and they all loved Lloyd and me and were so good to us. All my memories of my life with my stepmother are happy. When we went to North Sydney to live, my dad took us every Sunday to the Presbyterian Church, but my stepmother was Catholic. Bert Brennan, a great friend of Lloyd's, used to tell me how every Sunday my dad passed his house with two little kids with bibles under their arms—neither of us could read at that time. Our home now was lovely. It was 1900 and my dad had the house built with every modern convenience (inside toilet, etc.). We had a large living room, parlor, dining room, a small room, and a kitchen downstairs. It was furnished with the best, and I can remember my stepmother sitting at the piano on Sunday evenings, playing hymns. She was Irish and her father educated all his children, but none of them liked work. We always had a hired girl from Newfoundland—guess they paid her \$5.00 a month. When my dad and mother went out, Lloyd and I would take to the

kitchen and the girl would tell us ghost stories. These were happy times.

We went to St. Joseph's school, which was near our home. The nuns were so good to us. I met many good friends there. One, especially, was like a sister to me—Regis Ledbetter. She lived just a short distance from our house, but she really lived at our house. I can remember that when Dad went to the West Indies or the Northwest for a trip he always brought her the same things he brought Lloyd and me. (My dad worked for the Canadian Pacific, so I guess he got passes to take a trip every year.)

What happy times the next ten years were, we playing together and my stepmother letting us get away with murder. In the summertime we played on the beach; can remember cooking snails in an old tin can and eating them after getting them out of their shells with a pin.

When I was fourteen, all this ended. I was sent away to Halifax, to Mt. St. Vincent, to get the rough edges rubbed off me. The next five years were happy years, too, and I met lovely girls from different parts of Canada. Lloyd was in Halifax also, at medical school. He never missed a Sunday coming to see me. When I first went there, I was so lonesome that I pleaded with my Dad to let me come home. I remember writing to tell him that my legs were very sore. In a few days, I got his letter. He said, "Sorry to hear about your legs, but old age has its penalties." So I knew I had better make the best of it. I had one nun, Sister Aquinas, who was just wonderful to me. She had been Lloyd's teacher in High School, and had met my folks.

When I was fifteen, I became a Catholic, and have never been sorry. Up to this time, most of my friends were Catholic, and I guess I wanted to be like them. Lloyd also joined the church; all his life he was a wonderful asset, but I'm afraid I'm *too* broadminded to be really good.

## *My Adult Life*

When my time at school ended, I found myself with nothing to do but eat, sleep and play. I was bored, and my dad was hell-bent on my being a school teacher. In those days there were few jobs for girls—nursing, teaching school, or clerking in a store. Well, my brother would graduate from medical school in May, 1915, so I decided to train to be a nurse. My dad said "No" when I talked to him, so for a year I worked on him, and Lloyd helped me, and at last he said O.K. I left Nova Scotia in March, 1915 and entered Somerville Hospital in Somerville, Massachusetts. Uncle Chesley, my mother's brother, was chief surgeon there. When I left home, my dad bought me a return ticket—good for three months. For the first few months at Somerville, I would take the ticket out every night and plan to go home; then my better self would say, "Stay one more day," so I stayed and was always glad as I loved the work and the girls I met were all so worthwhile.

On Christmas Day, 1915, I had to work, but Uncle Chesley said he would pick me up when I got off duty. Well, he did, and he took me to some friends' house (Mr. and Mrs. Wright) for dinner. I had become friends with Effie Wright, and her folks were pals of Uncle Chesley and Aunt Eleanor. They were lovely English people. As it happened, Effie had her beau there, and he had brought his friend—a big, blond Canadian named William Norman Halliday. Well, we had a lovely evening, which, of course, ended at ten p.m. for me. That was the beginning of my love affair with Norm. I kept company with him for two years; after a year, he wanted to get married, but I was determined to finish my nursing. I was graduated April 1st, 1918—took the State board and then married the guy on November 6th, 1918. And let me add that I was never sorry, as he was a dear person—kind and good. He died in 1952 and is still missed. I am not going to recount our ups and downs, as there were many in our thirty-three years of marriage. We moved so often it seems I was always trying to put down roots. We always lived well, and were able to educate all of our children and, thank God, they all turned out well.

After we were married, we lived in Philadelphia for six months, where Bill [family name for William Norman] was with the

Emergency Fleet Corp. Then we were transferred to Washington D.C., where we stayed for three months. After that we moved to Boston where we bought a house in Lexington, a suburb of Boston. It was a darling house and we stayed there for about three months before moving to New Haven, Connecticut. I loved living in Boston, as I had many friends and relatives there. Uncle Chesley and Aunt Eleanor were so good to us. Well, we got a nice apartment in New Haven, and we were there only two months when Bob was born. Alice Curry came from Boston and was with me for a month. When Bob was about six months old, he and I went to Maine to visit Mr. and Mrs. Libby. I was so tired all the time and, I guess, looked like heck—Bob was so active he kept me going. The Libbys were wonderful to me; Mrs. Libby's mother kept Bob every night and I began to feel better. Later, I found out I was pregnant again, and that was the cause of my tiredness. When I returned to New Haven, Dad [Bill] had moved to a big house in a suburb of New Haven. Betty was the opposite of Bob, good-natured and happy. I do not mean Bob was cross; his only fault was that he was so active. Jean was also born in New Haven, and Norman arrived after we moved back to Boston.

In 1929, Simmons Hardware in St. Louis asked Dad to come to St. Louis as Treasurer. This was a big promotion, so we decided to go. Dad left in January, 1929, and I, with the four little ones, followed in May. Norm was only twenty months old, Bob was nine, Jean 4, and Betty 7. Shall never forget the loneliness when I landed in St. Louis—it was so different from the East. One day I went shopping while Dad stayed with the children. As I was coming home from the Center, I saw a little boy coming towards me and, when he got closer, I found it was my little Norman. I asked him what happened, and he said, "Me no like that man." (He wasn't used to his father yet, after the long separation.)

In 1931, we built a lovely home in University City, a suburb of St. Louis, where we lived for ten years. The children were in good schools and we were all so happy. In 1939, Simmons was sold, and Dad was out of a job. But, again, the Good God was good to us—the Mercantile Commerce Bank in St. Louis asked Dad to go to Quincy, Illinois to save a business that owed them a pile of money, so on January 1, 1940, Dad went to Quincy, while I stayed

in U. City until school was out. The children were all doing so well in every way. Bob and Betty were in college. They were both very bright and made friends easily. Bob was graduated from Yale in June, 1940, and a few years later was off to war—what a heartache.

I made many friends in Quincy and liked the town. I forgot to tell about my John—he was my bonus baby, ten years after Norman. I thought my family was complete, with two lovely daughters and two sons, when John arrived. My daughter Jean was a senior in high school when we moved to Quincy, and Norm was in junior high. It was hard on Jean, but she was graduated at the end of the year, and then went to college. Norman finished high school and, right after graduation, went in the Navy. I shall never forget seeing this lovely boy get on the bus, going away; he was only seventeen, tall and thin. Well, he served his time and the war ended, and he entered Washington University and was graduated. Later, he went to St. Louis University five nights a week to study law and was graduated from there. I have so much to be thankful for, as all the children turned out so well.

## *Later Life*

Now I am old, 86 years, and know I have not much longer. The last several years have been lonely, especially since Betty moved to Idaho —seems she took part of me with her. Most of my dear friends have died, and the few left are full of aches and pains. I, too, have my bad days, but must say the days are mostly good. Here I am, living from day to day.

Before I go any further, I must tell you about something my father said. When I was leaving for Boston, he took me to the train, and his last words to me were, "Be a good girl, that's all that matters." Another time, when I went home to bid Lloyd good-bye when he was leaving for England, Lloyd took me to the train and said, "Viv, I want you to promise me something. When you are in training, please never take any liquor, as I know that when any of my nurses went bad, there was drinking beforehand." I promised, of

course, and never tasted liquor until late in my twenties. Lloyd was always so protective of me—as a child and later in life.

On my 80th birthday, Betty and Jean gave a birthday party for me at the City Club in Quincy—had twenty-two friends. All had a real good time. During the years, I had many nice trips. In 1963, Jean took me to England and Scotland. We stayed at the Grosvenor House in London, and spent many interesting hours visiting places in London. I loved Scotland and would have liked to go back.

Every few years, I have returned to Nova Scotia—always think of Scott's poem, "Breathes there the man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, 'This is my own, my native land!' "

In 1973, Una MacDonald and I drove to the west coast. Went up to Canada and then down the coast to Los Angeles. What beauty again. I thought of Tennyson's "Break, break on the cold grey sands, oh sea. Would that I could utter the thoughts that arise in me."

We visited Bob and Bobbie, and John and Layne<sup>2</sup>, then went to L.A. to visit Ellen MacDonald. Every place we went, we were treated like royalty. Now poor Una is gone, and I miss her so much. She was a dear person.

Now I manage to fill my days with working in the yard, reading, and visiting my friends. Am lucky I have good neighbors who call me and come to see me all the time. Isabelle Willer is like a daughter to me; she is so very kind.

I play cards every week, and enjoy the company and the game a lot. Feel I am lucky people bother with me, as I don't think I am as keen as I once was. Get around better than most people, though.

Had a lovely visit a while back from Bill [Harting Bayer] and his wife. He is a dear boy—smart but humble, and I know he will go far as a doctor. His wife is a sweet girl—I hope they are happy.

Today I had a letter from my granddaughter Katie [Halliday Higgins] in St. Louis. She wanted me to come down there—wish I had the courage to go. I find I do not want to leave home—so unlike me, but then I realize that I'll soon be 87 years old.

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<sup>2</sup> See notes

I have so much to be thankful for—good children and grandchildren; enough money so that I can do as I please; a nice home. So what more can one want? Life has been good to me, but I find I get tired so easily. I still have the desire to work and keep busy, but only for a few hours each day.

*Sunday, October 3, 1982*—Such a pleasant surprise today. About 8:30, Richard O'Dell called from St. Louis and said he was coming to see me. Well, he arrived about 3 pm and stayed until 8:30. Richard is my niece Sophie's husband. They live in Skaneateles, New York. Such a nice visit, and he took me to the Patio for dinner. Also had another pleasant surprise on Monday—had a letter from my dear friend Regis in Hamilton, Ontario. She said she could not sleep—keeps thinking about me—so decided to write. She is my age and I guess is still holding her own. Wants me to come visit her. Also had a letter from my granddaughter Peg [Halliday Reed] in Denver, wanting me to come visit, but at present I feel I am better off at home.

Got a call last night from Beulah Klein in St. Louis. She wants to come up to see me for a couple of days. She is 92—her cousin and her sister will be with her. I'll be so glad to have them, but my friends think I am crazy. I cannot forget how kind the Kleins were to me and my children when I lived in St. Louis. Now I am busy making plans —I only hope I keep well. I *feel* God is sending Beulah and friends, as he knows that visiting with them will make me happy, and keep me occupied. Seems every time I get down something good happens, which makes me feel the Good God is looking after me.

I almost forgot to mention what happened in 1980 that really floored me. Norm asked me to come to Washington D.C. for Christmas. It was planned that I meet two of his sons in St. Louis. Well, all went as planned. When we arrived in Washington, Norm said to me, "Mother, we are going to a wedding this afternoon," and I said, "You go, I'll stay at home." He said, "But, Mother, it's my wedding." To say I was floored is putting it mildly. It was a lovely wedding to a wonderful woman, Alice Ginther.

I am now 87 years old, have twenty grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, and I guess I have omitted many things. My

life in Quincy has been good, but I still miss my good husband, who died very suddenly on May 31st, 1952. Ours was a good marriage. I guess that is why my children turned out so well.

*Vivian Halliday*

1982

## NOTES

Bob married Roberta Whalen in Seattle, Washington. They have four children—Norman, Margaret [Peggy], Patricia [Patty], and Jane.

Betty married William Harting in Seattle, Washington. They had three children—Susan, Patricia [Pat], and William [Bill]. Betty's husband, Bill, died in 1953. Eight years later she married Louis Bayer in St. Louis. They have one daughter, Julie.

Jean married William Baggerman in Quincy in 1951. They have five children—Ann, James [Jimmy], Jane, Robert [Bobby] and Laura.

Norman married Pat Dunn in St. Louis. They have four children—Robert, Katherine [K.D.], Norman, and John. They divorced. He married Alice Ginther in 1980. Norman died of cancer on January 27th, 1983. ("Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand/And the sound of a voice now stilled.")

John married Layne Griggs in Clearwater, Florida. They have two children, Richard and Bibit.

## APPENDIX

### *Reminiscences of George Richardson*

(Anonymous)

At the formal opening of the New Baptist Church at Stewiacke on Sunday the 17th of August, 1924, a reminiscence paper was read by Mrs. E. G. Lewis of West Brook, Cumberland Co. The paper dealt with George Richardson, the pioneer Baptist, who opened up the Baptist cause in Stewiacke, nearly a century ago. Mrs. Lewis is a descendent of the worthy divine. The paper follows:

George Richardson was born in 1790 in England. His people were very wealthy, having a large estate and keeping many servants; wine was served at dinner; They went to theatres and kept fast horses. George was being educated as a Church of England Minister. About that time the family moved to Ireland and he finished his education in a Dublin University.

He had an uncle in Ireland, who owned a beautiful estate and lived in a castle—had sheep, pools, hunting grounds, etc. George lived with him for a time, as he had no children of his own, and he was promised the estate. While there, he was converted and left the English Church and joined the Baptist. This greatly displeased his aunt and uncle, but to show how eager he was to tell the good news to those around him he wanted to preach in his uncle's house—he refused. He asked again and again, always getting the same answer. At last the uncle said, "Go to your aunt, and if she says yes, then you can preach." He went to his aunt and she said, "George are you telling the truth?" He straightened himself up and said, "Aunt, did you ever know me to tell a lie in my life?" That settled it, and he preached in the home, there being several converted. This was the beginning of his life work. On one occasion, he went to his uncle's hunting ground. The gate-keeper did not know him, and asked him for his pass. He straightened himself up and said, "I've got it in my gun, do you want it?"

After attending Dublin University one afternoon, he and some college chums were driving out and met a company of soldiers marching into town. They played a march that he was very much taken up with, and as soon as he went home, he searched his

uncle's music books and his neighbours', but couldn't find it. Then he noted it down as he remembered it, and after a short time he found the original, and compared notes, and found every note correct.

He was persecuted by his own people for leaving their church and becoming a Baptist. His cousin said, "I'd rather see you shot than be a Baptist."

Mr. Richardson and wife came to Canada in 1820 and he was ordained at Hammond Plains in 1822. After being in Nova Scotia a short time, he was sent for to claim the estate left him by his uncle, but he turned on his heels and said, "I'd rather be a poor man and preach the Gospel than to have riches and serve the Devil."

In 1832 he organized the Baptist Church at Stewiacke and became pastor. This field comprised six stations, via M. Stewiacke, Witemburg, formerly St. Andrew's Musquodobit, now Ahaswood, Little River, now Meaghers Grant, and Higginsville; all were branches of the M. Stewiacke Baptist Church. The following were charter members (elders):

Peter Stevens	Elizabeth Godfrey
Mehetabel Sibley	Burke Archibald
Joseph Sibley (Deacon)	Margaret Archibald
Elisha Godfrey	Ezekiel Sibley

*Upper Stewiacke and Brownfield*

Abram Newcomb (Deacon)	James W. Stevens (Clerk of the church for twenty years)
Noah Bentley	Sophia Hamilton
Mary Bentley	
Elizabeth Upham	
Mary Upham	

Pastor George Richardson labored with this group seven years and he was succeeded by his son Samuel Richardson. The following was taken from a book on Cape Breton history: George Richardson, the first minister to settle in Sydney, came here in 1840, a man of marked influence, gentlemanly bearing and great wit. He was succeeded by W. B. Boggs. Father Richardson had a home in South Bar, where he frequently ministered to his little flock. His oratory and musical talents were much appreciated.

One day, when returning from church, a young man in whom Father Richardson was deeply interested was walking in advance of him. He quickened his pace and his friend did likewise, and the space between them lengthened, so raising his cane, Father Richardson called to his friend, "so may you flee from the devil."

He and Dr. McLeod (Pres.) were intimate friends. One day while conversing, the doctor said, "Well, brother, when we get to Heaven, you'll not be looking at me as a Presbyterian nor I at you as a Baptist." "No," said Father Richardson, "We'll be better employed, our eyes will be fixed on a Baptist to all eternity."

One of his last public services was his participation in the dedication of the New Baptist Church at North Sydney in 1877 at the age of 87 years. I was present at that occasion.

Father Richardson and his wife had four sons and five daughters, all or whom have passed to the great beyond. George Richardson died in 1877 at the age of 88, and he is buried at South Bar Cemetery.

Note (V.H.): "Old George's" picture hangs in the Baptist Church in Sydney—he's real good-looking. I have a copy of it. My cousin Claude, a lawyer in Montreal, had a stained glass window put in the church in George's honor. Claude died a year ago—Old George was his hobby. George's great-grandson was Dean of Brown University for many years, and I hear he left quite a few descendants. I am George's great-granddaughter; his son William was my grandfather.