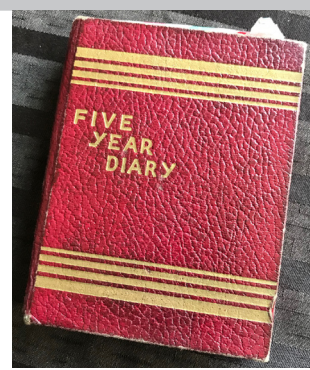


ONE

A RED BOOK, BLUE INK & THE BEGINNING OF A GRAND JOURNEY



May 10, 1953

Left Vancouver Bus Depot at 2:35 Standard Time. Arrived in Seattle 7:35 Standard Time — left Seattle 9:30 Standard Time — left Seattle 9:30 P.S.T. Stopped at Ellensburg 12:00 - 12:30 AM. Stopped Moses Lake 2:00 - 2:30 AM. Spokane 4:45 A.M. May 11.

She is 22. A small-town girl. An orphan. And she is setting off on what must seem a barely imaginable journey with two pals: A bus trip across North America, a steamer across the Atlantic. New York, Barcelona and, eventually, the homeland she has never seen.

And a brother she has never met.

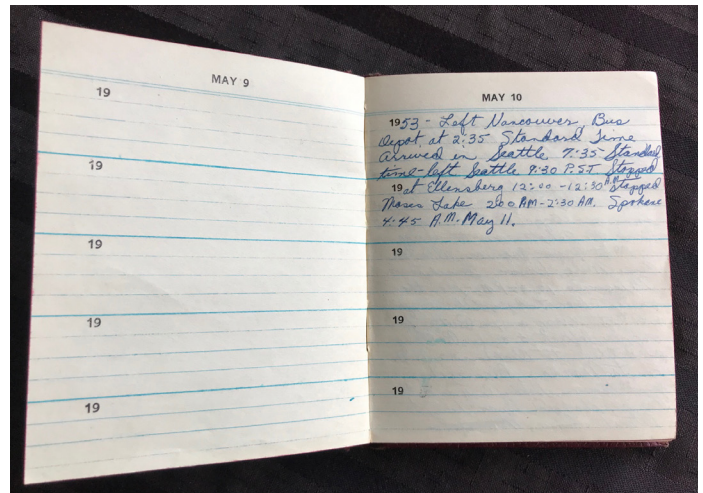
A lifelong reader, Irene will write about this trip day by day, filling with tightly spaced handwriting the middle 131 ruled pages of the Five Year Diary bought for the purpose, bound in red pebbled leather hardcover with embossed gold lettering and stripes, the size of a Bible a young woman might carry in her handbag.

On the inside front cover, in her first act of recording history, she writes her name and East Vancouver address in a neat, practised script — you would never know she was a lefty.*

“Memory Is Elusive — Capture It,” is printed at the top of the endpaper.

“The Mind is a wonderful machine,” reads an inscription further down the page from the Bert Manufacturing Company of Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y. “It needs but be just refreshed and incidents can again be revived in their former clarity.”

But opposite a blank page, as if life didn't



exist before this day, the first memories she captures are mundane: The time the trio left Vancouver, the locations and times of stops along the way in Washington State.

She doesn't note that May 10, 1953 is a Sunday nor does she remark that it is Mother's Day. Why would she? She has no mother — hers died when she was an infant.**

And she doesn't know, at the beginning of both this wonderful adventure and her adult life, that this date and this day, precisely 28 years later, will become remarkable and unforgettable in her family for another reason:

It will be the day she dies.

(* For me, her handwriting is a memory unto itself, specifically her inscriptions on the books she would select and my parents would give me for Christmas.)

(** Her father died when she was just 14, forcing her to relocate from her hometown of Trail, B.C., where he and hundreds of other Italian immigrants worked at the Cominco smelter, to Vancouver to move in with her brother and sister-in-law, who were newlyweds.)