

## OUR LINK TO FAMOUS SONGSTRESS

By Heritage Columnist Robert Williamson

A decade ago I volunteered to write a monthly heritage column for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society in the Mountain News. At first I wondered how much heritage there was on the Hamilton Mountain to write about, but here I am now, after 115 stories and a decade later, still revealing our magnificent Mountain history.

This month's beautiful Mountain story began when I was doing background research for a song as a member of the mountain's Kaleidoscope Singers, preparing for an April 30th Spring Concert with the St. Andrews United Church Choir at Upper Paradise and Mohawk roads. You may ask, "What has that got to do with Mountain heritage"?

As a singer, let me point out that a song is a beautiful way of telling a story. The lyrics combined with music, enhance the drama of the narration and theme. The combined choirs were practicing a song, written in 1938 for an unsuccessful Broadway musical, "Right This Way". The melody was salvaged because of its beautiful lyrics describing an appealing theme of "NOSTALGIA" otherwise known as heritage. It attracted many ballad singers of that time such as; Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. Blending well with the sentimental soundtrack of many 1940s films it fit into the catalogue of World War II Songs like; "We'll Meet Again" and "White Cliffs of Dover" made famous by British songstress Dame Vera Lynn. The name of the song: "I'LL BE SEEING YOU". Romantic lyrics that made it so memorable are: "I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you." It was these words that caught my attention when I found this unusual newspaper photo on the internet, dated June 18, 2020.



It showed an image of Vera Lynn projected at night on the White Cliffs of Dover from a ship in the English Channel during the funeral of the songstress who had just died at the age of 103. It made me recall messages in lights on our own Niagara escarpment face.

Born, Vera Margaret Welch, in a suburb of London, daughter of a plumber, Vera began performing at the age of seven. She left school at age eleven, touring in music hall revues. She took her stage name Vera Lynn from her grandmother, performing with big bands by age 16. In 1939 she volunteered for war work but was directed to entertainment for servicemen when voted "Forces Sweetheart". Married in 1941, her daughter, Virginia, was born in 1946.

However, the thrilling conclusion to my Mountain heritage story is this tribute. The "Call Sign" painted on the fuselage of the Lancaster bomber that flies overhead so frequently from Mount Hope's Warplane Heritage Museum is the letters "VRA" for VERA. Knowing that connection gives me a tingling sensation of NOSTALGIA with every fly by of the aircraft. Maybe it will for you too as the month of June approaches.



*Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Mountain Heritage.*