

Summer 2018

Special Edition Number 1

# Le Trésor des Kirouac

Bulletin of the descendants of Alexandre de K/voach

Witness to Kirouac activities since 1983



Mrs. Marie Huguette Morin Karrer and her daughter Pia and her family: from left to right, seated: Pia Karrer O'Leary, Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer and Paul O'Leary; standing: David, Steven, John and Suzan O'Leary (Photo: Zimmerman Family Collection)



Kirouac  
Kirouack



Kérouac  
Kérouack



Keroac  
Keroack



Kéroack  
Kyrouac



Breton  
Burton



Curwack  
Curwick



## INTRODUCTION

This first *Special Edition* of *Le Trésor des Kirouac* offers the texts published about a lady who, for many years, was the proud oldest Kirouac Family Association member.

By publishing her story on the KFA website, we wish to underline her exceptional life including the Second World War years when

she lived in Italy, then allied with Nazi Germany therefore enemy of Canada.

We are most grateful to her daughter, Pia, for writing her mother's life. Among the many descendants of our ancestor, Alexandre de Kervoach, she is one of the key figures we wish to be known and remembered.

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# *Keroacks serving under flags*

## *Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer*

*by Pia Karrer O'Leary*

*Published in Le Trésor de Kéroack, March 2005, number 79*

**M**arie-Huguette Morin Karrer, born on May 12, 1906, daughter of Notary Victor Morin and Alphonsine Côté, is the eldest member of our K/ clan. Her paternal grand-parents were Victor Côté and Philomène, born Le Brice de Keroack from Saint-Hyacinthe (Quebec). Marie-Huguette Morin a.k.a. Mrs. Carlo Karrer, spent the WWII years in Rome, Italy. As a civilian, she was not armed and quite harmless but that was not obvious to all. Those memories were indeed so painful that she never wanted to talk about it.

During the worst part of the war, she took refuge with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception (their Mother House was in Montreal). This congregation had a convent in Monte Mario, in the countryside near Rome. Ever grateful to the MIC Sisters for their hospitality, she always remained in touch with the four sisters who shared her miseries in Italy.

In 2002, the Missionary Sisters were about to celebrate the centennial of their foundation. Intrigued by this 'clandestine' aspect of their mission in Italy during the war, they asked Pia Karrer O'Leary, the only daughter of Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer, to ask her mother some questions and record her answers. This was the nudge needed to secure the facts relating to this chapter in the life of Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer.

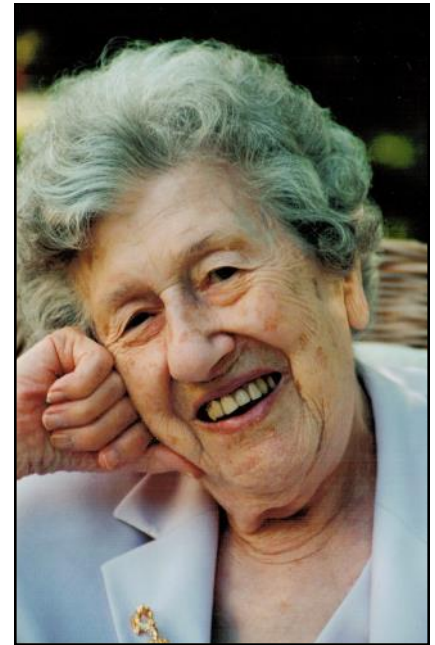
Here are Mrs. Karrer's answers to her daughter's questions.

Q. - How come you were in Rome alone with a baby during the War?

A. - I was married to an Italian and this is how it came to be.

As a young woman I loved the Italian language and studied it by myself. I started with conversation classes and then took courses in grammar, literature and Italian culture at the Italian Circle run by the Italian Consulate in Montreal. My enthusiasm doubled when I learned that a scholarship was being offered to study at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia. I attended all the classes, wrote all the exams and won the scholarship that paid for the traveling expenses, as well as lodging and registration! There were thirty-two students from various countries and I was the Canadian representative!

On July 17, 1937, as I left New York aboard the steamer "REX", I received a prophetic letter from my father which read: "My dear Marie, As I write to you, you are already embarked on the first leg of your great journey which could possibly decide the future of your life." Indeed, it was in Perugia that I met my future husband, Carlo Karrer, who at that time was a Lieutenant in the Royal Italian Army.



Marie-Huguette Morin-Karrer,  
London, Ontario, Canada, 2000

Photo : Pia Karrer O'Leary Collection

I was absorbed in my studies.... One evening, there was a book sale in the public square. Carlo and I both reached for the same book! It was love at first sight! I let him buy the book on the condition that he would lend it to me as I would need it for my studies. Thus, we would meet again.

Having arrived fifteen days after the start of classes I had a good deal of difficulty coping, therefore I decided to stay a whole year instead of six months. This allowed me to get to know Italian better - especially MY Italian!!!!

I graduated and, before leaving, Carlo asked me to marry him saying he could not live without me. I returned to Montreal, but some letters from a certain C. Karrer had arrived before me; to my sister Renée it all looked very suspicious!

My parents wanted to know more. Luckily, I knew a Signora Segatore whose husband was a medical

doctor in Montreal. I introduced them to my parents and my mother asked them to inquire about Carlo during their upcoming trip to Italy. So they met Carlo and his family. The news was good. The report said that 'they were good people'. As a matter of fact, Carlo's father and grandfather had served as Palatine Guards\* (not the Swiss Guards) at the Vatican. These guards originated from Bavaria in Southern Germany. This explains why my name is spelled with a K, even though there is no such letter in the Italian alphabet.

Later, the Segatores who had settled in Rome stood in for my parents as Pia's godparents when she was christened at the Vatican.

.....

But we are not there yet! In order to get married, there were many more obstacles to overcome. First of all, Italian army officers needed the King's permission to get married. Ours was requested on September 7, 1938, and granted on February 9, 1939. Also, a new law enacted on December 4, 1938, intending to preserve the purity of the Italian race, forbade military personnel from marrying foreigners. In some special cases, a dispensation could be obtained but only during the first three months that the law was in effect.

Finally, it was also necessary to certify that all Marie-H. Morin's ascendants were of French ancestry and of Aryan race, and that they had not contracted any marriage with any other non-Aryan persons up to and including the eighth generation back. The document

detailing the genealogical proof was completed in December 1938. Because we had become engaged quite a while before this law came into effect on December 4, 1938, Carlo was able to obtain a dispensation but this dispensation was only valid until March 4, 1939. At long last, on February 23, 1939, we knew for sure that we would be able to get married.

Thank goodness, my father had been looking after the paperwork needed for our marriage to take place by proxy. Indeed, my father, Victor Morin had himself married his first wife, a Franco-American from Biddeford, Maine, by proxy. He knew how to go about it and took it upon himself to obtain all the needed documents from Italy. His relationship with the Jesuit fathers proved to be very helpful.

On March 2, 1939, Carlo Karrer went to Santa Maria del Transpontino Church in Rome, accompanied by his mother who said 'yes' in my name. A cable informed me that I was 'married'. In Montreal, I went to the Wedding chapel of Notre-Dame Church, our parish, accompanied by my parents, my sisters Claire and Gisèle and some of my brothers. I was not wearing a white dress but a simple spring two-piece outfit. People who saw me standing between my parents thought I was becoming a nun and entering a convent. Afterwards, there was a reception at home. The whole family was present except my husband! In Italy too, there was a wedding reception but without the bride!

It took six more weeks to obtain all the papers needed to leave for Italy and for me to get over the



Alphonsine Côté, daughter of Victor Côté and Philomène Aurélie LeBrice de Keroack (Photo on her 1946 passport)  
Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary.



Mr. Victor Morin, notary, husband of Alphonsine Côté and father of Marie Huguette Morin Karrer.  
(Photo on his 1946 passport)  
Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary

*\*NOTE: The Palatine Guards, a Guard of Honour created in 1850 was eliminated in 1970, is not to be confused with the Swiss Guards (who continue guarding the Pope and the Vatican). Members of the Palatine Guards were recruited in the Palatinate region of Bavaria, in southern Germany. Carlo's father and grandfather rest in the Teutonic (i.e. German) Cemetery in the private gardens of the Vatican. Pia actually checked it out and found their names in the register of the tiny cemetery.*





### Graduated from the University of Perugia

La Presse, Montréal's main daily,  
February 26, 1938

Miss Marie-Huguette Morin from Montreal earned a very exceptional and enviable distinction.

Miss Marie-Huguette Morin, daughter of Notary Victor Morin, is the first Canadian to graduate from the Royal University for Foreigners founded by Mussolini in 1926 in Perugia. This diploma of high Italian culture proves that Miss Morin attended with success the superior courses of this institution in Italian language and literature, in art history, politics, sociology, as well as special studies of Dante and the *Divine Comedy*.

Miss Morin, recently returned from Europe, where she spent six months in Perugia amidst strangers, most of them professors from various far away countries such as South America, Germany, India and Japan. She already had a solid background acquired through her studies at the Italian Institute of High Culture in Montreal from which she had won a scholarship. The young Canadian woman fully appreciated the dynamic teaching given at the University of Perugia.

Yesterday she said that "Visits to museums, libraries, interesting sights

in Umbria, such as Orvieto, Assisi, Gubio, etc, completed the teaching." "The goal of the University is of course to do propaganda for Italy, its glorious and rich past, its hopes for the future. Also, there were courses on fascism given at the University, but they were optional, and one did not need to pass those exams in order to obtain a diploma."

### Without money but happy

"During my six month-stay, thanks to my knowledge of Italian, I was able to see for myself, in the town of Perugia with a population of 80,000 inhabitants, as well as in the surrounding countryside, that the Italian people are happy in spite of their lack of money. I could feel the confidence that everyone has in the present administration of the country and in their outlook for the future."

Miss Morin adds that in order to be able to sell the Ethiopian-produced fruit in Italy, a high tax has been added to the price of fruit imported from other countries. Unfortunately, everything is new in the new African empire and transport is so expensive that it is impossible to compete with other foreign imported fruit, hence the extra taxes. Also, in an effort to curtail the importation of tea from Britain, a new product has been launched: a red drink produced by a plant related to the tea bush. (...?)

The new graduate attended the University of Perugia only for personal cultural gain and she met many foreign professors who were there especially because they intended to teach Italian in their own country. Miss Morin hopes that other Canadians, men and women, will benefit from the same advantages she had. In the meantime she trusts that the number of students at the High Cultural Institute of Montreal, under the patronage of the Italian Consul, will increase year after year; thus more cultivated people will have the opportunity to know the country that gave music and painting to the Western world.

Translated by Marie Lussier Timperley for *Le Trésor des Kirouac*, number 79, March 2005.



Marie Huguette Morin, seated in the centre of the photo taken at *Università per i stranieri* in Perugia (Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

emotional roller-coaster of the preceding months. In April, I sailed to Italy with my trousseau. I was moving to Italy to settle there. Carlo met me in Naples. As I was now Italian by virtue of my marriage to Carlo, it was easy for me to enter the country. First we went to Rome to see his family and sign some papers together. We attended a Wedding Mass but there was no reception. Then we left on our honeymoon: to Capri in the south, then to Genoa and Turin in the north.

We settled in Rome in an apartment with Carlo's mother and brother as well as a maid and Carlo's orderly who was permanently in the way when Carlo was home during the day. The orderly was some kind of military servant assigned to assist an officer. He had to follow his officer like his shadow, everywhere even at his officer's home! He arrived early in the morning, fetched the bread, looked after the uniform, polished the saber and the leather boots, helped him put on his knee-high boots, did all sorts of errands, carried Carlo's briefcase and always walked four steps behind him on the street.

This 'exotic and eclectic foursome' plus two servants and the many cultural differences did not last. Pino, Carlo's brother was jealous of me. I had taken his place. He felt put aside by his brother and endless arguments ensued between them. On top of that, my mother-in-law never stopped criticizing everything I did. As for myself, I was pregnant and her constant "frittura" (she used to fry everything), did not agree with me at all. Wanting to please her on her birthday, I baked

a cake and decorated it with candles as we do in Canada. Imagine my surprise when I presented her with a piece of cake with a candle on it.... highly insulted, she got up and left the room telling me that a candle was a symbol of death and that, by giving her one, I was wishing her dead!!!

Finally, with the baby's arrival, Pia was born on April 20, 1940, we had an excuse: the need for more space. Carlo rented another apartment for his mother and brother and, at last, we were almost on our own!

Because of the war, unfortunately, we were not to be together for long. At the end of March 1944, one evening at supper time, around 8 p.m., three Fascist officers came to take Carlo and disarm him. At first, I wanted to hide and keep his beautiful large revolver that he always carried with him, but he convinced me that it would be wiser to give it up to spare ourselves added difficulties. As for Pia, she wanted to hide her father in a chest so he would not be taken away. He was six foot two inches tall... that would have been rather difficult!! At first, I did not know where they had taken him. Eventually he was able to send me short notes through the Red Cross or the Vatican.

This was the situation: because he had not been captured on the battlefield, officially he was not a prisoner of war. Rather, he was known as a 'displaced person' or as a 'political prisoner'. Because the Germans were not allowed to kill their prisoners of war, they used their political prisoners as hostages,



Carlo Karrer  
Colonel in the Royal Italian Army  
(Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)



Marie Huguette Morin, daughter of  
Victor Morin, notary, and Alphonsine Côté  
(Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

keeping them in civilian clothes. Whenever ONE German officer was killed by civilians, the Nazis would shoot TEN Italian officers. Therefore, Carlo remained a hostage under house arrest in Venice until the Germans in the North surrendered on April 28, 1945.

So during the war, for well over a year, I was left alone in Rome with Pia and my maid, Linda, who had promised me never to leave me as long as she could be of help. She kept her promise even when I could no longer pay her.

### **Painful wartime memories**

Being from Canada automatically made me an enemy of the Italian-German Axis, therefore suspicious. On many occasions, it was very frightening. I suspected that the 'concierge' of our building was watching all my comings and goings but she was not the only one doing so.

It was forbidden to listen to British radio. There was a lady on the third floor of our building who had a radio and who invited me to listen to the BBC with her. We would hide under a blanket to listen to the broadcast so no one else would hear it. We could not trust the servants and I had to be particularly careful not to put my husband's life in danger. What we heard were secret coded messages in Italian. I remember hearing: "Il pesce è senza acqua", i.e. "the fish is without water". We had no idea what it meant!

One day while riding on the bus, Pia asked me, out loud, why we hid under a blanket when we heard the toc, toc, toc ... toc sound on the radio, i.e. the signal given at the beginning of the BBC news broadcast. I pretended not to hear her but she repeated her question louder and insisted more and more. A few minutes later, a spy who had pretended to be my friend got off the bus in front of the fascist military headquarters. This woman had been to my apartment many times to give me Italian lessons, but

this was only a pretext. The truth was that she wanted to 'make me talk'. I knew she wanted to find out things about me and I had always been very careful when answering her.

Q. -How did you hear about the MIC Sisters?

A. - My Grandmother, Philomène LeBrice de Keroack Côté, as well as my mother, Alphonsine Côté Morin, had always supported the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception in their works of charity. Thus I knew that the Sisters had a convent near Rome and, one day, I met them at the home of Mrs. Rivest, a Canadian whose husband was Chamberlain at the Vatican. In fact it is interesting to note that back in 1911 my father had bought our house on St. Urbain Street in Montreal from her father, Mr. Berthiaume, the founder of La Presse (Montreal's main French daily).

The Sisters had a cow and I had a baby. Milk was rationed. Only small children under the age of three were allowed half a cup of milk per day! Thanks to that contact, I was able to send my maid to Monte Mario to buy a little bit more milk for Pia. The maid would bring back this precious 'contraband' in a flat bottle hidden in a 'nuns pocket' i.e. a deep pocket under her skirt.

It was also at Mrs. Rivest's home that I met Father Durocher, a Canadian Jesuit working at the Vatican. Through him I received money from my father in Canada. Here is how it worked: first my father gave some money for me to the Jesuits in Montreal. They sent it to their congregation in the United



Marie Huguette Morin  
when living in Rome  
(Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

States who in turn sent it to the Jesuits at the Vatican via an international Swiss bank. When the money arrived at the Vatican, they would let me know and I would pay a visit to Father Durocher who would give me the money.

On the days I visited Father Durocher, he would always keep his little dinner roll for Pia. As the Vatican was independent from the City of Rome, the Vatican residents were granted the luxury of one small six-inch bun every day. He would carefully hide this precious staple in his soutane (i.e. cassock).

Q. - Why did you decide to go to the convent and live with the Sisters?

A. - My husband was a political prisoner. He was under house arrest in Venice. At the time Italy was divided in two: the Germans controlled the north and the Fascists controlled the south. I was alone in Rome with my little Pia.





Marie Huguette Morin Karrer and her daughter, Pia, in Rome  
(Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

The sisters had a large house in the countryside in Monte Mario. Before I went to live with them, they had taken in a Jewish Italian family fleeing persecution. Every time someone came looking for them, the whole family would hide under the altar in the Sisters' chapel. They were never found. When that family left, the Sisters invited me to stay with them because I was alone in Rome and food in the city was scarce. I had also been very frightened on so many occasions!!! They said: "We cannot leave you alone like that".

The Sisters had their own quarters downstairs. I lived on the second floor in some kind of attic. We slept on straw. Sometimes in the middle of the night small four-legged visitors would wake us up. Linda, my maid, stayed in my apartment in Rome trusting that I would pay her whenever I would receive money from Canada. I wore the Missionary Sisters' white habit and blue sash so as to go unnoticed during the most dangerous times. Of course it was very important that Pia never called me "mamma". She had to pass for one of the orphans. The sisters had made a small dark blue uniform for Pia just like the one worn by a seven-year-old orphan they were sheltering at the time. Unfortunately there are no photos

of that difficult period but there are some of us with the Sisters taken during happier times a little later.

Q. - How was the convent run?

A. - Sister Saint-Michel-Archange, the Superior, administered the house.

Sister Marie-Reine looked after the animals, the garden and the kitchen.

Sister Saint-Henri did the sewing and the washing.

Sister Saint-Philippe-de-Néri did the house cleaning.

Sister Marie-Reine took care of the cow. This cow was so precious that it was never left alone in a field for fear it might be stolen. Every afternoon, Sister Marie-Reine had to spend a couple of hours in the field holding the cow on a leash while it grazed. One day, something frightened the cow and she dragged the poor sister along. In the end, the cow had to be kept indoors in a small cubicle sealed with stones and cement as people came at night trying to steal it. The shed had only a small opening just large enough to

let Sister Marie-Reine go in to milk the cow and clean the stall. It took a lot of courage for the sister to do that because someone could have been hiding inside or could have followed her in! She also had to step very carefully as the cow was attached with its rear end facing the opening! When she left, the sister always had to block the entrance with the stones so that no one could get in. The cow stayed put, shut in for a whole year. It is not surprising that the poor beast did not give much milk! As for the hens, the Sisters kept them on the roof. In Italy the roofs are flat with a raised edge. The hens' wings had all been clipped so that they would not fly away.

Sister Marie-Reine had to cook without a watch or a clock. When she needed to time her cooking, she had to run outside, climb on a small rock, check the time on the town clock and run back to the kitchen to keep stirring the pots.

Q. - Were there any dangerous moments?



Monte Mario with the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, 3 April 1945; left to right: Marie Huguette Morin Karrer, Sister Michel Archange, Sister Saint-Philippe-de-Néri, Sister Saint-Henri, Sister Marie-Reine and the nearly-five-year-old Pia Karrer  
(Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)



A. - There was a fanatic Fascist who strongly believed in the 'cause'. Pretending to be a very devout Catholic, he came every afternoon to say the rosary with the nuns. But in fact he was watching us. He had a grudge but only against me. He really wanted to have me thrown into jail because I had not given the right answer to a question used to entrap me. He had asked me: "Supposing the English had arrived here before the Fascists, what would the Italians have done?" I had answered: "They are not fools; they would have taken their guns and defended themselves." He said to the nuns: "That is what I wanted to know! This woman must be arrested. There are so many things I could say against her!" And he added: "In all conscience I should denounce that woman". Very good conscience he had indeed! What scared me most was to be separated from Pia; so much so that I would take her with me even to go to the washroom! I was always holding her hand; she always reached for my hand. Eventually thanks to the nuns' prayers, he finally left me alone and, after the war, he came to apologize for being so fanatical about Fascism.

We lived in constant fear. The convent was located in wide-open country side therefore very vulnerable during the bombardments. Evenings were always frightening because people often peeped through the torn curtains of the windows on the ground floor where the nuns lived. One day, Italian troops had mistakenly taken a soldier for a spy from the North trying to flee. They shot and killed him on the nun's property. He was buried by the handy-man who bunked above the cow's cubicle. The nuns notified his

regiment and placed a cross to mark the place where he was buried.

Q. - What did you do all day at the convent?

A. - I sang and I prayed. I worked with the nuns. I did some errands for them at the Vatican and other places. This was helpful to them as only one sister spoke Italian. I planted potatoes, gathered nuts and Pia, who was always with me, helped.

After the liberation of Rome on June 4, 1944, General Georges P. Vanier (Governor General of Canada 1959-1967), who knew my father, came to see me at our apartment on Alberico II Street in Rome because he wanted to give my family some news about Pia and me. The elevator in our building did not work anymore and, with his wooden leg, he painfully climbed the stairs, resting to catch his breath on the landing. It was very difficult for him but he did it because of his friendship for Victor Morin who was so worried about his daughter.

When the Germans left the north of Italy at the end of April 1945, Carlo came back to Rome where he was able to resume working as a buyer and materials inspector for the army. For a few months we were able to live as a family again and rediscover the great beauty of Rome before being separated once more. This time for two and a half years.

Aware of our suffering and deprivation, my family had been trying for over a year to repatriate Pia and me to Canada. But it was very difficult. By marrying Carlo, I had automatically become Italian,



Carlo Karrer and his daughter, Pia, at the Forum in Rome. Behind is the Roman Coliseum. (Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

so I was now considered an enemy of Canada and Great Britain. I was therefore incapable of reentering my country, unable even to receive any food from the British consulate in Rome. It was extremely difficult for my father to help me regain my Canadian citizenship and to buy, for Pia and me, tickets to travel on the only ship sailing between Europe and North America at the time.

Everything was a challenge. In order to travel from Rome to Naples, where we were to embark, Pia and I had to be granted special permits by the Allied forces to travel in the back of one of their military trucks!

Finally, on December 1st, 1945, Pia and I embarked on the GRIPSHOLM, a Swedish ship quite remarkable with a Swedish flag painted on her deck and on her sides so as to proclaim her neutrality. It was the only transatlantic vessel that had not been commissioned for the war therefore the only one ready to

repatriate the North-Americans, dead or alive, who had been stuck in Europe for the duration of the war. The ship was so full that people slept on the ballroom floor. It was so soon after the end of the war that we were escorted by a minesweeper in the Mediterranean Sea and through the Straits of Gibraltar.

Carlo, who was by now a Lieutenant-Colonel in the army of the Italian Republic, was not allowed to accompany us. It took another two and a half years to complete all the paperwork needed for him to immigrate to Canada. He finally arrived in June 1948. After spending a few weeks in Montreal,

we moved to Toronto, where Carlo started civilian life working as an accountant for the Independent Order of Foresters.

Thus ends Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer's war odyssey. But her return to Canada was not yet final. There was to be another twenty-year hiatus living in the United States, in Boston, Binghamton and New York, while Carlo was working for the Sheraton Hotel chain. In 1980, when Carlo finally retired at the age of 74, they came back to Montreal. Carlo passed away in 1988. In 1996, after the death of Gisèle, her last remaining sister, once more, Marie-H. Morin Karrer packed her bags and left, this time to move to London, Ontario, so as to be near her daughter, Pia.

On May 12, 2005, she will be 99 years young!

I wish to thank my cousin Luce Gauthier, who is also a great-granddaughter of Philomène Le Brice de Keroack Côté, for her excellent suggestions which make this article clearer and more pleasant to read. Luce is the daughter of Claire Morin, older sister of Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer, and Roger Gauthier, disciple and colleague of Frère Marie-Victorin. It is interesting to note that Claire Morin and Roger Gauthier met while studying Botany in Brother Marie-Victorin's classes. Physicist by profession, Luce Gauthier is

now retired. She is the author of: *Propos d'une physicienne sur la situation de la femme de science. (Women and science, a physicist's points of view).* (P.K.O'L)

*Translation for Le Trésor des Kirouac, March 2005, number 79, by Marie Lussier Timperley, great-granddaughter of Marie Le Brice de Keroack Lussier, a sister of Philomène Le Brice de Keroack Côté, therefore a distant cousin of Pia Karrer O'Leary and Luce Gauthier.*

*Translation edited by Paul T. O'Leary.*

Pia Karrer O'Leary and her mother, Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer on her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday. (Collection: Missionnaires of the Immaculate-Conception)



Marie Huguette Morin Karrer with her daughter Pia's family in 1997 (Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)



# Genealogy of Marie-Huguette Morin-Karrer







Photo : Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary

Children of Philomène LeBrice de Keroack and her husband Victor Côté, industrialist in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, Canada: left to right: Alphonsine, Victorine, Alphonse, Antoinette and Cécile.



Philomène LeBrice de Keroack and Renée Morin  
Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary



Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary

The Morin Family in 1917; front row: Guy [1912-2000], Roland (1909-1991), Roger (1915-1990); second row: Marc (1900-1986), Alphonsine Côté Morin (1869-1946) Victor Morin (1865-1960), André (Pol André) (1902-1940); third row: Claire (1905-1994), Marie-Huguette (1906-2009) Renée (1908-1984), Gisèle (1903-1996); behind: Réginald (1897-1939), Lucien (1894-2000) son of Victor Morin and his first wife, Fannie Côté (1872-1894) who died in childbirth)

# Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer

by her daughter, Pia M. Karrer-O'Leary

First Part

First published in *Le Trésor des Kirouac*,  
March 2005, number 79

In May 1906, Marie Huguette Morin was not expected to live

In May 2006, Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer  
celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday!



Photo : Pia M. Karrer O'Leary

**B**orn on May 12, 1906, a mere fourteen months after her sister Claire, M. Joséphine Huguette Morin<sup>(1)</sup> was a tiny sickly baby who could not digest anything. In fact, she was so small that she had to be carried around on a pillow. Luckily for her ... and for us ... a combination of divine and human intervention saved her life and she is now the sole survivor of the thirteen Morin children.<sup>(2)</sup>

A devout Catholic, her mother Alphonsine Côté Morin, turned to prayer and vowed that, if her baby survived, she would call her "Marie". Meanwhile her father, Victor Morin, sought the advice of his friends. The suggestion to siphon soda water through the milk before feeding it to her did the trick. From then on, she began to thrive on these milkshakes and ... to be called Marie.

But that was not the only danger she survived. Living in a bustling household with so many older siblings had its challenges. Unable to be everywhere at the same time, Alphonsine would enlist the help of all the saints in heaven in raising and watching over her ever-expanding brood. One day when things were unusually quiet, her sixth sense led her to the bathroom where Gisèle (almost four years old) and Claire (barely one and a half years old) had undressed Marie

(four months) and were about to give her a 'nice' bath in a deep tub full of water. A few years later while the parents were on a trip<sup>(3)</sup>, it was Tante Antoinette Côté<sup>(4)</sup> who discovered four-year-old Marie hidden in a closet with a match and some newspapers in her hands ... Marie remembers the ensuing spanking to this day!

Fortunately, there were always additional sets of eyes to watch over the children. The maternal grandparents, Victor Côté and Philomène LeBrice de Keroack Côté, came to live with the Morins at

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(1) She was baptized M. Joséphine Huguette Morin at St-Jean Baptiste Parish in Montréal on May 14, 1906. Her god-father was the famous artist-architect Napoléon Bourassa (see various English websites about this great artist 1827-1916), a friend of the family and Alphonsine's art teacher. Her godmother was Joséphine Sarasin, Alphonsine's good friend and confidante. At that time most girls were given Marie as a first name at baptism (this usually appeared as M. in the register). It did not mean that the child would be called Marie. In the case of Marie Karrer, her given name Huguette was replaced by Marie in thanksgiving for her miraculous survival.

(2) **Lucien**: notary (solicitor) (1894-2000, 106 yrs.), son of Fannie Côté, a Franco-American, Victor Morin's first wife who died a few days after giving birth to her son; **Réginald**: President and General Director of Industrial Valuation Company (1897-1939, 42 yrs.); **Simone**: (1899-1911, 12 yrs.); **Marc**: pharmacist-chemist (1900-1986, 85 yrs.); **Pol-André**: lawyer (1902-1940, 38 yrs.); **Gisèle**: housewife and patron of the

arts (1903-1996, 93 yrs.); **Claire**: (1905-1994, (88 yrs.). Degree (LSc) in Botany and Library Science; secretary in Brother Marie-Victorin's scientific group before marrying Roger Gauthier in 1942, a botanist and professor at Université de Montréal. **Marie**: 1906-2009: housewife with diplomas in tourism and Italian language and culture; **Renée**: involved in adult education, publicity, active in the CCF party, author (1908-1984, 76 yrs.); **Roland**: art teacher, amateur artist and photographer (1909-1991, 81 yrs.); **Guy**: Regional Director of Blue Cross Insurance, aviator and amateur electrician (1912-1999, 87 yrs.); **Michel**: (1913-1914, 6 weeks); **Roger**: underwriter and appraiser (1915-1990, 74 yrs.).

(3) Victor loved traveling finding it the best antidote to his work as notary, and his various activities as researcher, writer, community leader, etc. Reluctantly, Alphonsine would accompany him leaving the care of her precious children in the capable hands of her sisters, Antoinette and Cécile. The Morins made several trips to the United States and Europe. They visited the Holy Land and saw the Panama Canal under construction. Victor ventured into the Abitibi region of Quebec and trekked through Northern Ontario accompanied by two guides in search of a mine.

(4) Antoinette Côté, unmarried daughter of Victor Côté and Philomène LeBrice de Keroack, came to help her sister, Alphonsine, in the large house on Saint-Urbain Street. An eye infection resulting from measles had caused her to lose the sight in one eye when she was a child. She was blessed with a magnificent voice but a death-bed promise extracted by her father prevented her from ever appearing on stage. Fortunately, she was invited to accompany a friend to France where she had the opportunity to further her study of music and observe the family's excellent chef. So, years later, she combined giving private voice lessons while supervising the kitchen in the Morin household.



1116 Saint-Denis Street after they had lost everything in a fire in Saint-Hyacinthe. When the family moved to an even bigger home at 703 Saint-Urbain Street<sup>(5)</sup>, Alphonsine's two maiden sisters, Antoinette and Cécile Côté, moved in to help her run the household. Antoinette, a gifted singer and music teacher, oversaw the kitchen while Cécile looked after the garden, supervised the handyman and ran all the errands. In addition to the handyman, there were maids to help with the cooking, cleaning and laundry. When Alphonsine accompanied her husband on a six-month trip to Europe and the Holy Land, she even hired a cousin who was a registered nurse to look after the children.

Concern for the safety of her children was the reason why Alphonsine did not want a summer home near a body of water. Therefore the Morins bought a former apple orchard on the slopes of Mont-Bruno<sup>(6)</sup>. The sun, exercise, and fresh produce were excellent for building strong bodies. Unfortunately, the parents had neglected to take into account the vivid imagination and mischievousness of the older siblings which proved to be the greatest hazard of all!

Eager to win the respect of their older brothers, Réginald and Marc, Marie and all the other younger siblings would gladly accept their challenges to prove their spunk and bravery. Marie would let them drag her by the hair all the while pretending that it did not hurt. (Fortunately, this treatment did not cause her any hair loss. She still sports a full head of hair which is the envy of her three grandsons.).

Initiation into Marc's *army* involved finding and destroying a wasps' nest and not complaining about the many stings. In fact the more stings you had, the higher your *rank* would be. One day the farm hand caught Marc about to roll a wagon wheel down the steep slope with Marie tied to it like Saint Catherine during her martyrdom. Another day, when the four little girls had climbed bare-back on a horse, Marc threw a stone at the horse ... the horse reared and bolted ... Marie, sitting behind the others on the horse, fell backwards and head first to the ground.

However, probably the most potentially lethal activity occurred in Réginald's personal laboratory which he called *ELECTRICA*. For the privilege of being allowed to enter, the children had to hold on to metal bars while he ran an electrical current through it, thus through his younger siblings. Marie remembers being unable to cry out or let go of the bars while the current was flowing ... it still sends shivers down her spine as she considers the possibility that she and all her siblings might have been wiped out in an instant. Unbeknownst to Alphonsine, who was probably busy with the latest addition to her family, her prayers were constantly answered for it was truly a miracle that the Morin children survived their youth!<sup>(7)</sup>

Respite came during the school year when the older boys were sent to boarding schools while the four girls were home-taught by a French governess except for the occasional stay in a convent while preparing to receive the various sacraments of the Church. This arrangement

caused much envy among the older brothers some of whom were often 'ill' in order to stay home. Tutors were hired for them but to no avail. Instead of studying, they disrupted the girls' class or amused themselves by creating general mayhem. The three younger boys did not go to boarding school as they attended the Académie Saint-Urbain across the street from the Morin home.

Discipline was meted out at the end of the day by the father upon returning from his office. Marie recalls witnessing a few memorable public spankings. Unfortunately, many misdemeanors were never punished given the protective nature of Alphonsine compounded by the mischievous nature of Victor who delighted in his sons' pranks.

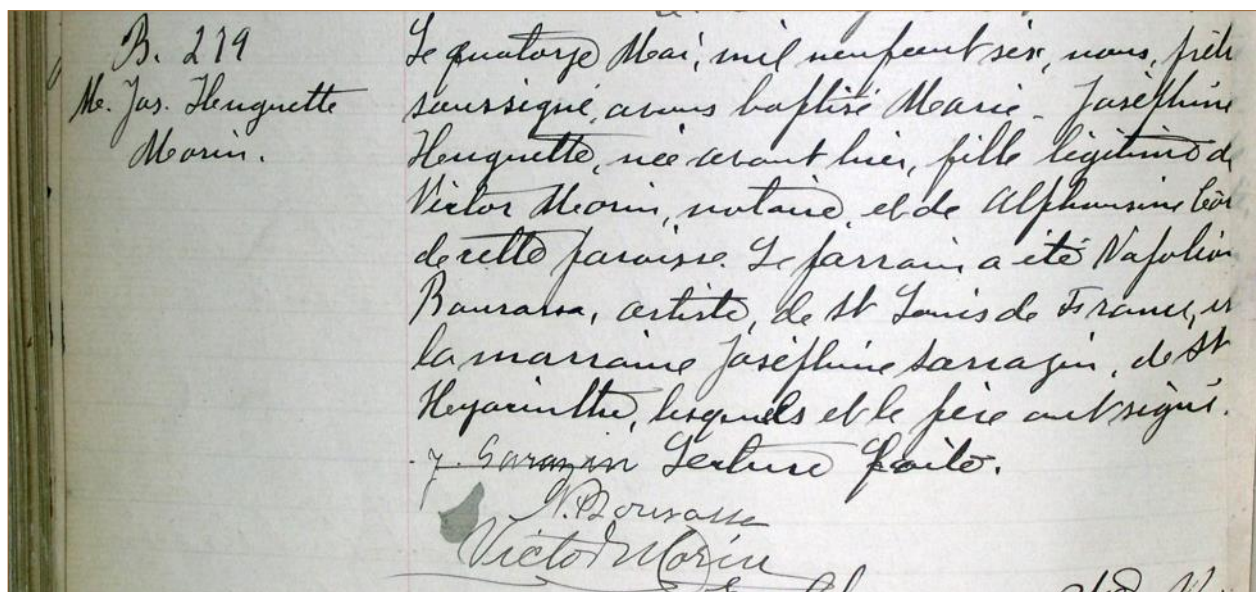
Relations between the older brothers and their younger sisters improved with time. As young adults they enjoyed hosting parties together. Each invited a few friends and fun was had by all. Because of its proximity to Mount-Royal Park, the Morin home on Saint-Urbain Street with its huge living-room and excellent midnight snacks became the *after-ski* headquarters for their

5) From 1902 to 1911, the Morins lived at 1116 Saint-Denis Street in Montreal between Marie-Anne and Mont-Royal Streets. From 1911 to 1952 they lived at 703 (which became 3585) Saint-Urbain Street near Prince-Arthur Street.

(6) Mont-Bruno: Across the River from Montreal, on the South Shore.  
<http://www.lbean.com/parksearch/parks/html/1658lit.htm>

(7) Simone died of measles and typhoid at the age of twelve, while Michel died of newborn's dysentery only six weeks old. Amazingly enough, Claire's broken arm and Renée's broken leg were the only serious accidents to befall any of the Morin children as they were growing up. They even managed to avoid the ravages of the Spanish Flu at the end of the First World War by retreating to their country home.





Baptismal record of Marie Joséphine Huguette Morin, dated May 14, 1906 (Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

ski club: *Club Chic Chac*. Their parents liked the arrangement. Victor would often join in the fun while Alphonsine was relieved to know where the children were and with whom they were associating. Even Tante Antoinette did not seem to mind spending all evening preparing a full meal complete with soup, meat and dessert for the hungry crowd. The time the Morin children spent together created a bond between them which lasted their lifetime and which continues to this day among their descendants.

Obviously the Morins were a very welcoming family. Every day, Antoinette would prepare a supply of hearty sandwiches for the *quêteux* (beggars) who knew where to come knocking around lunch time. When the inter-provincial exchanges began in the 1930's, the Morins were one of the first host families in Quebec. Sir Ernest<sup>(8)</sup> MacMillan's son and George Grant, the future philosopher, came as teenagers to learn French in the Morin home. Marie's helpfulness would later be acknowledged in George Grant's biography<sup>(9)</sup>. It was

also with open arms that the Morins welcomed back their grown children in need. They sheltered all five members of Réginald's family in the aftermath of the Crash of 1929 and later raised his children, Jacques-Victor, Magdelaine and Pierre, after their parents' death. They also took in Marie and her daughter, Pia, back from Italy, after the Second World War.

Having been brought up in a warm and caring home, it was natural for Marie to volunteer in her community. For years, she was in charge of dispensing nutritional supplements in a shelter for expectant and new mothers. She also earned a diploma in tourism from the University of Montreal and volunteered as a tour guide for the city of Montreal.

Like her parents<sup>(10)</sup> Marie enjoyed sports and a healthy lifestyle. She skied, rode horses, played tennis and learned to swim at the *Palestre nationale*. Never having had a car and being used to keeping up to her husband's military stride, she

walked briskly and never seemed to get tired. At the age of eighty-three, she would walk up four flights of stairs to her apartment several times a day often carrying her groceries. At ninety, she moved to London, Ontario, by herself on the train. When she was ninety-two, she was diagnosed with a small cancerous lump in her breast. At her pre-operation appointment she compensated for the missing step-stool by jumping backwards onto the examination table much to the amazement of the nurses. Word got around, all the nurses wanted to see it. She obliged them all by repeating the maneuver. At the

(8) Sir Ernest MacMillan was the conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

(9) "That summer was very happy for me and particularly because a Morin daughter, Marie-Huguette, arranged how I spent the day." CHRISTIAN, William, **George Grant: A Biography**, University of Toronto Press 1993, p. 34 and note 61, p.381.

(10) Victor played polo and tennis, loved hiking and walked to and from work morning, noon and evening.

Alphonsine was a talented figure skater.

time, she did not know that she was suffering from osteoporosis. Within two weeks, as she was helping a neighbour pull a shopping cart up an incline, she suffered a compression fracture of four vertebrae and lost four inches in height in one day. The intense pain she suffered and the medications she took in order to control that pain affected her ability to live alone. At the age of ninety-six she had to leave her apartment to live in a nursing home where, with the help of a walker, she can still outpace her much younger neighbours. She attributes her good health to the summers spent in the country, to the good food that

Tante Antoinette prepared and, of course, to the genetic inheritance passed on by her parents.

From her father she also inherited an innate curiosity characterized by a love of learning and traveling. All her adult life she continued his research on the Morin and Keroack genealogies<sup>(11)</sup>. She learned Italian and won the Canadian scholarship to study at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia (see *Le Trésor*, March 2005, for the complete story of her years in Italy). Alone, she visited Europe and took advantage of her steamer's port of calls to visit various cities in North Africa. In

1939, she married Carlo Karrer, an Italian army officer, and spent the war years in Italy. Later she followed her husband to Toronto, Boston, Binghamton and the New York City area.

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(11) "Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer, who had inherited her father's love of research, began researching her family's genealogy at the age of eighteen. It is incredible that she was able to keep her notes and persevere with this project despite her many moves. Over the years, she continued writing to the various parishes in order to acquire the necessary baptism, marriage and burial certificates of her ancestors (...) After Carlo's

death, she settled in Château Vincent d'Indy, a retirement home, where she could have more time to devote to her research. All she had was a bed-sitting room. Every day she would organize her notes on her bed only to have to pack everything up in plastic bags at bed-time. When she moved to London in 1996, Pia bought her a filing cabinet and helped her sort out the various documents. In doing so, the genealogical 'bug' was transmitted to Pia!

"From 2000 to 2003, after retiring and acquiring a new computer, I (Pia O'Leary) reduced the contents of a filing cabinet into a book that would be more easily accessible for the whole family. The whole process was under the watchful eye of (my mother) Marie, who checked and corrected all the proofs at the age of 96!" Pia O'Leary (loosely translated from the *Preamble* to the Morin genealogy dated May 15, 2003).



The Morin children in front of their summer home in Mont-Bruno, summer 1909:  
Lucien, Réginald, Simone, Marc, Pol-André, Gisèle, Claire, Marie-Huguette, Renée.  
(Collection Pia M. Karrer O'Leary)

# Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer

by her daughter, Pia M. (Karrer) O'Leary

## Second Part

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Her knowledge of three languages has always been an asset. During the war, she was able to make a little money by giving private French lessons. In Toronto, she organized a French conversation group for the parents' association at Pia's High School and even helped an aspiring opera singer with his Italian pronunciation. In Boston, she accepted a position as a governess for a family of seven children. Even at the age of ninety-six, she was tutoring the daughter of her home-care worker. Despite her many moves she always adapted to life be it in French, Italian or English.

Being the eighth child in a family of thirteen children and having survived her older brothers' 'boot camps' made her adaptable and resilient in the face of adversity but who could have imagined all the challenges she would have to overcome. Marrying an Italian army officer on the eve of the Second World War was her first major hurdle (details of her Italian saga in *Le Trésor*, March 2005) Then she had to adapt to married life in a different culture while sharing an apartment with her mother-in-law and brother-in-law.

She gave birth to her only child, Pia, by Caesarean section, was unable to breastfeed her and did her best to raise a baby on the war-time rations of one half cup of milk a day<sup>(12)</sup>. Moreover, she and her husband had to sell their most cherished possessions (wedding presents, Carlo's gold medals in gymnastics....even their gold wedding rings) in order to put food on the table. There was no longer any water, electricity or gas in their apartment building. Hunger and thirst were compounded by cold and fear. When the bombs came, they had to run ten minutes to the safety of Castel Sant'Angelo (a former summer residence of the Popes). When Carlo was taken hostage by the Germans, Marie sought refuge in a convent run by the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception, a French-Canadian order who had a convent in Monte Mario near Rome. She survived disguised as a nun ... the perfect camouflage so long as Pia remembered not to call her "Mamma".

During the war, her Canadian background made her the object of surveillance. Naturally she was suspected of sympathizing with the Allies. After the war, the tables were turned but she was still on the wrong side. Having become Italian by marriage made her ineligible for the rations which the British government doled out to other expatriate Canadians in Italy. The change of citizenship also made it a struggle for her to return to her homeland with Pia.

Then she had to wait another two and a half years before her husband would be allowed into Canada. Two years after the end of the war he was still considered an enemy because of his military career in spite of the fact that he had avoided serving in the Fascist army and had consequently spent part of the war as a hostage of the Germans<sup>(13)</sup>.

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*(12) In Rome during the war, the milk ration for every child under three was only one half cup of milk a day. There was no milk for those over the age of three!*

*(13) On September 3, 1943, the Allied Forces landed in Southern Italy and signed an armistice with the Italian government. Immediately, the Germans seized all the principal towns in Italy. Officers and soldiers alike ran to hide in order to avoid serving under the Germans. Carlo did not want to abandon his wife and child who could have easily been identified and killed. So he did not flee. He kept hoping the Allied Forces would soon reach Rome.*

*Mindful to remain true to his military code of honour, while refusing to serve in the army of the pseudo-Italian Social Republic, he took a sick leave. So on September 9, 1943, instead of showing up for his military service, he checked himself into a hospital where he underwent a tonsillectomy. After spending ten days in hospital he succeeded in being granted another three-month leave for stomach ulcers (probably brought on by the constant hunger). On January 12, 1944, he was deemed cured but he continued to be excused from duty because of his classification as 'mutilated'. In fact Carlo had lost an eye in a military vehicle accident before the war.*

*Unfortunately, his sick leave expired before the Allies reached Rome. In early April 1944, he was arrested and disarmed in front of his family. The Germans took him to Venice behind the Gothic line in the German-controlled region of northern Italy. There they kept him under house arrest in civilian clothes as a hostage. The Germans would kill ten of these 'deportees' for every German officer that was killed by Italian Partisans. This strategy allowed the Germans to contravene the Geneva Convention which forbade killing prisoners of war (by definition, a prisoner of war is one caught on a battlefield).*



When Carlo finally arrived in Canada, the position which awaited him at the Independent Order of Foresters, (IOF) was in Toronto. Once again, Marie was the outsider having to adapt to a new language and another culture. On top of that, she now had the additional task of initiating Carlo into the North American way of doing things and raising a child. However, neither of them was prepared for the outright xenophobia in a very WASPish<sup>(14)</sup> post-war Toronto. If you had an accent, finding an apartment was next to impossible and a simple game of tennis with Pia in a public park on a Sunday morning scandalized the neighbourhood. Carlo struggled with the English language while trying to earn a degree in actuarial science at the University of Toronto. Then the arrival of the first actuarial computation machines and the resulting downsizing at IOF left him unemployed. It was a struggle to make ends meet.

When the *Sheraton Hotel* chain offered Carlo a position, the Karrers migrated to the United States where they spent the next twenty years in Boston, Binghamton, NY, Roselle and Rutherford, NJ. Neither Carlo nor Marie became American. Carlo continued to serve as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Italian reserve army and Marie did not want to risk losing her Canadian citizenship again. All that time they carried American immigration Green cards which identified them as “aliens” a term which can refer to foreigners as well as to extra-terrestrials. One way or the other, again they were outsiders... but that was nothing new for the Karrers.

In 1980, when Carlo retired at the age of 72, the Karrers decided to settle in Montreal in order to be closer to the Morin family. Marie was packing when a failing heartbeat caused her to collapse. Earlier that morning, Carlo had left for the day in New York with a suit he planned to take to the cleaner’s on his way to catch the bus. As luck would have it, the cleaning establishment was closed for the day. So, when Carlo returned home to leave his suit, he found Marie on the floor near the phone but unable to reach it to call for help.

### ***Chronology of Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer’s life and the War Years in Italy***

<b>1906</b> (May 12):	Marie’s birth in Montréal.
<b>1906 to 1937:</b>	Marie lives in Montréal.
<b>1937</b> (July 17):	Leaves for Perugia, Italy, to study Italian.
<b>1938</b> (January 27):	Returns to Canada.
<b>1939</b> (March 2):	Marries Carlo Karrer by proxy (Carlo in Rome, Marie in Montréal). In so doing she becomes an Italian citizen.
<b>1939</b> (April 8):	Leaves for Italy.
<b>1940</b> (April 20):	Pia’s birth.
<b>1940</b> (June 10):	Mussolini declares war on the Allies.
<b>1942 to 1945:</b>	Austere conditions, lack of food.
<b>1943</b> (July 9):	The Americans land in Sicily.
<b>1943</b> (September 3):	An Armistice is signed. The Italian government surrenders to the Allies. The Germans seize all the major Italian cities.
<b>1943</b> (September 9):	Mindful to remain faithful to his military code of honour, Carlo takes a health leave rather than swearing allegiance to the Germans.
<b>1944</b> (April 4, 1944 to April 28, 1945):	Carlo is taken hostage by the Germans and brought to Venice. Marie remains alone with Pia in Rome without any source of revenue or contact with her family in Canada.
<b>1944</b> (June 4-5):	The Allies arrive in Rome but war continues in Italy.
(Summer 1944):	Marie goes to live in the convent of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Monte Mario.
<b>1945</b> (April 28):	Liberation of Venice. Carlo is free to return to Rome.
<b>1945</b> December 18):	Marie and Pia immigrate to Canada.
<b>1947</b> (July):	More than two years after the end of the war, a Peace Treaty is finally signed between Italy and Canada. Carlo immigrates to Canada.
<b>1948</b> June 29):	Carlo starts working for IOF in Toronto.
<b>1948</b> (July 19):	The Karrers emigrate to the United States.
<b>1959</b> January 20):	The Karrers return to Canada settling in Town of Mont-Royal, greater Montréal.
<b>1980</b> (August):	Carlo dies in Montreal.
<b>1988</b> (July 22):	Marie moves to Château Vincent-d’Indy in Outremont, greater Montréal.
<b>1989:</b>	Marie moves to London, Ontario.
<b>1996</b> (September 1):	Marie moves to Mount Hope Centre in London, Ontario.
<b>2002</b> (September 17):	Marie dies in London, Ontario
<b>2009</b> (December 11):	

(14) *W.A.S.P. stands for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant*

She was rushed to the hospital and outfitted with a pacemaker which allowed her to return to Montreal and reunite with her remaining siblings. In 1996, after the death of her last sister, she settled in London, Ontario, to be closer to Pia and her four grandchildren.

Marie's good genes, healthy lifestyle and strong family ties along with her mastery of three languages, her openness to others and to new adventures have combined to help her reach her 100th birthday.

She has been a wonderful mother and grandmother.

Now her ambition and dream is to become a great-grandmother. But while she waits, we remind her that she is already a GREAT grandmother!

## 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party of **Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer** First published in *Le Trésor des Kirouac*, June 2006, number 84

What an honour and a pleasure it was to be invited and attend the Brunch celebrating Marie-Huguette Morin-Karrer's Hundredth Birthday! Because I am a distant cousin but also to represent the Kirouac Family Association. What a privilege it was to travel between Montreal and London, and return, with Sister Huguette Turcotte, m.i.c., When Mrs. Karrer addressed a letter to: "The last surviving sister of those who were in Rome during the war" the letter landed in the hands of Sister Huguette who immediately phoned Mrs. Karrer. As an amateur historian and very interested in the archives of her religious community the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, she asked Pia to tape her mother as she recounted her souvenirs particularly those concerning her stay with the MIC sisters in Italy during the Second World War. (See *Le Trésor* 79, March 2005). Some thirty relatives and friends enjoyed the delicious brunch held at the Grosvenor Club on Sunday, May 21, 2006. Our centenarian looked so good in her attractive spring outfit sporting a lovely orchid. She greeted each visitor with a large smile and a kind word and kept smiling away for the hundreds of photographs. She was so happy to talk with everyone, among them, her four grandchildren, Stephen, John, David and Susan, and their partners, some Morin cousins who drove from Montreal and some long-time friends. She received many wonderful bouquets of flowers. Jacques and Alberte Kirouac from Quebec City sent a lovely white basket of flowers.

Among the many testimonies prepared specially for the occasion one must be underlined particularly for its historical importance. When Sister Huguette Turcotte learned that Napoléon Bourassa, had been Marie Huguette Morin's godfather, she quickly looked up the important links between this famous architect and artist and the M.I.C. Sisters and documented it accordingly as well as the links between the M.I.C. and another member of the K/ clan and a rather important one at that. (Article to be published in a future issue of *Le Trésor*).



From left to right: Camille Morin, great-grand-niece of Mrs. Karrer, her grandfather André Morin, sole son of Roger (the youngest of the notary's children), André's daughter and Camille's mother, Stéphanie and the new centenarian: Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer. (Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

After the brunch, Pia showed some old photos on screen and presented her mother with a thick souvenir album containing stories, anecdotes, photographs sent in by parents and friends. For some six months Pia had been emailing one and all asking them to send in something for the album and, if you have been astonished by the unbelievable adventures that Marie-Huguette survived since her birth (see *Le Trésor*, number 83, March 2006), believe me, some of the stories written in the album and read after the meal, prove that our cousin Marie-Huguette has even more than nine lives like cats do!

This beautiful family reunion went on at Pia and Paul's home afterwards while our happy centenarian was taken back to her room at the residence. She was still all smiles in spite of the emotions and the tiredness of such



a long day. Months of preparation and efforts really paid off; it was a great success.

As for K/rouacs' longevity, it is interesting to note that for many years Mrs. Karrer was very proud to be the eldest of the clan; but now we know that she is the youngest centenarian of the K/rouac clan! Again, we wish her many more years of happiness among her wonderful family.

Marie Lussier Timperley (21 June 2006)

Left to right: Sister Huguette Turcotte, m.i.c., Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer and her daughter, Pia. (Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary)

## OUR ELDEST FAMILY MEMBER IS NO LONGER

### Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer

12 May 1906 – 11 Decembre 2009

First published in *Le Trésor des Kirouac*, winter 2010, number 98

**B**orn in Montréal, the eighth of thirteen children, Huguette Morin was a sickly baby who was not expected to live and whose parents vowed to call her "Marie" if she survived. She not only survived but outlived all her brothers and sisters.

She had an idyllic childhood being home schooled with her three sisters and spending half the year in the country at Mt. Bruno. There she rode cows, adopted lambs and proved her bravery to her older brothers by attacking wasps nests and participating in a rather dangerous game of 'chain-link electrocution' with all her siblings.

Having survived her childhood, she developed into a strong but very compassionate adult who helped raise her oldest brother's orphaned children, taught French to the future philosopher, George Grant, one of the first inter-provincial exchange students to stay with the Morins and, for years, volunteered in a shelter for expectant and new mothers. She also earned a diploma in tourism from the University of Montréal and volunteered as a tour guide for the city of Montréal.



The great-grandmother at 102 with her one-year old first great-granddaughter

From her father she had inherited an innate curiosity characterized by a love of learning and traveling. All her adult life she continued his research on the Morin and Kerouac genealogies. She learned Italian and was the Canadian winner of the Italian government's scholarship to study for a year at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia, Italy. In 1939, she married Carlo Karrer and spent the war years in Rome. From 1948 to 1980 she followed her husband to Toronto, Boston, Binghamton and the New York City area. Everywhere she went, she enjoyed discovering the region and making new friends.

Collection Pia Karrer O'Leary



Being the eighth child in a family of thirteen children and having survived her older brothers' 'boot camps' had made her adaptable and resilient in the face of adversity but no one could have imagined all the challenges she would have to overcome. Marrying an Italian army officer on the eve of the Second World War was her first major hurdle. Then, she had to adapt to married life in a different culture while sharing an apartment with her mother-in-law and brother-in-law! She gave birth to her only child, Pia, by Cesarean section, was unable to breastfeed and did her best to raise a baby on the war-time rations of one half cup of milk a day. She and her husband had to sell their most cherished possessions, Carlo's gold medals in gymnastics and even their wedding bands, in order to put food on the table. There was no longer any water, electricity or gas in their apartment building. Hunger and thirst were compounded by cold and fear. When Carlo refused to serve under Mussolini and was taken hostage by the Germans, Marie sought refuge with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception, a French-Canadian order who had a convent near Rome. This time, she survived disguised as a nun...the perfect camouflage so long as Pia remembered not to call her "Mamma".

But the war years were not to be the only challenge. Twice more she would be uprooted and become an 'outsider'. In 1948 Carlo started working for the Independent Order of Foresters in Toronto (Ontario, Canada).



Photo taken on her 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday: sitting left to right: Marie Lussier Timperley, Marie-Huguette Morin Karrer, sister Huguette Turcotte m.i.c ; standing: Pia Karrer-O'Leary and her husband, Paul O'Leary.  
(Collection Pia Karrer)

Once again, Marie had to adapt to a new language and another culture at a time when Toronto was far from being a cosmopolitan city. The arrival of the first actuarial computation machines and the resulting downsizing at IOF left Carlo unemployed. It was a struggle to make ends meet.

Between 1959 and 1979 the Karrers lived in Boston, Binghamton, NY, Roselle and Rutherford, NJ while Carlo worked in the Hotel business. All that time they carried American immigration Green cards which identified them as "aliens" a term which can refer to foreigners as well as to extra-terrestrials. One way or the other they were again outsiders... but that was nothing new for Marie!

After Carlo's retirement, they returned to Montréal where Marie was able to reconnect with her remaining siblings. In 1996, after the death of her last sister, she settled in London to be closer to Pia and her four grand-children. Since 2002, she has resided at Mount Hope where she made many new friends, enjoyed the garden and participated in several of the activities provided.

Marie's good genes, healthy lifestyle and strong family ties along with her mastery of three languages, her openness to others and to new adventures served her well for 103 years and six months!

Pia O'Leary,  
17 December 2009

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