

## PREFACE

I wanted to write this book for a few reasons. I think my story is part of an especially interesting time in women's history. I was born in 1934. In the '30s, '40s and early '50s, men had career opportunities and advantages most women could never enjoy. The traditional jobs for women were secretary, teacher, stewardess or nurse. Education and skill development for these jobs were just steppingstones to the ultimate goal of getting married and having children. Advertisements showed housewives overjoyed at getting a Hoover vacuum for Christmas or smiling gratefully at their new refrigerator. The message was, if you want to be happy and fulfilled, be a good wife, mother and housekeeper. If, God help you, you couldn't find a suitable husband, you'd be labelled a spinster or old maid by the time you were 25!

I was surrounded by that attitude. It was ingrained in all females from an early age. But one day I had an epiphany that changed my life. I was 17 and working as a secretary at Lever Brothers in Toronto,

Ontario, looking at all these bright, energetic women typing all day in the secretarial pool. It hit me: That's me in ten years! Was that all life had in store for me?

I decided there had to be a lot more out there for Eleanor Fulcher, so I quit my job that same day — and it was a great job. I spent the next eight years experiencing the ups and downs in the beauty, modelling and secretarial fields, and then, against all odds, I started my own business. The year was 1960. The time was right. The Eleanor Fulcher School and Agency grew in leaps and bounds to become the biggest in Canada. Building my business wasn't easy, but it was exciting and challenging. Today I feel like I've lived my life the way I wanted to, not the way someone or society expected me to.

Times have changed and women have many more opportunities, but older women still have to fight against the image society has of us. When I'm with my contemporaries, I look around the room and see beautiful, strong women, smartly dressed, sharp. None of us is ready to give up and let ourselves age and look "old." I'm healthy and happy and I take care of myself. In 2012, I celebrated 50 years of marriage to my husband, Bruno Arnold. (And they said it wouldn't last!) We have dear friends and a great family — our daughter Angela, our son Marcus and his wife Lori, and our grandchildren Joseph, Vittoria, Peyton and Madison. Life is good.

So with this book, I'm volunteering to be the poster child for my generation. I'm alive and kicking and feeling great, getting up at 6:20 a.m., exercising, doing my hair and makeup, eating well, doing the *Globe and Mail* bridge column and crossword puzzle, and dressing for whatever the day throws at me. At 9:30 a.m. I am "ready for anything"!

So let's rewind.



# MY ROOTS AND FAMILY

## The Fulcher Clan

My paternal grandfather was a brickmaker named Frederick Fulcher, born in Burton-Upon-Trent, England, on September 12, 1880. Frederick was one of seven children. His childhood was very rough. He was separated from his entire family while quite young and sent to a workhouse, and later was put on a ship to Canada to work on a farm as one of the Barnardo Boys, as these young waifs were called. I don't know anything about his life in those early years. At one point he joined the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders and fought at Vimy Ridge. He married my grandmother Tella Hansen (or Hausen, as it's spelled on some documents) on December 1, 1908.

Tella was born December 23, 1885, in Mosjøen, Norway, and came to Canada in 1907. I loved and admired my grandmother Fulcher. I was 15 when she died on February 4, 1949, and felt her loss very deeply — and still do.



My brother Freddy and me with our grandparents Tella Fulcher (née Hansen) and Frederick Fulcher

Frederick and Tella had six children, the eldest being my father, also named Frederick (Fred). My dad was born August 27, 1909. He lived until he was 77, when he died of prostate cancer. The 1911 census of Canada shows Frederick, Tella and my father, Fred, living at 158 Sackville Street, Toronto.

My father was a labourer, an incredibly strong man. My brother, also named Fred (Freddy), worked with him part time during the summers, hauling ice to refrigerators, and even though my brother is also very strong, he told me once that he watched Dad pick up a 50-pound brick of ice and fling it over his shoulder like it weighed no more than three pounds. Fred tried to copy him and could barely lift it! My dad was very quiet and laid back. He had a moustache and a bit of the Clark Gable look. Women thought he was very handsome.



*Left to right: Aunt Mabel, Grandma Fulcher, Aunt Gladys, Aunt Edna and Uncle Bobby*

My dad's home life growing up was difficult. My grandfather Fulcher abused both my grandmother and my dad's younger brother Charlie. Maybe he also mistreated the three daughters — Gladys, Edna and Mabel — and the youngest brother, Bobby, whom I had a crush on. I don't know. My aunts always said their father was mean. He didn't allow them to finish school, didn't allow them to do anything. He didn't pick on my dad because he knew he would lose. But Charlie was a small, skinny guy and no match for his dad's wrath. My dad helped Charlie run away from home one night when he couldn't take it anymore.

I used to judge my grandfather Fulcher harshly, and I still don't excuse his actions, but now that I know about his very difficult childhood and younger years, I can understand him a bit better.