

# My Life at the Tower of London

by Heather Louise Miller



*Above: Robin Miller in his Queen's Yeoman uniform.*

*Below: The first Miller residence, the Old Hospital Block.*

My husband Robin came home from work at the end of February 2005 and said, “Babe, remember I have always said that I would give you a palace to live in? Well start packing we are moving into a Royal Palace.” That statement was the end of a long period of wondering.

Back in 2004 we had been posted back to the UK from Germany for my husband to finish his last year of colour service in the British Army. At the time we were unsure as to our future, we had only recently applied for immigration to Canada and so knew we had a few years to wait, our daughter, Marnie, was about to finish her mandatory schooling and looking at going to college so we wanted to be stable for the two years that she would be at college gaining her qualifications for going on to university. Robin had been offered his commission in the British Army but that would mean moving every 18 months, so not very stable for our daughter’s education; he had also been offered an extension in service but again we were unsure as to how long and where.

A friend of Robin’s gave him a business card one evening and suggested that he phone the gentleman on the card as it could be what we were looking for. Long story cut short, Robin phoned the gentleman on the card and after various interviews and presentations over many months, he was selected by Her Majesty to become a Queen’s Yeoman of the Guard, Ceremonial Body Guard, Gentleman Extraordinaire, Yeoman Warder—or ‘Beefeater’ as more commonly known.

Robin started at Her Majesty’s Royal Palace and Fortress, the Tower of London, in May 2005; while he was in training he was also preparing our living quarters within the Tower so that we could move in as a family in August.

We both have always been interested in history; Robin’s passion is Roman history and mine—well I like it all, but in particular Tudor and Victorian times. I had never really paid much attention to the Tower before we went to live there and didn’t realize that as a family we already had a connection with it going back generations, right back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and possibly even further. I knew that Robin’s grandfather had been stationed at the Garrison there in the late 1920s early 1930s and until we moved in, that was the only connection I thought we had.



Our first living quarters were in the Old Hospital Block, which was built in 1649 and is situated next door to the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers HQ and opposite the White Tower, which most people think is the Tower of London, not realizing that 22 towers in fact make up the Tower of London. My mother’s father, and his father, and his father, and so on had all been fusiliers, and now I was living next door to their HQ where all their documents would be kept. That was where my interest in finding out more about where we were living started.

## Ancestral Ties to the Tower

I found that my family had connections to the Tower dating back to 1400, when one of my maternal grandfathers was the Lieutenant of the Tower for three years. Searching further I found that I had relatives on ‘both’ sides of the cell door, so Yeoman Warders and ‘guests’.

I then started looking at my husband’s family and found that he too had relatives on both sides of the cell door. On an interesting side note, my maiden name is Paterson and I am a member of the MacLaren Clan; my husband Robin, with his surname of Miller, is a member of the MacFarlane Clan. It was only after we were married that I found out that the MacLaren and MacFarlane Clans had always married into each other’s families, and now we had continued a family tradition without knowing it. Anyway back to the story....

In the Byward Tower, which is the second tower you pass through upon entering the Tower of London, there are boards hung on the wall upon which are the names all the Yeoman Warders there have ever been since the Duke of Wellington took over at the Tower as the constable in 1826. It did give me a warm feeling to be able to look up and read the names and know that two of them on the board were related to me, one being my husband and the other being an uncle on my grandmother’s side.

## The Ravens Also Have Ancestral Ties to the Tower

Living at the Tower you can’t help but watch the ravens that also reside there. You have to keep in mind that they are not tame; they are still wild and yes, they can fly. However it is an uneven flight as their flight feathers are clipped. Many of the ravens that have served at the Tower (yes, they are in military service to the monarchy) have been the ‘children’ of previous ravens that have been in service there, some born at the Tower and some born in the Wild Bird Sanctuaries where the odd one or two Tower Ravens have ended up after being dishonourably discharged from service for behaviour unbecoming—long story for another time. Ravens mate for life and are very intelligent.

Thor, one of the ravens at the Tower while we were there, loved plain flavoured crisps, or chips as they are known in North America. Thor knew that the plain flavoured crisps came in a blue packet, and would happily sneak up on some poor tourist, and put his head straight into their crisp packet and help himself (trust me you are not going to say no to a raven who would rather be eating your eyeball whether you were dead or alive and has a three-inch-thick razor-sharp beak). He would then run off to his water bowl, throw the crisps in the water, stamp on them, get them all nice and soggy and then eat them. Well, unbeknownst to Thor, the crisp manufacturer changed the colour of the packets, putting the plain crisps in a red packet and cheese and pickle flavoured crisps in the blue packet. Thor hated cheese and pickle of any description. Well, you can imagine he did his usual routine of obtaining the crisps, running over to his water bowl, stamping on them, and then eating them only to realize that they were cheese and pickle flavour. This angered him so much that he went back to the tourist from whom he took the crisps and took the packet, which he then proceeded to rip apart; he scattered the contents and the packet all around the side of the White Tower, chattering at the top of his voice as he did so. He did this a few times until he worked out the new packet colour of his favourite flavoured crisps.

## Mum’s Special Day

Living in the Tower of London you do get quite a few perks, which offset the restrictions put upon you whilst living there. As you can imagine there are quite a few restrictions to living in a royal palace, such as times when you can have deliveries to your home—groceries and so forth; those

*Heather Louise Miller, born and raised in the UK, has lived all over Europe and now lives in Alberta, Canada. She is not as avid a genealogist as her mother but does take a peek every now and then, always finding something rather unique and interesting—such as her husband’s family and hers, on their father’s sides, always having married into to each other’s, going back many generations. You can learn a little more about Heather by visiting her website [www.mylifeatthetoweroflondon.com](http://www.mylifeatthetoweroflondon.com).*



are done in the late afternoon. Then there are the visitors; they are in your 'front yard' every day of the week, for all but four days of the year, and they are there from nine in the morning until six in the evening. Young children are unable to play where they want to until all these visitors have left for the day. And not to mention being locked in at night because the crown jewels are housed in the Tower, as well as other jewels and documents pertaining to the monarchy and country, so of course security is tight—as it should be.

Some of the perks of living in the Tower are being able to have your children christened and/or married in the Chapel Royal of St. Peter ad Vincula, and their children, and so on. You can have friends and family come and stay with you (and who wouldn't want to stay in a royal palace). Also, being able to host special parties; permission needs to be requested and granted but once gained what a place to host a party—just to name but a few.

My mother, Christine Paterson, was going to be turning 60 in April 2006 and so I invited her up for her birthday and said that I would take her to the Ritz for her birthday tea, living in London all these places are on your door step so to speak. She was delighted and eager to come up. I also said that as we lived next door to the HQ and Museum of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, and that we have a direct family connection to the regiment, I had arranged for afternoon tea for her with the Colonel of the Regiment for the following day. My mother was thrilled as she had so many questions she wanted to ask the colonel about the regiment: her father had served as a fusilier during WWII, and her grandfather had served during WWI and her great grandfather had served and so on. I told her that rather than bring lots of items with her, it would be better if she were to make a list of questions she would like to ask the colonel and the regimental historian as he would also be on hand to talk to her and show us around the historical records that the public do not get to see. What Mum didn't know was that I had arranged a surprise birthday party for her in the regimental HQ dining room with various members of our family many of whom she hadn't seen

*Left to right: The author's mother Christine Paterson, Rob in his Yeoman Warder's uniform, Christine's cousin Marian, and Marian's husband Keith.*



for over 20 years or more. I had sent the invitations out stipulating where and when and the dress code, along with an itinerary of what would be happening, such as: meeting point, entrance to the venue, Mum's arrival, a private tour of the Tower with Robin, a presentation showing Mum at various ages with members of the family, games for the children, Ceremony of the Keys, food, drinks, and then leaving time at midnight—along with a note that under no circumstances was anyone to mention this to Mum or Auntie Rose. Auntie Rose is a wonderful woman but has always been unable to keep a secret and would be the first to phone Mum and congratulate her on the party she was going to. It worked. No one mentioned anything to Mum or Auntie Rose, although to be fair, Mum was slightly upset that her brother and a few of her cousins hadn't phoned her on her birthday to wish her well as they normally did, and she was so sure that she had given them my telephone number. When talking to Uncle Roy (my Mother's brother) the next day at the party he said the reason for not phoning was because he and everyone else who normally phoned were scared to talk to Mum in case they let slip that they would be seeing her the next day.

My mother's big day came and I and Marnie took Mum to the Ritz for afternoon tea and then later in the evening once Robin had finished work we went to an Italian Restaurant to round off the day.

The following day my mother was anxious and excited about meeting the Colonel of the Regiment and changed her clothes so many times I lost count. In between Mum's excitement and clothes changes I and Marnie kept popping out to next door to make sure that the food had arrived and to take the six birthday cakes down all without Mum suspecting anything. Then came the

time for me to go and meet up with the family to take them into the Tower and then into the venue; I made an excuse of having to just pop over and see a friend who needed a quick word and that I would be back in time to go next door for afternoon tea. I slipped out and down to the East Gate to meet with the family members from all over the UK as well as Australia. Once all were there I phoned Marnie to say to keep Mum in the flat and away from the front windows for five minutes or so whilst I walked everyone up to the fusilier HQ and got them settled before fetching Mum.

I escorted Mum, who was holding her list of questions tightly, into the HQ and as we were in the cloakroom I handed her an envelope, took the list from her and said "You'll need to read


this before going in, Mum." Mum read the invitation that I had sent out to the family and, while she was still in shock and the moment still sinking in, I opened the door and gently pushed her into the room where she was greeted by 70 family members shouting 'surprise' and 'happy birthday'. After a few minutes I entered the room and went over to Mum where she gave me a huge hug, tears rolling down her cheeks, and said to me "You cow." She was overwhelmed and so happy. She found out why no one had phoned her the day before and forgave them happily.

After that the afternoon, evening and night festivities passed too quickly; all enjoyed themselves, had great fun and new memories were made.


My mother still talks about her surprise birthday party and how well organized it was. I'm not sure if she has forgiven me yet for the slight deception in getting her to her party or that she completely trusts me when I say that one thing is happening and it turns out to be something else; but then that did come in handy when I surprised her for her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday—a tale for another day.

### In Conclusion

I have access to all the names of every constable and lieutenant of the Tower and every prisoner that that been held in the Tower of London since 1078. If you would like me to see if any of your family names appear in the records please drop me an email [hlmiller762@gmail.com](mailto:hlmiller762@gmail.com) or give me a call on 780-967-3841 and I will see what I can find. I must point out that any family name that I find I cannot guarantee will be related to you in any way, but you never know.... RS




The pleasure of your company is requested at  
 The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Headquarters in  
 Her Majesty's Royal Palace and Fortress, The Tower of London,  
 To celebrate the 60th birthday of Christine Ann Paterson




On arrival at the gates you will be met and given a private tour of the Tower before proceeding into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Headquarters for Dining and Drinking. At 2130hrs (9.30pm) you will be escorted out to attend the ancient and dignified ceremony, 'The Ceremony of the Keys', the oldest military ceremony in the world. After the ceremony you will be escorted back to the Headquarters for final drinks before being lead out of the Tower at roughly 2300hrs (11pm).

Dress for the occasion is smart casual, please no jeans or trainers.  
 Date and Time for arrival at the Tower of London: Saturday 8th April 2006, 1545hrs (3.45pm)



R.S.V.P by 24th February 06  
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*A solid sterling silver model of the Tower, with birthday cards from the family celebration.*

