



Rumble Seat: A Victorian Childhood Remembered

Helen Piddington

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Rumble Seat is an evocative, poetically-written memoir of artist Helen Piddington's childhood in the Victoria suburb of Esquimalt--and what a childhood it was! The Piddingtons arrived from Quebec in 1924, and settled into a life that in many ways typified well-off Victoria families of the period. Helen's father, Major Arthur Grosvenor Piddington, was a bit of an eccentric whose preferred attire, after his British army blazer, was jodhpurs and riding coat or drill shorts with knee socks held up by brightly-coloured garters. He dabbled in gentlemanly pursuits such as sheep ranching but his true passion was riding. Helen's mother was "expected to make and receive social calls and entertain with tea parties, dinners and dances" but she had help--a governess, a nanny, a housemaid, a cook and faithful Tim the gardener. The Piddingtons occupied an imposing home designed by Victoria's favourite residential architect, Samuel Maclure, with a grand entrance hall and private garden, tennis court, stables, paddock and meadows bordered by golf links. Family amusements included hosting garden fetes, playing tennis and polo, summering at Savira, their cottage on Shawnigan Lake and motoring in their mother's Morris roadster--the one with the coveted rumble seat.

During the 1930s the Piddington's life of privileged comfort vanished thanks to the Great Depression and Major Piddington's bad luck in business. From then on the elder Piddingtons were forced to look after their vast brood themselves, the Major growing their food and Mrs. P. belatedly learning to cook, keep house and care for Helen, her youngest child. Difficult as the adjustment was, there was new satisfaction to be found in sharing and making do.

With sharp descriptions of the artifacts, mannerisms and characters recalled from her early years, Helen Piddington's *Rumble Seat* is a captivating record of a way of life gone by and a valuable addition to the social history of British Columbia.

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