

Elsie Crosby
English War Bride
Empress of Scotland

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When the war started I was living in the suburbs of Grimbsy. Not a target for bombing, but for a lot of sleepless nights from large guns and German planes flying to bomb the industrial part of Yorkshire.

After leaving school, I helped an elderly lady in her convenience store, waiting for the age of eighteen when it would be mandatory for me to contribute to the war efforts. Her son had enlisted,

I discussed this with my mother, she suggested the services, she had left her job as a teacher and joined the Royal Navy during W.W. 1. I did not want to go in the Land Army or the Army and I get seasick, so it was easy, I enlisted in the R.A.F.

I was posted to Mildenhall, Suffolk. It was (is) a large station accommodating three squadron, R.A.F. squadron 419, to which I was attached, New Zealand squadron 75 and Canadian squadron 419 in it's formative stages.

The W.A.A.F.'s lived in married quarters, I shared a large room with a wonderful girl from the outskirts of London, Doreen and I were very compatible. She was also a war bride, living in Ontario. We were friends for life. She died early 2005 and left a big void in my life.

The first plane of 419 to fly on operations over Germany, was piloted by Wing Commander 'Moose' Fullton, a very impressive man. His wireless operator was 'Bing Crosby' who would be a person of interest later on. As I met more and more of the boys (which a lot of them were!), I found it very difficult to hear night after night that two or three crews had not returned. Like many people, I prayed for clear moonlight nights when flights had to be cancelled. It was a very difficult time.

'Bing' of 419 (I did not know his proper name then) had asked me out for a date a few times. I had refused as I thought Canadians were in the same class as Americans, and I had two unpleasant experiences with them. But, we had a chance meeting at a café while with friends and I realized he really was very nice.

We dated regularly as good friends until one morning following Knowles' thirtieth mission (I knew his name by then) the plane was reported missing. The target had been Essen in the Ruhr, a very heavily defended area. Apparently, from reports of accompanying aircraft they were coned by search

lights, received several hits and caught fire. This was news I had been dreading to hear for months. But a miracle! Later that day three of the crew, including Knowles, arrived back at Mildenhall. According to the pilot, Knowles had beaten out the flames, administered morphine to a badly injured second pilot and assisted the pilot in guiding the skeleton plane back over the channel by picking up signals. For this he received the Distinguished Flying Medal from King George VI.

This near death situation brought the realization that we had stronger feelings than friendship for each other. We became engaged. I took him home to meet my family and four months later we were married in the old Norman church (1066) I had attended since the age of three.

At this time Knowles had finished one tour of operations and had started a second tour with the Wing Commander of 432 Squadron, flying in Lancasters out of Skipton in Yorkshire. When we were on our honeymoon in the Lake District a friend took Knowles' place on a mission over industrial Germany, the plane was shot down and only one of the crew survived.

Knowles became the station Signal Officer 'in charge of the wireless operators' and I got a compassionate posting to a nearby aerodrome. Three months later he was posted to Ottawa to be a member of the 'Special Cases Board'. I was praying I was pregnant as that was the only way I could leave the Air Force to join him. I was!

I got my discharge shortly afterwards and went home to wait to hear when I could join my husband. I was there for Christmas with my family, I had some real quality time with my mother.

The letter arrived in February. It contained information I had been waiting for and a ticket for the Empress of Scotland leaving Liverpool for Canada on March 17th, I was excited but when I hugged my mother her eyes were filled with tears. She said, "It is so far away". I now know the pain and anxiety she was feeling. I was nineteen years old, her eldest child, three months pregnant and leaving for a place so far away I might not see her again. I had always had a role in the nurturing of the four younger children, so when it came time to leave, I cannot describe the overwhelming emotion and anxiety I felt. On the way to Liverpool, the realization of the drastic change shortly to take place in my life came to me with a shock. What was I doing?

I boarded the ship in time for dinner. As a wife of an officer I had a seat at the captains table. The selection of food was amazing, much of it I had not seen for years. The roast beef was delicious but I really enjoyed the white bread and real butter. That dinner was the only solid food I had for twelve days.

The ship left in convoy and set out on a northerly route. German U-boats were very active in the Atlantic Ocean at that time. Returning troops were on the lower decks of the ship so we were obviously a target. The sea was very rough and I was dreadfully seasick. Still we all had to go on deck every day, put on life jackets and go through lifeboat drills. On one occasion we were summoned to the deck late in the day and had to stay there in the cold and wind until some kind of threat had passed. The doctor came to see me every day and gave me nutritious liquids. Finally on the evening on the twelfth day we arrived in Halifax. What a relief!

I was the only passenger destined for Nova Scotia. At approximately 7 a.m. A Red Cross worker came on board and escorted me to Pier 21. There I went through the immigration procedure, after which I was taken to the train waiting just outside the building. It left at 8 o'clock and I was on the last lap of my journey.

I had not had time for breakfast so hoped a snack would be available on the train, but not until lunchtime. The train was very slow - in less than three hours it had made eleven stops. After another half hour the conductor announced lunch was being served. I was so hungry!

We had been on the train for eight and a half hours when the conductor came along and told me to prepare to get off at the next station. I gathered my belongings and went to the door, when it opened I was in shock. There was nothing in sight but a short boardwalk, bushes, trees and a narrow path. I said: "This can't be Yarmouth". He said it was not, my ticket had South Ohio as my destination. The Crosby family lived in the rural area not far from the village of South Ohio as my destination. The Crosby family lived in the rural area not far from the village of South Ohio, consequently his postal address was R.R.1, South Ohio. I had to exit the train.

There was a small elderly man heading up the path and I decided to follow him. I was beginning to feel a little panic. I was still walking through bushes without a sign of anyone else or a building. I stopped for a rest and when I did the man came back. He said he knew the Crosby family and that something had gone wrong somewhere. He thought the best idea was to take me to the village store where I could make a phone

call. Knowles was waiting for me in Yarmouth, and when the train arrived there without me he was very concerned and went to the station in the south end of town which sometimes carried passengers. The family had difficulty locating him.

Meanwhile, the very nice couple who owned the store, Elroy and Helen Moses, took me to their home for tea (supper). There I had my first taste of home bake beans and brown bread. It was delicious. That is how I know I arrived on Saturday - it was a Saturday night staple, at least in the country.

Knowles' brother and wife picked me up. I was so happy to arrive at the Crosby farm and be with my husband again. His parents were kind, rather shy people who made me very welcome.

Three days after I arrived I had a telephone call from Halifax police telling me the disturbing news that my trunk, which had been stored in the hold of the ship, had been stolen. When he told me the chances of finding it were slim, I was devastated. It contained all my wedding gifts including a chest of silverware from the W.A.A.F.S. on the station. Also included were new clothes for which my family and friends had sacrificed their clothing coupons. Several weeks later two stevedores were arrested for stealing luggage from incoming ships. Nothing of mine was ever recovered.

A few days later, Knowles' mother told us the people of Port Maitland (where Knowles went to school) were having a 'shower' to honour Knowles and meet me. Until that time a shower to me was a brief period of rain. I had no idea what to expect. When we entered the hall I was shocked - it was literally full of people. There were even some English service men there, members of the British Fleet Air Arm stationed at Yarmouth's East and West Camps. We were taken to a particular place and people filed by to shake hands and congratulate Knowles. Their local boy had become a Flight Lieutenant, won a medal for valour and brought home a foreign wife. The first war bride in the area. I think there were some disappointed local girls. My face ached from smiling and my hand was numb by the time we had greeted everyone.

Following this, we were presented with one hundred dollars to help to buy new silverware, a blanket and a bouquet of roses. I really appreciated their kindness and thoughtfulness and told them so.

After ten days we were on our way to Ottawa, I was happy to be starting out life together. We were very fortunate to find a house on the river. It was being vacated by a fellow officer leaving Rockcliffe. I was happy

there as there were several people at the base we had known in England. Our social circle was ready made.

As my pregnancy progressed, I really missed my mother, in fact all my family. I did find a kind doctor. He knew I would need advice and told me I could call him anytime with concerns I may have. My son, Derek, was born on July ninth, an extremely hot day. When I took my baby home I was pleased that when I was eleven years old I had helped take care of my youngest brother. The first few months of his life my mother had been ill. I had an aunt and uncle living on the Scarborough bluffs. I contacted them and they invited us for Christmas. I had only met them once but it was so nice to be with family. They were childless so loved the baby.

We had been in Ottawa fourteen months when Knowles was transferred to Lachine, Montreal. I was so disappointed to leave all our friends. We found an apartment near Loyola College in N.D.G. It was difficult to make friends with a baby in the picture. After V.J. Day, Knowles' thoughts turned to leaving the Air Force. He was offered a permanent position as the wireless operator mapping the northern regions. He declined. He wanted a more settled life, preferably in Nova Scotia.

Shortly before V.E. Day we moved to Dartmouth, and Knowles took training to be a Government Fishery Inspector. He liked the work but he was moved three times in just a few months and it looked likely to continue. I was staying with his parents. He resigned as we both thought it was time we bought a home and settled down.

We found an attractive bungalow on the outskirts of Yarmouth on two acres of land. It was lovely and we were fortunate to find it. Now Knowles had to decide what his future was going to be. He was brought up on a farm, but that was not an option. Before I agreed to become engaged I exacted a promise from Knowles that he would never be a farmer. That life never held any appeal for me. He bought a 38 foot fishing boat and equipment, hired a man and went lobster fishing. He did well but did not want to do it on a permanent basis.

In 1950 my daughter, Debra, was born. Our family was now complete.

Knowles had been doing a lot of landscape gardening and business was increasing. When some rather derelict greenhouses - 75,000 square feet, became available we decided it might be a good investment. We worked incredibly hard to build up the business. After nearly two years, when the future was beginning to look bright, a fire burned out the shop and parts of two greenhouses. Wiring that had not been replaced was the

cause of the fire. We were devastated, but decided later that it brought about a fortunate change. It was rebuilt as a retail business. I went to Hamilton to take a concentrated course at the Canadian School of Floral Art. It extended our business, which was successful for thirty years. I loved the work and the contact with the public.

Meanwhile we built a house next door to the business. We decided to try and be successful by being available at all hours, being honest and giving value for money - it worked!

When we had a shop on Main Street, the children were teenagers and we had two, then three, employees. I decided I would do some voluntary work. I had been in a choral group, the church choir, I.O.D.E. (Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire), Home and School and Lionettes. Both Knowles and I had been curling and golfing since the early sixties and been in Provincial Competitions. It was now time to get involved.

I was asked to write what I considered to be accomplishments in my life. I will simply list them. Of course my family and sharing our business are the most important. Next would be:

President & Secretary of Yarmouth Ladies Curling Association
President & Match Chairman of Yarmouth Ladies Gold Club
Member of Yarmouth Recreation Committee
Zone Chairman for N.S. Ladies Curling Association
President for N.S. Ladies Curling Association
Chairman for N.S. Curling Association Provincial Championship
Member of the Board of Sport Nova Scotia
Delegate to the Canadian Ladies Curling Association, later elected to the board
President of Canadian Ladies Curling Association
Chairman of Curl Canada (Curling in Canada)
Representative at the Olympic Trials and the Ladies World Championship
Joined the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame Board
Chairman of the Selection Committee
Devised a system of evaluation (which is still in use)
Induced into the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame.

In Nova Scotia I joined the Board of the Nova Scotia Hall of Fame for three years then came back to Yarmouth to be with the Yarmouth Area Sport Heritage Association. I have been with the S.P.C.A. for twenty five years - I love animals! These days I enjoy playing duplicate bridge and belong to the oldest book club in Canada. Yes, I did have time for my family.

We retired from our business several years ago but the shop still has our name. I lost my husband in 2004 and life will never be the same again. I miss him so much, however I am fortunate to have many happy memories. I am going to England in April 2006 and part of the time there will be a sentimental journey.