

Loose Threads

“Forever is composed of nows.” – Emily Dickinson

Gerry Madigan

21 January 2020

Acknowledgments:

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The editors and family of Merle Taylor ***“Until the Cows Come Home: Memoirs of Merle Taylor (pp. 23-49). (2013).*** Halifax, NS: Quadrule Services Inc.”; and

Nick Devaux **“The Log Book”** on the life and service of his father Cyril Devaux at <https://www.facebook.com/lucianlogbook/>

Dr. Katie Edwards, Assistant Professor English StFX University, **“Every Child Should Have A Chance”**, 2018-19 St FX Impact Report

Gerry (GD) Madigan, CD, MSc, MA is a retired logistician, Canadian Armed Forces. Major (Retired) Madigan’s career spanned 28 Years as a finance officer. His notable postings included time served at National Defence Headquarters, CFB Europe, Maritime Canada and The First Gulf War as comptroller in Qatar. He is a graduate of Saint Francis Xavier University (BSc), McGill University (MSc) and the Royal Military College of Canada (Master of Arts War Studies).

Introductions

Melodie and I were visiting our daughter Janice, and her family in January 2018 when I received an email from the Guysborough Journal. It was a request from a Mr. Nick Devaux of Castries, St Lucia who said:

“I would be most grateful if you could forward this email onto Mr. Madigan on my behalf since he wrote an article on Morris O'Hara who captained the Lady Nelson which was torpedoed in Castries during WWII.

The first attachment below describes the matter I wish to discuss with Mr. Madigan. The other attachment is from a related project that I am working on that may be of interest to Mr. Madigan.

I would be most grateful for your assistance.”

My story on the loss of the Lady Nelson during the Second World War had only recently been published. Regrettably, I had to disable the email on my website, so Nick had to relay his request through the Guysborough Journal.

One thing led to another, and apart from his interest in the Lady Nelson, Nick was also working on his own project, The Log Book; concerning his father, Cyril Devaux's wartime service.



Project Logbook with permission – Cyril Devaux

Cyril Devaux was born on 19 February 1920 in St. Lucia, at the time a British Colony. In 1943, he left the West Indies for Alberta, Canada, and commenced training with the RAF in January 1944. In October that year, he earned his Pilot's Flying Badge and subsequently relocated to England where he was initially stationed at Sywell in Northampton. With the war rapidly closing in Europe however, Devaux was not assigned to engage the enemy. He therefore successfully sought a transfer to the Fleet Air Arm in order to serve in the Pacific. In July 1945, he was posted to Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) Henstridge where he flew the iconic Seafire (Spitfires modified for aircraft carrier service). The atomic bombing and surrender of Japan in August 1945 meant that Devaux was never deployed into combat however he continued to fly with the RNAS until May 1946, serving out his final months with 720 Squadron at Ford Sussex. After his discharge he returned to the West Indies where he rose to the level of Managing Director with Barclays Bank PLC, raising ten children with his wife Norah, before his retirement in 1980. He died on 6 February 1997; his tombstone reads “a noble man”.

Starting in 2016, some 70 years after Devaux's last flight entry, a random sample of war veterans and civilian witnesses who lived and served through one of history's darkest chapters, was asked to autograph Devaux's RCAF pilot log book. A document summarizing their remarkable experiences, annotated with the log book's own journey as it travels the world obtaining signatures, is in progress. It is hoped that future generations who encounter the book and the compilation of testimonies, will appreciate the unspeakable horrific suffering and deprivation experienced by millions - on all sides - during World War II and the need to strive continuously for peace and reconciliation. This token is therefore dedicated to all who suffered incalculable and irreplaceable losses and to those who served in order to purchase the freedoms so often taken for granted today.

Nick requested my assistance in circulating the book, but I was totally committed to several projects, so Nick's project happened to remain as one loose thread on my desk for a time. But then my desk and outstanding projects (two books and several articles) cleared by June 2019 , so I contacted Nick, offering my assistance.

Nick asked if I knew any surviving WWII veterans who might be interested in signing the book. I enquired of several organizations on his behalf, but no names were put forward. I happened to pick one small volume off my own library shelf and re-read a passage from; "Until the Cows Come Home – Memoirs of Merle Taylor". As I re-read these passages, I realized that much of Merle and Fred's wartime service met Nick's criteria for inclusion in his project, The Log Book.

I approached my niece, Krista Ghanekar Taylor, one of two granddaughters/editors of this fine book to inquire if her grandmother might be interested in signing The Log Book, to add to its collected stories. And so it was, Merle agreed and the Log Book, once it made its rounds to veterans in France, Belgium and the UK for the 75th Anniversary of D-Day, was finally dispatched to me January 2020 for her signature.

Merle and Fred's story begins like many threads of their time, with Canada declaring war on Germany, 10th September 1939. It has been remembered by many Canadians not only as the day Canada went to war, but also as the day that ended the misery of the Great Depression.

The Thread of the Canadian Experience

The 10th of September 1939 marked a change of circumstances for many Canadians whose lives were to change forever. On a personal note, my father Vincent recalled Canada's declaration of war that day. He was playing pick-up baseball in Montreal, as one of the younger kids chosen to fill in the field, so the older boys could play a game.

It was common enough to see young and old coming together, filling in time, waiting for the next job, which were not plentiful. Time weighed heavily for the older unemployed lads. There was little else to do but play ball.

For the younger ones, it was a time to impress and to earn respect of the older boys. The ballfield was a field of honour, through which sports was a time to forget the misery of the Depression, a time to enjoy a rare moment of pleasure and comradery.

Vincent remembered a wonderful afternoon. The air filled with the sound of joy, the bravado of sport, the crack of the bat as the boys played on that afternoon. But there was an ominous air on the horizon.

Word came down that very afternoon that Canada had declared war on Germany. It was as if a wet blanket dampened their exuberance and smothered their youthful joy at play. A sombre grim determination descended upon the group gathered there. The field was immediately cleared of the older players who left and proceeded en-masse to join up at local recruiting centres.

The younger boys found themselves suddenly abandoned. Vincent remembered it surreally and happening so fast. An ominous silence pervaded as a sense of profound loss descended upon him; one that was soon felt by many Canadian families during the war. It was the loss of innocence and of peaceful times. The loose threads of a lost peace would soon tie many inextricably to the path of war in which great sacrifice and service occurred.

With that declaration came a mass migration of Canada's young, beginning with many heading off towards recruiting centres. Canada's swift mobilization for war manifested itself by the ground swell across the provinces in the hurry to join up.

But at the highest levels of government, there remained great concern for how deeply Canada would become involved. At the time, the declaration of war also meant the end of the Great Depression. It was not clear then though, but the impact saw full employment coming soon across the land, and with that, came the end of the Depression. Prosperity came, something not felt in a generation!

Canada's commitment to war in September 1939 was of great concern to Prime Minister Mackenzie King. King set expectations and limits to Canada's participation from the onset. King, like many Canadians, had little desire or thirst for the role of "active" service for the armed forces. The open sores of the Great War were still far too fresh for many who had lived through it and remembered its lingering horrors all too well.

King wished to limit Canadian participation as much as possible.¹ It matched the public's desire at least at the very beginning of the war. Canadians wished to be supportive yet, without the full engagement in all aspects of war. The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) was designed as the sop to that end.

¹ Pierre Berton, *The Great Depression - 1929-1939* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2001), pg., 499



Project Logbook with permission – Cyril Devaux RAF BCATP Trainee

The plan was cast as Canada's major contribution that would contribute materially but limit its military participation. Canada became the "aerodrome of democracy", responsible for the training of Allied aircrews in safety on Canadian soil that brought the threads of many young lives from across the Empire and world to Canada. ²

On 17 December 1939, three and a half months after the declaration of Canadian hostilities, Mackenzie King signed the BCATP act into being. Coincidentally, the 17th was also Mackenzie King's birthday.³ King's desire for limited participation came to naught though. Canadian armed forces eventually became engaged in total war as hostilities progressed.

Mobilization of Canada's economy happened under extremely tight deadlines. In fact, there was a flurry of activity involving the Army, Navy and Air Force. The confluence of these activities brought Canada ever closer to total war in 1939 despite the prevailing opinion for a limited war. And so, it came to pass that not only did Canada's young men sign up to serve, but also its young woman too! Merle McIntyre, a young woman at the prime of her life, would soon follow many young Canadian men and women serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force. It was an event that changed her young life, and her destiny.

Merle's life and times were lovingly recorded by her family in *Until the Cows Come Home: Memoirs of Merle Taylor*. (2013). Halifax, NS: Quadrule Services Inc. The following is the story of Fred and Merle, as remembered and retold by her sons and edited by her granddaughters.

Merle's Story excerpts from "Until the Cows Come Home: Memoirs of Merle Taylor"

By the spring of 1942, the Second World war had ravaged most of Europe. As with so many young Canadians at this rather great time at our history, Merle was trying to find a way to contribute in a meaningful way to the war effort.⁴ *She had good family reasons for doing so.*

"My dad was the eldest of grandma Scarfe's first family and Uncle Sandy Horne was the youngest in her second family. We had never met Uncle Sandy until he came to the farm at

² F.J. Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1983), 1-2

³ Ibid Hatch, pg.1

⁴ Wartime. In *Until the Cows Come Home: Memoirs of Merle Taylor* (pp. 23-49). (2013). Halifax, NS: Quadrule Services Inc. pg. 23-49 (starts this entire section was extracted and use with permission of the authors)

Centre School to say goodbye. He was a wireless air gunner and had been posted overseas; he looked impressive and very handsome in his uniform. Uncle Sandy had planned on getting married the previous year, but his mother had objected to the marriage. However, as his mother had died during the winter, he now planned on getting married and taking his bride to the East Coast on their honeymoon.”



*Merle Taylor and Gerry Madigan - Log Book Signing
23 January 2020*

Merle’s recollection of a family loved one leaving for far distant shores and battlefields, was one sentiment and memory shared by many Canadian families during the Second World War. It is a recollection of loved ones leaving for overseas; where some regrettably, never returned home, and in which, they were lost to their loved ones forever. She continued her final recollections of her Uncle Sandy with;

“Once on the East Coast he would then take leave of his new wife and board a ship bound for England and the war. It was very sad for all of us to bid him farewell and the image of Uncle Sandy leaving the farm was vividly etched into my mind forever.”

By the summer of 1942, Merle began to finalise plans to join the RCAF WD (Royal Canadian Air Force, Women's Division) in the fall. One of her good friends, Elsie Gardner, had joined that spring as a cook and was posted to Jarvis, Ontario. Elsie was very encouraging as she was enjoying her experience in the military.

Merle decided that now was the time to put her plans into action. This was Merle’s second return to the recruiting centre. Her first trip was with her friend Elsie Gardiner in the spring of 1942. She had no interest in the careers open to her the first time around. So, she elected to stay and work on the farm at three cents an hour for one more summer. Elsie joined up as a cook. But after the summer, she had her father take her to the corner, where she could catch the bus to travel the 28 miles to the recruiting centre in Winnipeg. Once at the recruiting centre, Merle studied the list of careers that were available to women wishing to enter the military at that time.



With Permission of the Taylor Family

“You could be a motor transit driver, a medical assistant, a meteorologist in the tower, a cook or a wireless operator ground bracket (WOG). The position of WOG had just recently been added as many wireless air gunners were being killed in the mission's over Germany. These air gunners were being replaced by male WOGs as they were already fluent in Morse code. In turn, the vacant WOG positions were opened to women.”

With the image of her uncle Sandy in his airmen uniform still fresh in her memory, Merle immediately applied for the WOG position. She returned home and waited for word from the recruiting office.

In short order, she was asked to come back to the recruiting office and write an aptitude test to determine if she was capable of carrying out the duties of a WOG - the main requirement was the ability to take Morse code. In October, Merle received word that she had passed the test and was accepted as a wireless operator. She was to report to Rockcliffe, Ontario where she completed basic training.

On hearing the news of Merle's acceptance, her uncle Sandy sent a telegram on the 24th of December 1942. It read, “Merle, congratulations on choice. Seasons greetings. Letter to follow. Love uncle Sandy.”

Merle did extremely well on her WOG course at Number One Wireless School in Montreal. There were 52 students in Merle's class, and 27 of those students graduated. The remainder of the class either failed or were put back to the next class to repeat the entire course. Overall, Merle finished third in her class.

But it wasn't all work and no play for Merle. She fondly remembered her first Christmas in the RCAF. Merle had made plans to return to her home for her first Christmas leave and spend that time with her family. She was so looking forward to it, but it wasn't meant to be.

In the days where no ATMs existed, and the scepticism of banks accepting cheques, military personnel were often paid in cash and were responsible for making their own arrangements for the safekeeping of their funds. Service men and women were well remunerated for the time. So, it happened that Merle received her Christmas pay, broken into two parts; earned pay, plus two weeks of unearned pay to cover her time on leave and her return to work. Her purse was flush with cash. However, it was momentarily left unattended and she was robbed.

Merle was crestfallen. However, her life long friend, Elsie Gardiner then posted to Jarvis, Ontario, much closer than her home in Manitoba, saved the day. Merle and Elsie had known

each other since they were six years old, where they attended Centre School in Manitoba together. Elsie had joined the service in the spring of 1942 and was a cook, at Jarvis, Ontario.

Elsie suggested that Merle spend Christmas with her. But Merle had no money, or ready cash. She scrambled and went through her things and found 50 cents! It was surprisingly just enough money to get her to Jarvis. Christmas was saved and Merle said; "it was the best Christmas ever!"

The perpetrator of the stolen money was never found, nor the money returned to Merle. That wasn't the end of the affair though. True to the spirit of service, and after her return from Jarvis, word soon went around the barracks. Her mates took up a collection for her and then presented Merle with \$15 from her fellow service women.

And so, the loose threads in Merle's life, ensured that she was not alone, nor forgotten, and that the season was made merry. In fact, it was, and still is, the service way. We're all part of a big family and family helps when needs must, in what is today known as the service ethos of "I got your back."



With Permission of the Taylor Family Merle and Her lifelong friend, Elsie Gardiner

Merle was anxious to write her mother and father about her new posting in Montreal. So, one day, she went to the Recreation Hall, purchased ink and stationery, and found an empty desk on one side of the many large marble pillars that were located in the hall. She noticed an airman busy writing at the desk on the opposite side of the pillar.

This airman turned out to be her future husband Fred Taylor.

Merle recounts their meeting; "As I was busy writing, the airman, who turned out to be a nice-looking chap, approached me and asked me if he could borrow some ink, as his fountain pen had run out. I informed him that I had a new bottle and he was welcome to some ink. He thanked me and said that not only was the ink new, but I was also new. When he finished writing the letter, he

asked me if I would mind mailing it for him when I went to post my letter. He asked me my name and informed me that his name was Frank MacDonald.

The next night, I returned to the recreation hall and noticed Frank on a couch talking to an attractive woman. After the woman left, Frank approached me and asked if I would like to go to a movie the next night. I was somewhat taken aback, but I agreed to go to the movie.

The movie theatre was located approximately one-half mile from the school and as we were



With Permission of the Taylor Family

walking home, Frank informed me that his name was not Frank MacDonald, but it was Fred Taylor. Fred apologised and explained to me, that was a habit of airmen, not to give their proper names to women who they had just met. It was a joke that has always provided much laughter when recalled in later years.”

On May 26, 1943 Fred graduated as a wireless electric mechanic (WEM). He was posted to Number 3 Service Training Flying School in Calgary. By the time he left on the train for his posting, he and Merle had already been making plans to be married.

Merle was one of the top students in Morse code who graduated that June. She was posted to the east coast at a base in Halifax where her talents could be utilised. She and Fred we're going to be at a considerable distance apart. Merle approached the officer in charge and asked if it would be possible to have a posting closer to Fred in Calgary. The officer arranged a posting exchange for Merle with the girl who had been posted to Number 4 Service Flying School in Saskatoon.

Fred and Merle decided to get married on August the second 1943 which was Merle's 20th birthday. Merle returned to work in Saskatoon. She discovered that she had been posted to England. She now had a difficult choice to make as an overseas posting held considerable appeal to her. She realised that should she accept this posting, there was a chance that her relationship with Fred would come to an end. After some deliberation, Merle returned to Calgary to seal the deal, *where she and Fred were married.*

In Calgary, Fred and Merle found a minister in the phone book and made necessary arrangements with him over the phone. Fred picked up Merle at the YWCA where she was staying. As Merle came down the stairs, there was a girl playing a piano in the lobby. Quite appropriately, the song she was playing was “The bells are ringing for me and my gal”. To this day, the memory of this song still gives Merle goosebumps.

Merle returned to her instructor's position in Saskatoon, after having made the decision that she would leave the military as soon as possible. It was a difficult decision, but she really enjoyed contributing to our country, and her duties in the service. However, Merle did not have to wait long for a reason to leave as she realised that she was pregnant. In October, the Air Force made it official on December the eighth 1943 by advising her that “her services were no longer required.”

Merle move to Calgary where she delivered a son to Fred in June 1944. Fred and Merle decided to call their baby Alexander (Sandy) after Fred's maternal grandfather Alexander Archibald, and

Merle's uncle, Sandy Horne, whose visit to the farm at Centre School had inspired Merle to join the military. Sadly, Merle's uncle did not survive the war as he was shot down while on a mission over Germany and reported missing in action on December 26, 1943.

Merle's uncle Sandy was amongst a vast score of names published daily in newspapers across Canada, documenting their heroism, service, devotion to duty, and deaths throughout the Second World War.

On April 10th, 1945 Merle had appendicitis and her appendix was removed. The next day, Fred was advised that he had been posted overseas. He went to the hospital and delivered the news to Merle. He explained that he was to leave in 3 days and that he would be travelling to Halifax by train in order to catch a troop ship to England. Merle and Sandy travelled to Nova Scotia with Fred as they would be staying with Fred's parents, William and Lottie, during his overseas posting.

Fred finally returned from England aboard the Mauritania, arriving in Halifax January 16th, 1946. Merle joined the excited crowd welcoming home soldiers and airmen, some of whom had been overseas much longer than Fred. Nevertheless, they were certainly happy to be back together and hurried down to *Lochaber, NS to begin life anew.*⁵

A Hope and Promise for a Better Future

In the aftermath of the war, the government learned a very valuable lesson from the BCATP experience. Defence spending brought prosperity. Government had a role to play through policies that enhanced and sustained the economy. So too, did the private sector.

At the back of their minds loomed the recent experience of the Great Depression and the harsh public censure that the government received in its laissez faire approach to managing that disaster.⁶ Nobody wished to endure that ever again!

The experience of war brought great privations, trials and tragedy. But it also brought prosperity and jobs. A vast industrial complex and expansion created by increased defence spending, generated demand for labour and war production. The policy led to full employment.

In some ways the war restored the Nation's confidence, hope, and prosperity, that negated what was simply lost during the Great Depression. It was not lost on the government that Defence spending stimulated Canada's moribund economy. It was this revelation that was the

⁵ Ibid Wartime. In *Until the Cows Come Home: Memoirs of Merle Taylor* (2013). Ends here

⁶ Alexander Brady and F.R. Scott, **Canada After the War – Studies in Political, Social, and Economic Policies for Post-War Canada**, The Canadian Institute of International Affairs, The Macmillan Company of Canada Lt, Toronto, 1945 (@1943), Pg. 3,

catalyst for a new view on fiscal management and for social policy development in post war Canada.

A country that had been unable to find work or succour for about one fifth of its population during the Dirty 30's and Great Depression, suddenly and miraculously found work for all during the war! And "All" included women, young boys, girls, and old men.⁷ The War was truly an economic miracle that had not gone unnoticed!⁸

Government spending was widely and broadly felt across all reaches of Canada, especially Nova Scotia. In the post war, the government would not allow a back slide to the ways and old times and policies of the Great Depression.

Defence spending on the RCAF, Army, and Royal Canadian Navy during the war had a huge bearing toward the development of economic policies after the war. There was a certain hope on the government's part that the sacrifice invested would make Canadians the happiest people on earth.

Still hope, confidence, and prospects remained high. There was a prosperous economic outlook despite the large industrial drawdowns in war production and the rapid demobilization of Canada's armed forces.

Canadian exports were far above the level required for full employment in 1946 and were forecasted to remain so. But the government thought a buffer was necessary to ease the future transition to a peace time economy. Many measures were taken to ease any transition that prevented social dislocation such as the institution of unemployment insurance plans and social welfare policies.⁹

⁷ ibid Pierre Berton, **The Great Depression - 1929-1939**, 2001, pg. 503-504

⁸ Ibid Alexander Brady and F.R. Scott, 1945 (@1943), Pg. 3

"if we are not now to take thought for the future, we can expect nothing but backsliding to the bad old ways of the inter-war period. As to the claim that thinking of the post-war future slackens the war effort, nothing could be more paltry. People are bound to think of the future. Only the promise of better things to come sustains us in war. If this promise is not to be frustrated and our high hopes disappointed, we must be prepared to discuss now in a realistic manner the modifications of our institutions necessary to fulfil man's aspirations for a "better world".¹

⁹ a. Ibid Alexander Brady and F.R. Scott, 1945 (@1943),

b. Kenneth C. Cragg, [Far-Reaching System Told By Mackenzie](#), Globe and Mail, 17 March 1943, Canadian War Museum Archives, accession number 100-006-005 149 War European 1939 Canada Post War Social

But the reality of the hope for the future of the government's policies were also tempered by the fiscal realities many veterans faced on their return to civilian life after the war. It wasn't to be a bed of roses, but a struggle to pick up their lives and get on where they left off.

It happened that as Fred was shipped overseas and crossing the Atlantic, peace was declared. The war was over, and Fred spent some time in England before making his way back home.

Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5063669>

Accessed: 19 April 2012

c. Anon., [SOCIAL CHANGES REQUIRE MOST INTELLIGENT STUDY](#), Hamilton Spectator, 22 March 1944, Canadian War Museum Archives, accession number 100 017 004, 149 War European 1939 Canada Post War Social Whitton

Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5063723>

Accessed 19 April 2012

d. Anon., [Postwar Planning Information](#), Saturday Night, 16 May 1944, Canadian War Museum Archives, accession number 100-017-003, 149 European 1939 Canada Post War Social

Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5063722>

Accessed: 19 April 2012

e. Anon., [The Political Implications Of Family Allowances](#), Toronto Telegram, 20 July 1944, Canadian War Museum Archives, accession number 084 016 019, 149 War European 1939 Canada Labour Family Bonus

Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5053637>

Accessed: 19 April 2012

f. Charlotte Whitton, C.B.E., [We're Off To Social Security Confusion](#), Saturday Night, 29 March 1945, Canadian War Museum Archives, accession number 100 017 002, 149 War European 1939 Canada Post War Social Whitton

Source: <http://collections.civilisations.ca/warclip/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=5063721>

Accessed: 19 April 2012

Fred eventually returned home from England on the Mauritania, arriving in Halifax 16 January 1946.

Happily reunited, Fred and Merle sought opportunities for the future. One was a desire to own a farm to raise a family on. They looked to Lochaber, NS and discovered one property that suited their needs.

Home was Lochaber, outside of Antigonish – where he and Merle had saved about a thousand dollars and worked furiously to save another thousand. When they bought Glen Hill Farm in 1946, they had a year to pay the remainder of the three thousand-dollar purchase price. Their farm is located at the north end of Lochaber Lake, flowing into a tributary to the St Mary’s River at its southern end. The property of 225 acres of land, came with farm buildings, hens, and six milking cows.¹⁰

“That year was a struggle,” Merle recalled. It was further complicated by Fred who had to have a kidney removed. He was sent to Halifax for medical treatment and remained there for the whole winter.¹¹

The Taylor family like many others following the war, struggled. The first ten years of farm ownership was “hard,” as an almost complete lack of money. But through hard work and, through the dint of perseverance, not only did the farm grow, but their family too!

The family’s situation bettered as a result of Fred’s involvement in local politics, that eventually saw him working as property assessor with a steady salary. Fred’s work in town meant that Merle, who had an eye for business, ran the farm. That enterprise prospered too!

Sadly, Fred died of cancer in 1982, shortly after retiring. He was only 63. Fred’s philosophy was that although he’d had a short life, it had been “an awful good one.”¹²

Community Service

Education was a mutual interest; for the couple, especially as found nearby was St Francis Xavier University (StFX). All five boys were educated there, and graduated in order: Sandy ‘65/66, Lloyd ‘84, Keith ‘71, Sidney ‘74, and James ‘76.¹³

Merle and Fred’s community spirit and generosity were recently recognized by the Xaverian Community in their 2018-2019 impact report – A Celebration of Xaverian Generosity. Dr. Katie Edwards, Assistant Professor English StFX University recounted Merle’s Fred’s devotion to StFX:

¹⁰ Dr. Katie Edwards, Assistant Professor English StFX University., “**Every Child Should Have A Chance**”, 2018-19 St FX Impact Report - A Celebration of Xaverian Generosity, pg. 8-9

¹¹ Ibid Dr. Katie Edwards, “Every Child Should Have A Chance”

¹² Ibid Dr. Katie Edwards, “Every Child Should Have A Chance”

¹³ Ibid Dr. Katie Edwards, “Every Child Should Have A Chance”

“Although Fred has passed on, Merle ensures his legacy is still strong. Almost immediately after his passing, she established the Fred L. Taylor Award, a bursary for StFX students enrolled in science from Antigonish or Guysborough counties. Merle has been so happy to hear from its recipients over the years.

“Really” she says, “Fred was so interested in young people having an education.”

Merle knows what it’s like to struggle, and certainly knows the value of a dollar. But, she still somehow found \$500 every year to help send a student to StFX.

“I wanted every child to have a chance, regardless of what their parents had,” she says. “And Fred would have wanted it, too.””¹⁴

But Merle’s legacy goes way beyond funding bursaries. Hers is also a legacy of community service and activism. She amongst others saw not only the building of a community curling rink, but also a rebuild of a new community hall that has since become a world class place for competitive rowing, sculling and canoe racing. Merle has been a most active member of her community, always looking to its needs and betterment.

Merle continues to live on her own in her own home and is quite the remarkable and gracious host at the tender age of 95. She still bakes her own daily bread and puts down her own stocks of strawberry preserves and mustard pickles which are well renowned and that have won their fair share of prizes at local fairs. We shared a fair sampling of that abundance with a tea, bread and homemade jam on the day of our interview. And we weren’t allowed to leave her without a sampling of both in hand to take home with us.

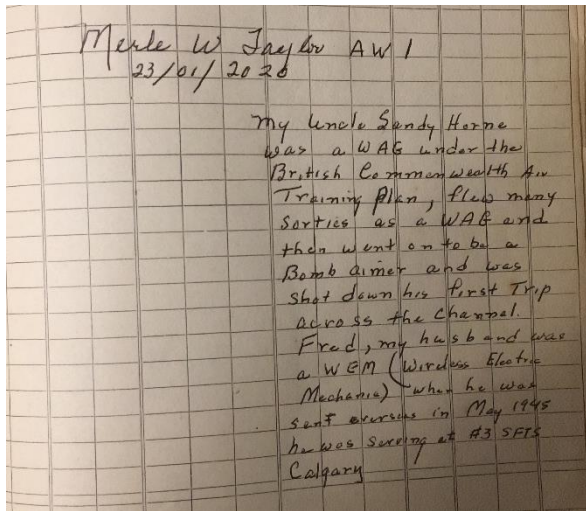
Merle’s proudest legacy though is her grandchildren and their accomplishments who photographs proudly adorn her living room. That is the satisfaction of her sacrifices along the way and lives well lived.

A Tapestry of Loose Threads

A fine web of humanity was expended during World War Two, some of which left gaping holes in the fabric of time and family, who suffered severe hardship as a consequence. Our attention would be tragically misplaced if we do not consider the sacrifices of the families too! Merle remembered the sacrifice of her Uncle Sandy Horne who was recently married before his posting overseas. The young couple honeymooned in Halifax before Sandy bid his fond goodbyes to his bride. He served one tour overseas as a Wireless Air Gunner, but subsequently re-mustered and trained as an air bomb aimer, another dangerous role. Sadly, Sandy was killed

¹⁴ Ibid Dr. Katie Edwards, “Every Child Should Have A Chance”

in action on his very first mission over mainland Europe reported missing 26 December 1943. It was a very sad Christmas for Merle, as she was very aware of the loss not only of her loved one, but that of his bride as well.



Merle's Annotation Project Log Book 23 Jan 2020

Our young men and women played a very important role, whose service was marked by a singular devotion to duty. It was in these small threads that placed many young men and women at the crossroads of time, place, and history. Their sacrifice, immutable from events, is sadly, often lost upon us today in the scope of its tragic consequences. And for those who survived, their contributions are often forgotten and buried in time.

No one theatre was more important than another based on the scale of lives lost or service rendered. Sacrifices were made everywhere. Like a tapestry we tend to focus on the larger motifs

in looking at past events, as they often seem the most important, for in them lie the dominant features of a story.

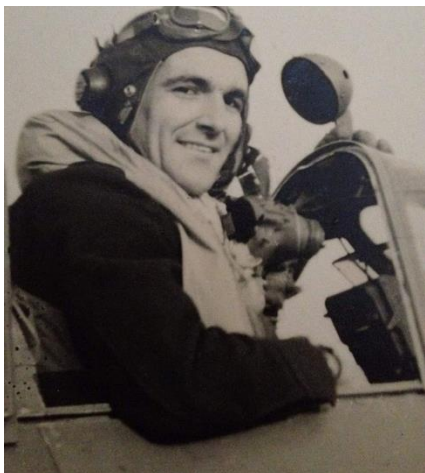
But a tapestry is also made up of smaller pixels. Those smaller patterns tell a tale, without which, the total story is incomplete. From these small threads where lives cross comes the fabric that yields the larger picture. And threads and colour seldom run linearly when shading the tale.

Enter the Log Book: a 4 year journey of seeking threads as humble tokens of remembrance for which Nick Devaux of St. Lucia has gathered over 80 signatures from around the world in his father's RCAF log book. Each representing either eyewitness accounts of the horrors or of remarkable service during that period.



Merle Taylor Presented the Log Book for her signature on behalf of Mr. Nick Devaux 23 Jan 2020

The book has travelled along a route determined through current news items or word of mouth references. There was no restriction in scope, rather Nick hoped to secure differing perspectives from as many sides of the conflict as possible. As destructive and horrific as WWII was, it forced record models of human development and mobilization that still stand. Beyond the battlefields and extermination camps, WWII affected every aspect of life as we know it today. As varied as the signatory's stories are, theirs are but single tiny threads within a sprawling vast WWII tapestry of experiences, stories, discoveries and advances that has and still shapes our world today.



The Log Book with permission

Along the way however, Nick realised that those who influenced his father's service were represented by the flight instructors and officers who had signed The Log Book in the course of duty. On a personal level, he began hoping to establish at least one modern day direct link to his father's WWII journey. Nick was therefore elated to find that connection in Merle's life story published in "Until the Cows Come Home". It appears that his father and Merle's late husband, Fred were stationed at No. 3 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) during the same period as confirmed in the Log Book in his father's own writing "28 April to November 1944". Nick expounds "Here at last, is a tangible connection!" Coincidentally, it appears that both men transferred to the

UK around the same time in April 1945. Life threads do indeed cross!

Nick wrote to Mrs. Taylor on her service in a letter that accompanied the Log Book for her signature, stating "As top student/graduate Wireless Operator Ground Bracket (WOG), posted to Halifax, and later to No. 4 SFTS, your determination to contribute bears witness to a legacy of selfless service," an astute deduction that has been the hallmark of Merle and Fred's lives and legacy recognized by many in Antigonish and Guysborough Counties.

Nick went on to say, “There is a duty to ensure that records like yours and Mr. Taylor’s and the ultimate sacrifice of your uncle, Sandy Horne, KIA over Germany 26 December 1943, are eternally recognized.”

Perhaps such threads help explain the smaller motifs in the tapestry of our lives and the sacrifices that were necessary and required to achieve total victory. The sacrifices found in the smaller profiles of the living should not be ignored either. The seemingly unrelated loose threads of our lives often detail a tenure of public and civic service in a well-lived life; whose connections then, now are just as important today. Without them, the ends may have been totally different, for their lives made a difference.

For these and other stories **VISIT:**

<https://www.facebook.com/lucianlogbook/> to follow the journey of the Log Book; and

The latest on-line additions to <https://madiganstories.com/> concerning Nova Scotia’s Military History