

Transcript of interview conducted January 10 2018

Interviewee: HEATHER SPEAR (HS)

Interviewer: JAREK ZABA (JZ)

Phone call from London, England to Toronto, Canada

Transcription: JAREK ZABA and REBECCA DOGGWILER

[00:30] HS: OK. Certainly I would say that my parents were very typical of that generation in that it seemed that the place meeting was in dance halls. And they – my brother and I were trying to find the place and I actually found a tiny little diary of hers. It was about the size of a matchbox where she talks of meeting my dad and at the Palais. And they – I think it was the Palais de Royale – but they definitely used the French word instead of palace. It was palais. And so you have made already come across that in your research but there seemed to be the main source of entertainment. That and the movie houses during the wartime for couples to meet. And my parent's story I think was probably fairly typical in that they would – the ladies would all get dressed up to go to the Palais. Palace. And the servicemen would go there in their uniforms and would meet up to dance. We have several books that have been written about war brides and all that sort of thing. Unfortunately they're all in Ottawa and it sounds to me like you've probably found all those kind of things. There's all kinds of pictures of these servicemen and English ladies dancing. Now my parents – the story is that my mum was there with a couple of girlfriends wearing a red dress. And my dad arrived into the hall and according to him he set his sights on her right away. And asked her and she – he was tall and Canadian, very young. 20 years old, 21 I guess. She was 18. And the first thing she said to him was 'well soldier, how you gonna dance with those boots on?' Cause he had his big army boots on. And because my father had learned to dance back in Canada – and I don't remember how or why except that at the high school he went to which is one I actually went to as well dancing was part of the gym programme, the PE programme – so he knew how to dance. And that apparently was quite unusual – like he really did know how to dance. He knew how to do foxtrots and waltzes and all that sort of thing. So I think she was quite smitten with him and it was him because of that. And that they say was the beginning and – so they – the Palais – I looked at my mum's diary – was a regular thing. So even after they had met and started to – going out, that was a regular meeting place. And the soldiers and their girlfriends would all meet there. And another thing that was interesting was that these soldiers – now my dad was a Canadian soldier – you mentioned GIs so – the – my aunt, my mother's sister, met an American GI. And so both sisters ended up marrying servicemen from over here. And with my aunt actually – the story was a little bit different in that her boyfriend, my uncle, went back to the United States. And they corresponded by letters, which was the only way to do it then. And at one point – and they'd only met – known each other for a very short time. He actually sent her an engagement ring through the mail. And my mother talked about her receiving this little package and sitting – my aunt sitting at the table and just very quietly putting this ring on her finger. And she was officially engaged and – so – and for my parents I think it was maybe a year they went out. And then people got married fairly quickly then. Because they didn't – well they just – they just didn't know, right? So they tended to get married very quickly. In terms of the sort of the music part – one of the questions I wanted to ask you is have you been in touch with Vera Lynn and Vera Lynn's family?

[05:34] JZ: I have not. I wasn't even sure if Vera Lynn was still about to be perfectly honest with you.

HS: Well she is. And the reason I'm mentioning her is she's just celebrated her 100th birthday. And my – and she is still – and was widely celebrated, there was a whole CBC thing about her. She and my mum in later years actually became friends. And she was an idol of that generation. She was just two years older and all the war brides here used to think of her as their sort of [pause] she was kind of their leader in a way. And the gentlemen thought of her as the wartime sweetheart. So their music – her music was a big part of that era.

[06:35] JZ: And it wasn't just that it was – she wasn't just significant to your parents, she was significant to all of those wartime couples.

HS: Absolutely. That's correct. And so what happened in the later – very later years. Very – like really in the last maybe 15, 20 years – is that my mum would – started to be in touch with her. And they started exchanging correspondence. And my mum and dad actually visited her at her home and they became friends. And there was a correspondence going back and forth between these two ladies. And [pause] when my parents passed away Vera Lynn was informed and sent us a card and all that sort of thing. Anyway I have contact there, Jarek, if that's of any use to you. That's sort of my long story to let you know that I do have a personal contact there if that's of any help to you.

[07:40] JZ: Please, yes. Pass that on, absolutely. And we can – there's absolutely no harm in us trying to get in touch. If nothing else, we may get a quote or something along those lines. Yes that would be tremendously helpful. Thank you-

HS: Well what I will do, I think I have an email address for her. For her daughter with whom she lives now. And I could sort of send an email and just say are you open to this. I mean she gets requests all the time – they – even now they still do. But I thought that would be a kind of neat thing to add to your research.

[08:20] JZ: Absolutely. Even outside of this project just as a general music nerd that would be great for me personally.

HS: Well – just a wonderful wonderful story there. She played – seems to me that part of your research is not just what happened in the – from what you've said it's not just what happened in the wartime but did that sort of influence of that time continue on throughout their lives? And that is a very definite thing that happened with my parents. And with my mum and dad, when they – they got married I think as many of them do there with a sort of a dress bought from the butcher's daughter and the cake being sent over from Canada because nobody had enough rations to make it there. One of the layers of the cake being blown up in the ocean by torpedo – there's all kinds of wonderful stories like that. But in the end what happened is my dad was able to get her out of England and over – brought over on a boat over to Canada. And the ships – as you've I'm sure researched – were full of these war brides and very often children coming over from England. Over to Canada. My mum was one of the fortunate ones and I think

many of them were in that her man, my dad actually had a little legitimate life to offer her. Some of them came over to find that their men were already married or lived out west in the prairies in a sod house, had [nothing] to offer. There were some really – there's some real stories of the war brides that you may or may not be aware of that – it's a whole history of itself. That the warbride - of that warbride generation.

[10:33] JZ: Absolutely. I'm meeting someone this weekend actually who's sort of written a book that specialises on it. It's one of the last posts of my research so it's not something I've been able to look at in huge amount of details thus far. I have heard this idea that for some of the war brides it didn't quite work out the way it expected to on the other side.

HS: Oh some of them had terrible experiences. Terrible terrible. And I know mum had met one friend – made one friend on the boat coming over and she actually turned out to be a British spy. No, a French spy, I think she was French, I can't remember. But she ended up marrying a Canadian who was from Quebec I think, or Montreal. And this lady was a former spy so there was all kinds of interesting stories there but she ended up being one of the successful ones and had a very good marriage for a long time. But there were many stories of others that weren't so lucky. But -

[11:36] JZ: Sorry, I was just going to say. You mentioned these ships with – that were full of GI brides. How did that work in practice? Were these being snuck across the ocean or were these being sponsored to go across the ocean? How did that work?

HS: No they were all married. So they were married in England. And I guess that – the army made it possible for them to be brought over to Canada. But there were shiploads of them. So – and I mean my mum talked about not being able to tell her parents when she was leaving. It was an undercover event. And her dad took her to the train station as if she was just going on a little trip and she wasn't sort of allowed make a big deal of it. And he wasn't really supposed to know that she was leaving but of course everyone really knew. And then getting on these long long lines of war brides and sometimes these little children. These [pause] long trips across the ocean and being sick all of the time. They were – I'm sure there was a lot of interesting stories that would come out just from those trips. And some of the ships that make it – some of them were torpedoed. And – but she was one of the lucky ones. So when -

[Cross-talking]

[13:10] HS: I was just going to say when my mum came over she was – the kind of lady that my mum was, she was a leader. She was an organiser. And she – when she came over here, the Canadian government did its best to welcome these ladies and their children and I know in the house I will eventually find – she – I'm sure her ticket is there from the ship. And the books that the Canadian government on the terms that Canadians use to – that wouldn't be familiar to them. The day to day customs of the Canadians supposed to – what the British used. And so she – the WYCA here – the young womens association – I'm trying to remember how that happened now but they kind of made it possible for some of these war brides to get together. When they were here. And this was in Ottawa. So at that

time my mum was part of a group that organised – they were called the ESWIC group – E-S-W-I-C – England, Scotland, you've heard of that group have you?

[14:38] JZ: It was just in the article that was in the Ottawa Citizen that I mentioned.

HS: Yes that's right, that's right. So it was basically the British group of war brides. And it was meant to be a support group. And these women would get together and I remember them even as a child they would circulate to each other's homes. And they would bring their sewing or their knitting and they'd bring food and they were a support system. And Vera Lynn's music was a big part of their group. So she became – she was sort of their hero. Heroine I guess. And whenever they would get together they would play her music. And then as a married couple my parents – my dad was very musical. My dad actually was one of those self made musicians, he could play anything. And actually made a lot of instruments as well. So whenever there was get togethers my dad and mum were very much sort of the promoters of this sort of thing. And my dad would get the guitar out or the piano and they would have all these singsongs. And as a child I remember that. I know all of the songs of that generation. Because they were played in my home all the time. So that musical influence continued on at least in my home. I guess it sort of started – the fact his both my parents were interested it and because my dad was very musically inclined he kept it. He kept it going. As a child this group of women – and the men were invited as well, when they would have parties the men would be invited. And they would have these wonderful family gatherings. And a lot of times they did them at the British high commission. That became a part of their group. And right near the beginning, when I [audio cuts out] why – one of the British high commissioners, her name was Lady Clutterbuck. If you could remember – a name like that you never forget. Lady Clutterbuck and she met and my mum these other war brides and that was the start of the very long relationship with the British high commission. And every year all of the war brides - their children would be invited to Earncliffe in Ottawa which is the British high commissioner's home. And they would have these wonderful wonderful family parties and I - again I remember that as a child. Going and playing on the lawns of this - of beautiful home. And as recently as the summer my mum was still going there. So it was quite special and again - even going there Vera Lynn's music for example would be featured as part of that. And any party that we had always ended up with the ladies in a circle singing We'll Meet Again by Vera Lynn. Yeah, it was quite beautiful. I mean I have a sense of that history and that time more than other people my generation because I was - my parents were such a vital part of it. And made sure that we knew it - that we understood it and we are a part of it as well.

[18:36] JZ: Absolutely. You were ingrained of the whole culture of the time.

HS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And the stories that you saw in the newspaper - because my mum had always wanted to be a journalist and that - she never was given the opportunity to do formal schooling that way. But she was a natural writer so she - there's all kinds of writings back at their home and she would promote this group because she felt very strongly that the - that these British war brides - and they were thousands and thousands and thousands that came over here. She felt very strongly that they had a significant influence on the Canadian population and the Canadian way of life. And they - she and - and I think it's been borne out to my certain statistics. There was a lot of - their influence on Canadian culture was quite significant. And my mum actually received a medal from the Queen -

[19:45] JZ: Yes. An MBE I believe.

HS: That's right. Recognising her contribution to keeping the connection between England and Canada.

[19:56] JZ: It's remarkable. That thing you mentioned just now about the influence that the brides had on Canadian culture. It's so interesting because we're looking at the reverse, we're looking at when the North Americans came to us and what impact that had on our culture. And I guess we haven't really been thinking about it from the reverse principle - what happened when they went back over that side.

HS: It is very true. You have to understand - I mean I remember some of the war brides talking about coming over and finding Canada very young. And very naive in many ways. They didn't have the big buildings that London had. And they didn't have the sophisticated societies. We were a very young colony in many ways. And so these war brides brought a lot of that English - the English customs. And morals and ethics and all that sort of stuff. They brought them over and I had a lot of friends who were the children of British people and there definitely was an influence, I do believe that very strongly. And there's been research done on that too.

[21:10] JZ: And I guess Canada with its smaller population - that impact will be felt much more obviously than in the States where the population is much larger I'm guessing.

HS: Yes. Definitely, definitely. I mean Canada was a very young country at that point. So they - to have 5,000 war brides come over and go all across Canada - it wasn't just in the eastern provinces. These ladies went - hopped on a train and they went - they were from sea to sea. They were all over the country. And they kept their connections. There were war bride groups all over the country. Very supportive.

[21:56] JZ: I've got plenty of follow up questions but before I do any of them, are you under any kind of time pressure? Do you have to go at any point?

HS: No I'm OK. I actually run a nursery school and I work at a home a lot of the time. So I sent an email around to my staff and just said I'm incommunicado between this - for about an hour or so. So don't worry about that.

[22:19] JZ: Great. Just making sure because my interviews do have a tendency to go on a while because I do always have so many questions. I just want to roll back to your parents' first meeting. Do you - from speaking to your mother, do you get the impression that she had and her peers were specifically looking for husbands at these dances and things like this? Or were they just looking to have a good time, and whatever happened would happen?

HS: I'm just putting you on speakerphone because my ear's getting tired. It's just easier to talk this way. No - you know when I read her diary, I mean remember she was 18. They were young. And I think - the

sense I got from the diaries they were really just looking to have fun. And there wasn't - no I don't remember reading [pause] that she wanted to get married per se. No that was just my mum because I think my mum was a real social butterfly - she loved partying. Even throughout her life she was a gatherer of people, she was a leader that way. And other - there definitely - the mentions were that people did get married quickly, Jarek. They did find mates and they did marry. And there doesn't seem to be long periods of courtship.

[23:54] JZ: And they got married in Kingston. Did either of your parents speak about Kingston much as a town? Any sort of fond memories, thoughts about it?

HS: Oh my mum - she was - her house. And I think her house is still there actually, it's on Stead Lane Road. And we have a picture of them visiting the house. I believe from what they talked and it was mostly my mum that would talk - my dad would certainly chip in. But - I think the very next day after she met him she invited him back to tea at the house. And shortly thereafter he was - he had some leave. And the family invited him to come and stay. And this is apparently - this was apparently what used to happen all the time. Is that these soldiers were welcomed into the homes. And just as the American soldier was welcomed with my aunt, they were - and it seemed to be a common thing - in other words I didn't get the feeling like it was an unusual thing that my grandparents did. But it seemed like - it seemed that that town was very supportive of these soldiers. They - and I suppose a lot of the young British men had gone off to war. So these Canadians and Americans were kind of making up for the fact that a lot of their own young men were not there.

[25:50] JZ: I was just going to say from the people that I've spoken to who were around when the Bushy Park base was around - the American base. Both in wartime and postwar. The only people I've found who didn't seem to be quite as welcoming of that presence were young men who didn't like seeing their women running off to these bases. And being taken away by all these exotic foreigners. I don't know if your dad would have had any notion of that being the case. There was certainly a little bit of resentment there I think.

HS: And that would be understood. The women would feel the same way. [Laughs]. If a bunch of young ladies from another country came in. But I just remember them and my dad speaking very warmly - I mean my grandmother - eventually my parents brought my English grandparents over to live with them. And they were very close. My parents were very fortunate in that the similarities between the families, my father's mother was English, I think... I'm not sure about, no, I think my grandfather, my Canadian grandfather, was Canadian. In other words, there was English on both sides of the family. So there were a lot of similarities in terms of upbringing and all that sort of thing. So, you know, my grandparents were referred to as mum and dad, they just were, it didn't matter whether it was my mum or my dad speaking about them, they were just mum and dad. But my grandmother, for example, when she - mum brought back this young Canadian soldier, my grandmother was a bit of a prankster, a bit of a joker, and she loved a good joke, and she made him, she made mincemeat pies, the little tarts, for the tea, and they gave him a special one and, man, I think back to it and it doesn't sound very friendly, but she put in, she put in some cotton padding into one of the mince tarts, and so, you know, when he would bite into it he wouldn't know what on earth was in this tart, and then he looked around the room and everyone

was smiling and he took this joke so well I think he became an instant part of the family. But he, when he was there, for example, my Dad was very handy, he was a sort of jack of all trades, I think, he could do anything, and he built them, he helped them to build a bomb shelter, you know, for the first Christmas they were there, he went on a streetcar and somehow found a little Christmas tree, and probably shouldn't of, but cut it down and brought it back on the streetcar, so they could have a Christmas tree for Christmas. So he really became very quickly part of the family and I can only suppose that was sort've the norm then. I don't know, but that was the way it was with them.

[29:12] JZ: Sure. But both your parents sound like pretty phenomenal people. Your mum was a firefighter, an air raid warden and a corporal in the Home Guard, is all of this true?

HS: Yep. They were, they believed in community, they believed in being a part of it, and one of the legacies I think that they've left is wanting to help people, and they were always throughout their lives leaders that way, and very much helping people and they kinda passed that onto my brother and I. I do believe that they were very special that way. I think that the reason that they stand out in some ways is because, as I mentioned before, my mother was very much into journalism, and she was a great networker, and she could - throughout the years, they had all kinds of articles written about them. And that was because she knew people, and she would talk to people, and they would say, 'gosh, Jean and George, you did such and such, can I write a story about you.' And so they would, so they had several, especially when we were getting into the later years and they were celebrating, you know, the fiftieth year of the war, and then sixty, and then seventy. There was always celebrations going on, and she would make sure that her war brides were mentioned, and that she and my, well, people were just interested in their story.

[31:00] JZ: And you mentioned your aunt as well, your mother's sister presumably, and was she also from Kingston?

HS: Yes, they were all brought up in Kingston upon Thames together. There was a younger brother, he was younger by like fifteen years, so he, you know, he really didn't figure into it too much, so the two girls - my mum and my aunt Betty - were very close in age, they were like two years apart. Her story was, you know, in some ways similar, he was from Kentucky, just a country boy, and he sent the ring, and they actually got married in Ottawa, before going down to the States. My aunt was a different personality than my mum, she was much more of a homebody, you know, had five kids and many grandchildren and was very content with that kind of life, whereas my mum was much more of a career person, she wanted to work, she wanted to be out and doing things. They were different that way. But both of them had long marriages. My aunt had a long marriage until her husband passed away, so, you know, they - you just don't see marriages like that anymore.

[32:37] JZ: You said that she got her engagement ring in the post, is that right?

HS: Yes, it was on the ship. She got it in the mail.

[32:52] JZ: Presumably they were able to meet up not too long after and actually have the wedding.

HS: My mother set up the wedding in Ottawa, and that's how they got married. They hadn't seen each other for like three years.

[32:58] JZ: Oh wow. Amazing.

HS: And then they ended up having the most wonderful relationship just like my parents did. And they were both good friends, all of them, and my parents would go back and forth between the two countries. Keep in touch that way. As I said, they were the lucky ones. There were some that weren't so lucky.

[33:21] JZ: And in terms of your Dad's perspective, did he ever discuss his wartime experiences much? And how he felt, and how he got on with being in the UK, and then was he stationed elsewhere in Europe?

HS: He was stationed over in Italy, that I remember. He was more on the engineering side of things, he was a map maker, but he was also, even as a young man, he was twenty-one and he was already a Sergeant-Major. He was also a leader, and I, you know, I think was of the reasons that he did well was, again, because of his British background. You know, he was very well mannered and all of that sort of thing. But there were certainly - they got married and my recollection, and I'm pretty sure, is that after they got married he was posted away and went to Italy. And this is from what I understand, happened a lot, and I remember friends of my mum, she would talk about them getting married and even having a child and then their husbands being sent away and never coming back. There were a number of stories of that, even my mum and dad's best man, you know, there was that story that they were out of touch for years and years and then, finally, came back, and she had already lost a husband, and he married her. There were very often second marriages because of servicemen getting married and then going away and not coming back. That happened a fair bit.

[35:20] JZ: It's funny, I think you mentioned earlier about when the war brides crossed the Atlantic and came into Canada, they had these sort of guides on Canadian life and tips about Canadian culture and that sort of thing. Because we've seen the same equivalent sort of literature produced for US GIs staying in the UK saying this is what the UK is like, they like tea, don't insult the Queen, that sort of thing. These things make me laugh.

HS: Yeah, I'm sure there were. My Dad wasn't the kind of saver that my mum was, I mean, he did in his own way, believe me, when we go through this house of theirs, having lived in it for sixty-eight years, I can't even imagine what we're going to find, but I know that my mum saved everything, and I've actually seen this little booklet which was from the Canadian government. You know, telling them what to expect, that kind of thing.

[36:27] JZ: Just switching back to the music momentarily. Aside from Vera Lynn, were there any artists of significance to your parents, do you know, and their history? Or is it just Vera Lynn that you're really aware of?

HS: Oh, the only reason I mentioned Vera Lynn is strictly because we got to know her.

[36:47] JZ: Yeah, the personal link.

HS: Her songs, you know, I know all of her songs by heart, sort of thing. But the big band music, and, you know, my dad, the music books are there, were all the big band era, and all the singers that were very popular at that time. As I said, I know all that stuff, because that's what my dad used to play on the piano all the time.

[37:18] JZ: And do you want to talk a little bit about the sort of celebration events you had for your parents life. I mean, music was a sort of big focus of that, was it?

HS: Well, you know. My parents loved to pull people together, and whenever there was an anniversary, a birthday or whatever, we always had families, of course. For example, at their fiftieth wedding anniversary, I'm trying to remember, I think maybe it was their fiftieth, and they, I'm a little bit off track here, but it's an interesting point, so I'll just mention it to you, they had a little place out in the country, over here in Canada, a lot of the pioneers lived in wooden log cabins and my parents had found, when my father retired, my parents had found this old, old farm, with this little log cabin, and it sort of became a hobby farm for my dad, and we would often have big celebrations up there and this particular time, they invited all kinds of people, it would be about an hour's drive out of Ottawa, and everybody would bring food, it was quite a wonderful place. But that particular year, we had discovered that my parents had had a movie taken of their wedding and I didn't even realise that they had such a thing at that time, but nobody - including them - had ever seen this movie clip of their wedding, and because it was a very old fashioned and unique way of projecting this film and nobody had any equipment to play it. So my brother was able to get it converted to VHS I think, and unbeknownst to my parents, we were able to somehow, I don't even know if we had electricity up there, I don't even know how we did that, we had, we brought a television up, and in front of everyone we played this three minute, I'm sure it wasn't much longer than that, three to five minute movie clip, that they had never seen of their wedding. And it was the most sentimental moment that you can possibly imagine, there wasn't a dry eye there. But to see my parents as a nineteen year old and a twenty two year old, and there's my grandfather, it was the most amazing step back in time. And of course my parents had never seen it either, so the reason I'm mentioning that is because several decades later we celebrated their - I believe it was their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary - by reenacting their wedding. And we did it at the yacht club where they used to belong, and we replicated the red dress that my mum had worn when they met, and Dad still had part of his uniform and his hat, his hat still had the picture in it that he had carried in it all during the war of my mum. And we reenacted their meeting and then their wedding and so the reason to have the celebration of life, in a way what we were doing was we were having one more celebration for them, the way that they had celebrated all through the years, and so we had music and we had dancing. And as part of it.

[41:33] JZ: It strikes me that the dancing was as important as the music, in terms, certainly socially I guess.

HS: Well, but the music was what brought them together. That's the way we see it, and it played a significant role. There was always dancing, always, always dancing, always, always dancing at these parties, and the old music. It was always the old music. So they kept that alive throughout their marriage, and we thought it fitting at the end to have some of that old music there, and to have a few dances.

[42:16] JZ: The wedding stuff is incredible, all the stuff around the film, it must've been quite the moving moment for your parents to watch that footage. Do you know the venue of the wedding itself?

HS: The wedding was in, oh, what was the name of the church? Darn.

[42:38] JZ: Was it All Saints church, perchance?

HS: No, no it wasn't All Saints, I think.

[42:46] JZ: I mean, you don't need to know it off the top of your head but if you find it it would be great if you could email me the name because the church may well still be in existence and you never know there might be some records from the time?

HS: There's no question that it is, because what happened when my mother came in contact with them again, in the last ten years or so, I'm sure that they ended up having some sort of correspondence between the church and my parents. The church is definitely still there, and I'm just blanking at the moment.

[43:34] JZ: That's fine, that's fine. And if it comes to you, please drop it in an email and, yeah, just out of interest more than anything, because I'm sure it's a church that I've walked past-

HS: They'll know the name. These articles that you've read online, they were throughout England, and in fact my English relatives knew about the passing of my parents before I had a chance to tell them.

[43:57] JZ: Oh wow.

HS: It was because the story had gone viral all over the world. So, I think the church was probably aware of it because they had been in touch.

[44:19] JZ: Yeah, I mean I've lived in Kingston for the last ten years or so, so it's probably a church that I've walked past many a time myself. I don't suppose you ever made it to England, to Kingston?

HS: I did. I've been there. I went there a couple of times. I went there as a ten year old and I also went back the year that my mum received her medal. That was 2006. And my brother and my father and I went back to England. Now, I don't - I didn't have a lot of time then to visit, they ended up staying longer

than my brother and I did, but I think probably when I was a youngster we actually - my parents lived on a place in Lincolnshire, they rented part of an old manor there, and that was where my brother and I spent the summer. But I remember travelling around, and I'm sure that we went to Kingston on Thames to see you know, where they live.

[45:28] JZ: Sure. Well, just finally, we're ready to wrap up shortly, I just wanted to ask a little bit more about this Eswick Club stuff that your mum was involved in. I mean, what was, was it just activities in terms of getting war brides together? I read something in the article about sending parcels to London. What were the general activities of the Eswick Club.

HS: Well, I think initially that it was, it was a support group as I mentioned before. They did charitable works, that was sort of the focus of it in the early years, is that because England, we often think that when the war ended everything went back to normal, but my understanding is that it took England a long time to get away from rations and life in Canada was very different to life in England. So, I do remember sending packages to my grandparents, and I think this is what the war brides did, they would collect things through the Red Cross, and send packages back to England, and I think in later years the ladies were always involved in community work of sort, and supporting new people coming over, as well as being a social venue for them.

[47:10] JZ: Sure, sure. And just a note to end on, how remarkable that your parents did pass away so close to each other. That must have been surreal for yourself, personally.

HS: Well, you know, when we say to people that neither one of them knew that the other had died. And everyone is like, well, they must've known, and I said, well, on some level, we believe that they did know, but they were so closely connected, I mean, to have celebrated that sort of seventy-fifth wedding anniversary, we joke around and say mum loved these big celebrations, I mean, Dad went along with them whole-heartedly, but she was certainly the organiser, and we can just sort of see her saying, 'well, George, I think we've done enough.' You know, 'that's it, what do you think, dear?' You know, it was just a remarkable thing, and I remember my mum had gone into hospital, you know, we had them at home, I'd been able to keep them at home, with live-in help because that was their wish, that they should stay together, we were able to do that. It was a challenge, but we were able to do that. And they really were not ill per se, they were just wearing out. So they had the difficulties of old age, pneumonia and that sort of thing, periodically, it was just surreal, honestly. My mum went into hospital on the Tuesday night and we just said, 'mum, what d'you think. You're just not getting over this cough the way you should be', she said, 'yeah, maybe I should go in and get it checked out.' I always made a point of saying to my care-givers there, you make sure that they have a kiss goodbye whenever one of them goes to the hospital, because you never know right? And, so she went to the hospital and apparently the next day the ladies arranged that they could have some video-calling, that they could see each other, and they talked on the phone. And they overheard my dad say to my mum at one point, 'Jean, don't make me cry, don't make me cry.' And she would tell him all the time, 'I love you, I love you, I love you,' she would say, and whether that's what she had said, I don't know. But she wasn't doing as well as she had in the past in terms of getting over this pneumonia, and dad seemed to be fine. There was no sign of illness or anything with him. And the Thursday, the Thursday, he seemed off in the morning, and didn't want to

eat, and by lunchtime refused to eat, refused to take his medication, and just wanted to have a sleep. And meanwhile in the hospital, my mum was kind of doing the same thing, and struggling, and the doctors said to me, 'this isn't looking good, Heather, I think you maybe wanna be prepared', so I was all set to come up the very next day and they both went into this deep sleep that Dad had, at home we were concerned enough by dinner time we thought better take him in, we don't know what's going on here. And he was just in this very deep, peaceful sleep, and my brother was with them the whole time, you know, I don't think he even knew that he was in hospital. He wasn't in a coma or anything, and mum was sort of the same thing, and he - my brother - anyway, I received notice in the middle of the night that my mum had passed away before I could get there, and I'm on the train going up to Ottawa and my brother phoned to say that Dad had gone too. And I said to my friends the day before, 'you know what, they're gonna do this together'. They thought I was nuts, and I said no, I'm not kidding, they're going to do this together. I've no idea how, but, son of a gun, they did it.

[51:38] JZ: Absolutely. What an incredible story. All of it, on so many levels, so thank you so much for sharing.

HS: You're very welcome Jarek, it's been a delight talking to you. Is there any other question that I can answer?

[51:52] JZ: No, only formalities. In terms of, I've been recording this on my mic, are you happy for us to use any of the audio of this interview, so the idea is for us to host this on our web resource.

HS: Yes, I didn't know you were taping it, but, yes, of course, if there's anything that's useful you're welcome to share it.

[52:18] JZ: Sure. I mean, it will probably be a few clips that we'll host online as part of a sort of general page that is looking at the army presence over in the UK during the war. So, yeah, if you're happy for us to do that and we may also want to submit the recording to our sort of history archive, our local history archive, if you're happy for us to do that as well.

HS: Well, yes. I mean, I'm very happy to be a part of that, I mean, the only thing I can say to you is that when I eventually go through the house I'll try and hold on to your email, because there are things there that are - you may be interested in, in fact, I really have to find someone to pass these things onto, because I think a lot of what she had there is of great significance, at least it could be I guess to someone.

[53:16] JZ: Sure. In which case, I'll probably have to email you over some forms that probably need your signature on, just so we're covered if that's okay. It might involve you scanning it in, and sending it back, does that sound alright?

HS: Yeah, I can do that.

[53:30] JZ: Excellent, excellent. Wonderful, Heather.

HS: I will try and find out the name of that church.

[53:35] JZ: Yes, that would be great. And if you want to copy me into an email to Vera Lynn's daughter that would be superb. Which is not a sentence I ever thought I'd say, but, yes.

HS: Okay, I'll see what I can do in that regard as well.

[53:53] JZ: Lovely. Lovely. Okay, thank you so much again, Heather. This has been brilliant for us.

HS: It has been delightful Jarek, and you never know, maybe we'll actually meet one of these days, I'm hoping one day that I'll be able to go back to England, it's been a while.

[54:06] JZ: Please. If you do, by all means let me know. And if you're in Kingston I'd be more than happy to meet up.

HS: Thank you so much, it's been a pleasure, thank you for taking this on and thank you for your interest in my parents. My mum would be grinning from ear to ear.

[54:24] JZ: [laughs]. Excellent.

HS: She would love this, to be a part of this, she would just think that was the best thing.

[54:31] JZ: Well, that pleases me greatly to hear that. All right, Heather, you enjoy the rest of your day.

HS: I will, thanks for calling.

[54:39] JZ: Cheers now, thanks, bye.