

Between Us

The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre & You • Winter 1999

Destined for Canada



Left: Squibs, Johnny and Johnny Mercier Jr. stand beside a case displaying memories from World War II. Squibs became a war bride in England where she and Johnny met in 1944.

Valentines' Day is an extra special occasion for Squibs and Johnny Mercier. Their first child, "Johnny", was born on February 14th in England, where they met during World War II. Johnny was a soldier with the Canadian Air Force and Squibs, named after a firecracker by her father, worked for the Canadian Salvation Army. They met at Alverstoon Manor, a place where air force soldiers would come for a short stay, in Stratford on Avon. Squibs was one of the four women who ran the Manor. One evening she was invited, along with the other women, to go to the Stratford theatre with a crew of soldiers. She

went along "so as not be called a spoiled sport". One of the men in this crew was Johnny Mercier, and after several nights out with the "happy bunch" there was no looking back. "One night we snuck into the soldiers' room when they were out, put holly under their sheets, unscrewed the light bulbs so they wouldn't be able to see and barricaded the door to our room so that they couldn't get in." When asked if he still wanted to marry Squibs after that episode he promptly responds, "Oh yes, you bet!"

This was the second time Squibs became a war bride to a Canadian soldier. Her first husband, from

Maddock, Ontario, was killed in Italy during the war after only eighteen months of marriage. "Being a war bride was obviously my destiny," says the lively and lovely Squibs, despite the fact that her mother had warned her not to "get muddled with those wild Canadians".

Squibs remembers seeing the "banana boat" coming to bring the 35 war brides waiting at the seaside to Canada. "I thought it was the boat to pick up our luggage to take it to a big boat. I couldn't believe that little boat was coming for us!"

Squibs had a happy childhood.

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Perley Rideau

Overcoming Boundaries to Improve the Experience of the People We Serve

LET US introduce you...

Members of the Health Centre "family" know that our residents have many untold stories and words of wisdom to share. It is our privilege to introduce one of these special people to you...

Right: *Watercolour by Phyllis McCarrol*



Phyllis McCarrol is a free spirit. Amongst the many places she has travelled to are England, Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, Trinidad and Morocco. She has worked as an Avon Manager in Venezuela, as a Registered Nursing Assistant in the hospital for the mentally challenged in Gravenhurst, and was posted in Barryfield and Perterborough as an Acting Sergeant during World War II. Before moving to Ottawa to be close to her family, she served as the President of the Seniors Club for the Town of Gravenhurst.

"I always like to try new things," says Phyllis. "I take in everything going on. I won three dollars at

Bingo here today... and I don't even play Bingo!" Among the many things she does do are paint, play cards and read. She also holds her membership to the Royal Canadian Legion very dearly.

Phyllis is "elated" about the expected birth of twins to her niece. She is very close to her sister's three daughters and one son. "I'd do anything for them, and they'd do anything for me," she says.

It's no wonder that this carefree and courageous woman doesn't have a strand of gray hair at 83 years of age!

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She had parents that gave her courage and love, horses to ride, and frequently took her to the theatre. "It was not an easy life when we returned to Canada," she explains. Squibs and Johnny moved to Gimili, Manitoba where Johnny worked as a commercial radio operator. "We lived in a shack with no water or toilet. I had to chop a hole in the ice on the nearby river to get water." Their small son had polio and the six years they spent in Gimili were trying.

Then, word arrived that Johnny was going to be transferred further north. "So, I wrote a poem for Johnny's boss to get him fired," she says. Squibs can still recite the

clever poem. So, Johnny was fired and they moved to Ontario. "Ontario is hilly and beautiful just like England. I felt more at home here," says Squibs. In Ontario they bought a home and had two more children.

In their later years, Squibs helped Johnny to fight for his recovery through triple bypass surgery and cancer. "She's always been fighting for me and she still is," says Johnny. "I couldn't have found a better wife." Her dedication is a testimony to the Perley Rideau's essential strategy to "enhance the role of volunteers and family members" in the care of residents. Johnny's experiences at the Perley Rideau have been "wonderful" and the involvement of

Squibs in his care plays an important role in his happiness.

On their 40th wedding Anniversary Squibs and Johnny returned to England. It is from her memories of England that Squibs has always gained her strength. She gets her inspiration from her father's determination and sense of humour. "When a bomb knocked the bay window off of the front of our house in England during the war, my father said 'That's going to cause a draft in the winter'." Squibs concludes, "I've had problems along the way, but I'm glad that I'm me. I don't desire to have anything that anyone else has and I proved to my mom and dad that I could do it."