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Honour and Care

The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre Foundation ♦ OTTAWA, ONTARIO

A Lifetime of Giving Back

By Peter McKinnon

Thomas Young Strath devoted his life to serving his family, his community and his country. In a final act of generosity, he bequeathed much of his estate to 10 charities, including the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre Foundation.

"I remember my parents saying to me 'When you live such a blessed life, how can you not give back?'" says daughter Linda Glassford.

Born in 1923, Thomas Strath grew up in Montreal and attended Lakeside Academy. In Grade 8, he fell in love with the girl who sat in front of him: Isobel Anne Dye. They would eventually marry, raise a son and daughter, and spend the rest of their lives together.

After completing high school, Thomas took a job with Bell Canada. As soon as he was old enough, he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and fulfilled his childhood dream of flying. He became part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, the bold and unprecedented effort that trained more than 130,000 personnel in Canada to defeat the Axis powers. Thomas became such an adept pilot that he was deemed too

valuable for overseas service: he was assigned to training duties in Canada. Although disappointed, he soldiered on and served in numerous training centres.

"Dad's mother was relieved that he served in Canada during the war," recalls Linda Glassford, "but aviation training was also dangerous, and mishaps and crashes killed and injured many young men." By some estimates, 14 percent of all RCAF fatalities occurred in Canada.¹

After decommissioning, Thomas settled in Montreal, where he earned a degree in engineering at McGill University. Upon graduation, he started a 40-year career with Bell Canada and in 1948 married Isobel, who left her teaching job to become a homemaker. The years that followed saw the birth of son Bill and daughter Linda, and vacations at the family cottage in the Laurentians.

Both parents were active in Valois United Church, where they had married. Isobel sang in the choir and volunteered with children's programs, such as Explorers and Canadian Girls in Training. Thomas chaired the committee that oversaw the funding and construction of a new church building.

"Dad was always happiest fixing things," says Linda Glassford. "And he loved to share his passion with me and my brother. During my teens, there was always a car in the driveway to work on, and we learned to do all kinds of technical and mechanical tasks. Dad used to say: 'Between the two of you, you can do anything.'"

With the children grown in the late 1970s, Thomas accepted a transfer to Ottawa, where he and Isobel joined Merivale United Church. Thomas began to volunteer with an organization known as STRIDE – a group that refurbishes and repairs equipment such as wheelchairs for persons with disabilities. Many fellow Veterans also volunteered there; Thomas enjoyed both the fellowship and the opportunity to put his skills to work for a good cause, particularly during his retirement. The Straths also donated regularly to more than 100 charities.

"When my parents were in their 80s, they both got sick at the same time and I went to Ottawa to help them recover," recalls Linda Glassford. "I remember spending nearly two days writing cheques to the various charities they supported."

Among these charities was

the Perley Rideau Foundation. "Dad liked to read the Foundation's newsletter and thought that Perley Rideau would be a good place to live, in part because he'd be among fellow Veterans," says Linda.

When Isobel's condition worsened in her 90s, Thomas took care of her around-the-clock for several years.

"After mom passed away, Dad became understandably depressed," says daughter Linda. "He felt useless, I think. I convinced him to move out to New Brunswick with us. He passed away three months to the day after Mom died. Dad had appointed me executor of his estate and I was proud to honour the wishes of my parents to donate to charity." **HC**

¹<http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo3/no1/doc/65-69-eng.pdf>



Thomas and Isobel Strath with baby Bill

The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre is home of 450 residents, including 250 Canadian Veterans, most of whom served in either the Second World War or the Korean War. The Government of Canada provides additional funding for the care of Veterans, but donations to the Perley Rideau Foundation improve their quality of life in direct and significant ways. In May 2017, Veterans Affairs Canada, the province of Ontario, and the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre celebrated the announcement of 25 Specialized Veterans beds for Veterans who served in Canada for a minimum of 365 days and are income qualified, as well as to Canadian Armed Forces and Allied Veterans.

We appreciate your support in making a donation at www.perleyrideaufoundation.ca.

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