

NANCY BEEGHLY

War bride records memories of Paris childhood



When Edith Cowin came to Youngstown as a war bride, she brought along the memories of her childhood in Paris, but she didn't slow down long enough to record them until she was 90.

As a child, she had watched the zeppelins circle the Eiffel Tower while she played in the gardens below. She had paused on the way to school each morning as the cavalry passed by on its way to the exercise field. She had seen the Wright brothers and their plane at the air field of Issy les Moulineaux.

She had climbed cherry trees in her grandparents' orchards and fished summers away on the banks of the river Yonne.

She knew the abundance of apri-

cots, artichokes and plums. She remembered the taste of the cure-all chamomile tea and the crunch of white asparagus.

She'd endured the devastation of the Paris flood of 1910 and survived the destruction of the bombings of World War I.

It was fairly easy to be safe in Paris in the daytime bombings if you knew Paris. The guilty gun called the BIG BERTHA was a very big gun, very clumsy, and with little ability to change its target. All one needed to do was to stay behind the last bomb and you were fairly safe.

A struggle: At 22, she struggled with the English language as a clerk in the office of the American Expeditionary Forces. Bill Cowin, an American soldier working there, concocted excuses to visit her office frequently.

War is a terrible thing, but I would never have met the young man who became my husband if it had not occurred.

In January 1920, Edith boarded the Antigone, an old German transport that pitched and heaved with every wave for seven days.

Overjoyed to embrace her new husband waiting for her on the Boston dock, Edith prepared to face her new future far from home.

Her dowry included the twinkle in her eye, the lilt of her French accent and the energy of her optimism. All three would serve her well through 58 years of marriage, two children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Love has a way of conquering the bumps of life.

Writing talent: Five years ago, 11 years after Bill's death, Edith left her home on Youngstown's South Side to live in Sycamore Glen Retirement Center near her daughter, Jacqueline Mann, in Dayton. When Edith was interviewed for an article in the center's monthly newsletter, she wrote down her thoughts for the reporter.

Her family, who loved to hear her stories, realized she had a talent for writing and presented her with an electric typewriter. As Edith typed the story, her daughter put it into a computer.

Edith's daughter-in-law, Mary Cowin of Warren, proofed the copy, sent it to press at a print shop, and assembled the manuscript sprinkled with the author's wit, insights and family history.

Edith presented a copy of "As I Remember It" to each family member last Christmas. Her words save a heritage for posterity that could have been lost forever.

And so I arrive at the end of my tale of blessings not woes. My 93rd birthday is coming much too fast. True, my hearing is quite faulty and I walk about as gracefully as a duck flies . . . [but] I am blessed, truly blessed.

Grandma's journal is cherished gift

By MARY LOU REESE
Tribune Chronicle

EDITH Cowin still enjoys a good game of eight ball or rotation with the guys.

At 94, she says it makes up for the bridge games she left behind when she moved from her Youngstown apartment to the Sycamore Glen Retirement Center in Miamisburg.

Sometime, in years to come, Edith's great-great-grandchildren will read the journal she has written and laugh about grandma's pool shooting with Omar and Joe.

They will chuckle about the young tomboy's adventures in the French countryside with her brother, Marcel, and her dog, Toutou, and share her experiences in war-torn Paris. They will also learn of her first trip to America as the bride of American soldier, Bill Cowin, her life here and her trips back home.

The journal was Edith's 1990 Christmas gift to her son, Richard Cowin of Warren, and her daughter, Jacqueline Cowin Mann of Dayton. Copies were also presented to her six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

It all started with an interview for the retirement home newsletter, according to Edith's daughter-in-law, Mary Cowin.

"When they asked to interview her for the newsletter, she decided to write the information down for them instead. They printed it word-for-word. After Jacqueline read it, she suggested to her mother that she begin writing the story of

her life," Mary said.

Using a typewriter, Edith began to write. First there were just bits and pieces of things remembered — growing up in Paris with a beautiful mother and a father in the military — visits to her grandparents' farm in Yonne and the death of her 21-year-old brother, Pierre, on the Maginot Line during World War I.

Writing of the war years she said, "Wars, wars. Why do we have them? At night I would study until one or two o'clock and pray there would not be air raids during the night. We would wish for rainy nights or obscured skies as in those days planes flew only in clear weather.

"I felt very lucky when the next morning would find me on my way to the Avenue Montaigne."

Later came stories of getting a job with the American Expeditionary Forces in Paris, meeting and marrying a young American soldier and coming to the United States as a war bride. She wrote of her children and their triumphs, her pride in her grandchildren and her feelings follow the death of her husband.

"I felt completely lost when he died. All at once there was no one to talk to, to cook for, to take for a ride. Bill and I had a lovely life. I miss him very much," she penned.

"As she wrote, she gave the stories to Jackie to be put on the computer. We edited it, added documents and pictures, and in less than a year it was written and compiled into a book.

"We not only helped her, we learned a

Daily diaries source of personal history

Time and events pass quickly and while tape recorders and video cameras now make recording the milestones of one's life a snap, the old practice of keeping a daily journal is once again finding favor.

Many people have found that the diaries written by their ancestors are the only remaining source of family history.

While its roots go back centuries, the tradition of journal writing came to America with the Puritans on the Mayflower, who associated such writing with self-discipline and self-judgement.

Colonists' children were instructed by

Puritan ministers to use their journals as a means of keeping in touch with their feelings and consciences. Keeping journals or diaries remained popular throughout the late 1800s and early 20th century, but it wasn't until recently that the historical potential of journal writing was realized.

"The diary is a place where you don't have to worry about being perfect," said Anais Nin, one of this century's most important diarists, who demonstrated

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lot about the family that we didn't know before," said Mary.

Although the family was aware that Edith was writing a family history, they were surprised when they received the 44-page booklet complete with pictures and certificates from the past.

"They loved it and Edith was pleased and thrilled that we wanted it," Mary said.

Preparation of a paper to present at a club meeting led Marie Kreidler Byard of Warren to record events from her childhood — stories especially enjoyed by her children Barbara Loomis, William Byard and Kathryn Calcini.

Noting that she laid no claim to being a historian, she wrote of her childhood

home on a dirt road in Warren called Franklin Street, her pet chicken "Alice," and of the thrill of finding a penny and an orange in her stocking on Christmas morning.

Noting that there are many older people out there who have witnessed great changes in the world and their families during their lives, Mary Collins said, "Those who haven't kept diaries should write down the information and pass it along to generations that follow."

Journals, after all, are personal sanctuaries for feelings, thoughts, dreams, hopes and fears, for fantasies and facts. They are time machines moving from past to present to future with the stroke of a pen.

Stories passed down by parents help bond family

By MARTY DOUCE
Tribune Chronicle

There's storytelling and there is

imagination of today's children.

"In these times when families are fractured and family ties are being subjected to difficult outside pressures,

● Choose stories from your past that will connect with your child's young life, yet contain elements of surprise, some repetition and a message important

What was it like to be snowbound without electricity, water and heat during a record-breaking winter storm? Talk about trying to cook on a small hibachi