

GERRY CARTY REMEMBERED

Remembering Gerry Carty

BY GISELE MCKNIGHT

Editor's note: After the story called 'Do you remember Dolph Carty?' was published in February, several Frederictonians asked for a story on his brother, Gerry. This is the story of a remarkable man who loved nothing more than to sing in the Christ Church Cathedral choir. But singing was just one of his many talents.

Pioneer, trailblazer, a man of firsts — they're all good adjectives to describe Gerry Carty. The man had a list of talents, skills and hobbies that would boggle the mind. He was always busy, always enjoying himself, always making friends.

He was the first Black pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the youngest commissioned officer at 18. He flew 35 sorties over occupied territory during the Second World War.

While recovering in England from a plane crash, he studied electronics, and when, post-war, Air Canada rejected him as a potential pilot, he opened his own electronics store.

He was the first to bring cable television to Fredericton. He set up a tower in his backyard to facilitate an early communications system for the Fredericton Police Force. And with partners, he opened a charter air service in the province.

But that's not all. He taught people to fly and helped found the Fredericton Flying Club. He was a beekeeper, Air Cadet commanding officer, musician and gymnastics coach. You could often find him at the YMCA. And he was a family man, raising four children.

It's difficult to overstate the positive impact Gerry Carty had on his community, his province and his country.

THE BEGINNING

Gerry and his four brothers — Don, Adolphus, Bill and Clyde — were raised in Saint John. They were heavily involved in their community — sports, Scouting, music, church at St.

Mary's on Waterloo Street. All five joined the military to fight in the Second World War and all five returned.

They were following the tradition of their father, Albert, who had fought in the First World War. Albert was born on St. Maarten, in the Caribbean, and immigrated to Canada as a young man.

"Back when the Roots (TV show) thing was happening, I had the Carty wanderlust," said Gerry's son, John. "I decided to go to the Caribbean.

"There were Cartys everywhere. I found my grandfather's sister, Zada, and moved in with her for a few months."

John looked after the chickens and goats, fished with the fishermen, and found his own roots along with his grandfather's.

"I saw gestures in Zada that I saw in my dad and in myself," said John.

POST-WAR

Gerry returned home and opened an electronics store on Westmorland Street, then moved to the corner of Regent and Charlotte. When his shop burned, he relocated it to his house.

"He repaired TVs, radios, record players," said John. "We had the first colour TV."

If electronics was his career, flying was his love.

"He was an intelligent, busy guy," said John. "He had a plane in the garage. He was president of the flying club. He started an airline."

A Sunday drive for most readers was a Sunday flight for John, who invariably pleaded, 'do I have to?'

"We were always flying. I spent my childhood in the back seat of a plane. I became so sick of it."

John sees his father as a role model, for the youngsters he mentored, for himself and his siblings.

"I think what we learned from Dad was 'just do it.' Don't be afraid of things — we can do whatever we want," he said. "He would tackle anything. He loved people and he loved life."

Gerry died in 2008 at the age of 84.



From top of page:
War time group shot.

Evening Times-Globe story from 1945 highlighting the impressive involvement of the Carty brothers in the war effort.

Gerry Carty as a young boy playing saxophone on the radio.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
People at Christ Church Cathedral knew Gerry very well. It was hard not to.

"He had a very active place in the Cathedral," said Marilyn Lewell. "He had a big belly laugh and he always flashed that smile of his. He loved to tell stories."

After choir practice, you could find Gerry and several others enjoying a drink together.

"We had a special booth at the Sheraton (now the Delta),"

said Marilyn. "We had many meals there."

Marilyn recalled his fondness for his grandchildren, making sure they were involved in music and sports.

"He was so proud of his family," she said.

Lois Baker remembers a television she did not buy from Gerry, but needing him to come by and fix it more than once.

"Gerry used to come and spend the afternoon," said Lois. "He'd fix my TV and drink tea."

We had the most wonderful time."

She remembers him as a man who loved to have fun, and loved to talk to people.

"Gerry would come in the Cathedral, and it would take him 10 minutes to get up to the choir. Everyone wanted to talk to him. He was one of the nicest men I have ever known."

One of Lois's role at the church was to have the children make cards for shut-ins

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS

ABOVE: Gerry Carty, third from left, with others at the Fredericton Flying Club. BELOW LEFT: From an unknown book, with the page title 'Trailblazer in Aviation and Technology.' BELOW RIGHT: A Maclean's magazine article on "The War Generation" April 3, 1995.



Gerry Carty, continued

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Gerry had a building in his backyard he called his office, where he spent a great deal of time in his older years.

"We had many meetings in his office!" said Bill.

Bill and Gerry were part of a group, with Carl Ericson, Harvey Malmberg and Eric Wright, known as the ROMEOS — retired old men eating out — that got together regularly.

"We went to lunch a lot," said Bill.

"I want to emphasize how social he was," said Bill. "It would take him 20 minutes to get out of church. He was just of those great people. He made a great contribution to the Anglican Church."

At Christmas and Easter. When Gerry was in the hospital, she took him a card that a child had drawn an airplane on.

"I took it up to him and he laughed and laughed," she said. "I don't think he ever had a negative thought. He was just one of those beautiful people."

Bill Turney remembers Gerry as a friend and a highly respected professional.

"He knew his way around machinery," said Bill. "He was very responsible and very popular."

At church, his deep bass voice was hard to forget.

"He was a good singer. He sang a few solos and spirituals."

When I was 16%, I went with my closest friend, Gordie Barnes, to see the recruiting officer. We selected air crew. There were 90 or so in our flying course and I came first. I was commissioned as a pilot officer at 18. When I graduated in 1943, I had the weird distinction of being Canada's youngest officer.

Four days before wings parade, I was asked to step into the commanding officer's office. The discussion took about 20 seconds. He just wanted to see me. Apparently, he had received a memo

... he fired torpedoes at at our bow, went under the stern—just rolled it on. I was very lucky. I there when she blew. I sit on top of where the would have been me. explosion was flying went flying through the jacket on. I bounced and 14 were wounded. flock at night and the went over on a 20-degree and disappeared. The I and disappeared. It thank God. A few hours ships from the escort

... at that age what the ting for. They were the dn't like Hitler and the as going to conquer the t first, it's an adventure.

