

Copy of Sally's enclosure of 26/5/98

with my amendments

Notes about the life of Miss Jean Mary Speirs

Family life.

Jean Mary Speirs was born on St. Valentine's Day, 14.2.1922. She had an elder brother John and a younger brother Graham who died in 1973. John married Dorothy and that brought in the link to the Hamilton family (- Kath, the sister-in-law of Dorothy, with son Clive who married Liz). Graham married Celia (also called Scottie) who is Dorothy's sister - and they had a son called Martin, Jean's nephew. Celia subsequently married Eric Reece - but he died in 13.2.98. Martin has two children Sally and Simon - their mother Anne is in Australia so I was unable to contact her. Jean did not marry. Jean lost her parents when 14 and had to be at boarding school even in the holidays.

Young adult life.

Jean went to Harrow Art School where she met Dorothy Leach and shortly after that they worked in Mr. Frank's Studio in Hendon. Jean would have been 19 or 20 then. Dorothy wrote to me that "She was a delightful friend and colleague. Sadly we could not meet often over the course of years, but we never failed to correspond and so kept in touch ..... (although in) ... failing health, her letters were always cheerful and always mentioned the care and comfort her friends gave her in the Bahá'í community".

In the war, 1941-2 in the WAAF, based at Huntingdon, she met Cynthia who remains a good friend and is here to-day with her husband Peter Field. They have two daughters, Sarah who has now four children, Richard, Edward, James and David - and Susan who lives with her parents, unfortunately unable to come to-day. Cynthia has told me that Jean was "a beacon of culture in a mainly philistine desert at that time." Cynthia also said that she and Jean used to go to musical evenings at Hemmingford Grey

near Huntingdon, <sup>on camp bicycles</sup> and they would cycle over there after the war for patchwork evenings with Jill the teacher.

Mrs. Boston didn't take up patchwork till much later - maybe in the 70s. Jean and I didn't go for patchwork classes after the war with anyone called Jill. CF

She was diagnosed as having tuberculosis just too late to have a war service pension. In 1946, aged 22, she was in Edgware Hospital being treated for pulmonary TB - the TB was due to their war service.

CF.  
(this meant she operated on one lung and had to make an effort to sit straight. Was she wounded as Pari said?) There she met Mrs. Hilary Caspar Thrupp who was in an adjacent bed. In 1949 Hilary was discharged, but she says that Jean "poor girl, was worse off and so took longer". She also writes "In spite of all we had the most tremendous laughs, for we hit it off right from the start and understood each other well. We met less after I married, but she used to come and stay with us now and again. I much appreciated the artist that she was and admired her work. Most of all I think I shall miss writing to her. I did so often lengthily but she always kindly said she loved my letters. Latterly, she made long phone calls to me, because it wasn't easy for her to write."

In 1948, aged 24, Jean had left the Central School of Art and met Trudy Reece (nee Rosenau) at the Frank Studio, also Ken and Margaret Dixon. Through Trudy, Jean met Mary Bacon and her husband Kenneth. These remained good friends. Mary said she knew "the Bahá'í people gave her much support and courage". Trudy kept in touch and her last letter to Jean was sent a few days before Christmas 95. <sup>Hilary (not Trudy) also brought book of patchworks, as I know</sup> Cynthia sent her one of Jean's books to remember her by. Unfortunately the <sup>Hilary still treasured it.</sup> letter inviting Hilda Durkin to-day has been returned as "not at this address".

Later it is noted that Jean was living with an aunt and then tried a home in South Devon, but the home was a bad experience.

#### Meeting the Bahá'í Faith

It was in 1968 or 9 that the Bahá'ís in the area covering Three Rivers, Watford and Dacorum numbered about 30 to 40. Large public meetings and firesides took place, particularly at the home of Mrs. Atherton - Parsons (whose husband was a solicitor). Jean saw an advertisement in the paper and went to a public meeting in Watford. She was interested in the Faith and read about it, so in a short time Jean declared her Faith - that must have been in about 1970 or so, when she was aged 48. When the time came for different areas to have their own assemblies, Jean went to Bushey and if she could not go out, the Local Spiritual Assembly met in her house. When Pari and Mehrabahn Firoozmand came to Dacorum, Jean moved to Bovingdon.

#### Steadfastness in the Faith

Pari commented that Jean was always interested to see what new Bahá'í books were published, read much and studied. To the end of her life she gave service to the Faith and tried to help people. Charles MacDonald was the public relations officer for the national papers and he asked Jean, when she read articles concerning the Faith, to send these to him. She was always steadfast and sincere, even when house bound she taught by ringing, writing and giving books to the library. She showed the best qualities, a fine Bahá'í attitude. Jean was always present at meetings and generally these took place in different people's homes. Even when she could not come to a 19 day feast, she was trying to do her duty, sending her contribution by taxi. Pari said that at one of the last times they saw her, when she was finding it difficult to move and was lonely - she said that the only thing keeping her alive was the prayer "is there any remover of difficulties".

In 1986, when she and other friends in the Dacorum Community introduced me to the Bahá'í Faith, for which I am much indebted. I was impressed by her spirituality and sincerity. The photo I sent out was I think from 24.8.94. I gathered that she had had an idea of putting many faces in a drawing of the world for a poster - this idea was used by others for a lovely poster. When she could, she gave a picture once a year to a charity to sell. However, gradually she was able to do less and less art work and her last picture of a boy (Martin's son) was only completed very slowly and with great difficulty. She loved going to Bahá'í events, round about 1990 there were visits to Cambridge and Canterbury I believe. When she could not go, she really missed meeting the friends at these events. In 1995 she wrote to me "Please do not go far without letting me know even in the UK, otherwise I feel rather lost!"

*Jean went on a pilgrimage to Haifa and subsequently to a residential Bahá'í convention, or similar, in Holland. Jean's known dates - probably in late 1980s.*

#### Making friends

A cultured lady, she took great care over her appearance, from her elegant hair style to her shoes, and her flat was also kept spick and span from top to toe! During the last years her restriction to her flat meant she did not meet so many people, but those she did meet became friends. There was the sister of Kari-anna Christopherson, called Diana Spencer and her friend Jill Simmons who worked for RUBRA which helped "professional ladies in distress" - they helped (organised a small annuity for

Jean) and visited her. There were also for example, her hair dresser and the home helps such as Christine King and Gill Archer - the latter in particular regarded Jean almost as a mother. Jean took every opportunity to share her faith with all who came, she had neat heaps of Bahá'í books which she gave away. She prepared a special album of her souvenirs of her life as a Bahá'í and Martha Hall-Patch, niece of Shamsi Nevadi, took this to the Holy Land, in Haifa for the records there. (S.N. was assistant to the Auxiliary Board member).

#### Moving on to a new life

By 1995 she began reluctantly to face the need to move to a Nursing Home and Hilary tried to help her choose one. However one day she was turning too fast, lost her balance and fractured her leg. She entered hospital and in a week unexpectedly faded away, dying peacefully from heart failure (?disease or an embolism). Gill and I had the privilege of being with her at the end. This was early in the morning of Thursday 14.12.95 in Boleyn ward of the Tudor wing of Hemel Hempstead General Hospital.

On the 15th the Universal House of Justice sent a message saying they "were offering prayers at the sacred Threshold on behalf of Mrs. Speirs for the progress of her soul."

The funeral took place on the 22nd just before Christmas, attended by many friends. Subsequently typical of her loving heart many (36) beneficiaries received gifts from Jean. Many of these people would have wished to be here today, but could not make it. These are Pauline, Gill and Hilary who wrote "Those who die in faith, go no further than God - and God is very near." Diana Spence, Dorothy Leach who says she often thinks about Jean and her lovely personality ..... A very dear person!"; Dorothy Speirs and her sister Kath Hamilton, also Susan Field. There is Trudy Reece who, having been very ill this last winter, had many weeks in hospital and at home had an army of carers to look after her as she could scarcely walk from one room to another - none the less, she took the trouble to write that she could not attend today, and commented that "Jean was one of my younger friends - a difference of 14 years!", and said how she misses Jean very much and their regular exchange of letters. These will be remembering Jean with us in our prayers at this time.

Notes compiled by Gill Speirs, 14.1.2000.