

Life Story Work - Kathleen ("Katie") Reid

Katie's time working as a flying controller, World War 2

Katie decided to join up during the war as the result of her only sister's death at the early age of 21 years. Due to the job that she was doing at the time, there was no need for her to join up, as it was not a requirement. Katie was working in the office in a Co-op establishment in Leeds. Katie considered joining both the air force and the land army. However, they stated that she was too small and delicate for the land army, so she joined the WAAF instead. Katie later thought that it probably caused her parents a lot of worry as a consequence.

Katie initially went to flying control at Grimsby, where the officer in charge was very kind to her. She spent approximately a year working there without training. All the men at Grimsby were very protective of her and used to warn others off her. For the first few nights at Grimsby Katie sat and listened to the other girls working. When they realised that she was competent enough, she was then allowed to begin her work there. Therefore she was quite knowledgeable before she went to Cranwell College. The officer in charge at Grimsby was keen on her going to Cranwell.

When Katie went to Cranwell, she trained in flying control. She was in the last group of girls to train there. She wished that they had also been taught more technical issues, to enable her to help the young men when they were in trouble, especially on their first flights. Katie remembered that they were sometimes inclined to panic, which Katie described as very distressing to witness. Katie felt that they really needed somebody with them who had already flown, so that they could relate to the experience.

Katie described her job as holding no real danger in itself, though acknowledged that some girls in flying control had been injured when the returning planes had been pursued and attacked by Germans and they had been caught in the attacks.

Katie was initially stationed with Bomber Command, Grimsby and then Fighter Command, Norfolk. Katie remembers that Grimsby was not a negative place to work, even though everyone knew that every day could be their last. She remembers it as having a very positive atmosphere.

Katie was nick named "half pint" as she was the smallest WAAF at the stations. Katie described the bombers and fighters as being carefully and cleverly selected according to their personality types; the bombers being good team players, some being not so young, whereas the fighters in their Spitfires were often very young, wearing moustaches to make them look older. Katie said that the fighters worked alone, appeared relatively carefree in their approach and used to boast how many planes they had shot down. They always had one button on their coats undone to show they were fighters. Katie describes the fighters as wanting to look like "thoroughbreds" although they were still very young. By contrast, the bombers had to be good team workers. They trained in various areas and were therefore able to multi task, so that they could take over if one member of the crew was injured or killed.

The younger men, 17-18 years of age, were always at the back of the plane. They were hooked in and had difficulty getting out sometimes. They were very vulnerable in that position. Katie remembers that they were sometimes very pale, with "faces as white as chalk" on return, as they were often shocked. On return they would have to go up to the room to be questioned and would sometimes stagger up the stairs like old men.

colliding with the row of three trees near the airfield. More were lost on the landing return than on the outward run to Germany. The Medical Officer wept because he did not even have a chance to save them.

Katie visited Bernard's parents after his death. She helped a local farmer to design a memorial for the men in his field, which still stands there. Bernard is buried in his uncle's grave in Lincolnshire. Katie has a miniature memorial to Bernard, which has remnants of his aircraft on it. On the plaque, it states "Bernard - crew of Avro Lancaster JB 596. Crashed on return from Berlin, Dec. 16/17 1943."

Katie had met Bernard at a dance. He was drunk with a bottle under his arm. He asked her to teach him to dance. Katie remembers that she could not dance very well. When she left for Cranwell, he saw her off on the bus, carrying her kit bag up the hill for her, asking her to write to him. He said that she was the nicest WAAF that he had ever met. In the last letter that he sent to her, he had been drinking with the boys in the crew. He was not happy with the pilot, who Katie says was married with children and had responsibilities. Katie says Bernard used to grumble about him and make fun of him, because he was stern and so on.

On one occasion, a training session was planned for air crew. 60 aircraft were lined up ready to go. Usually in her role as flying controller, Katie was the one to give the instructions and her colleague would record everything that was said on all sides, for evidence in case of errors. On one particular occasion, there were 60 aircraft lined up at night, ready to be involved in some training involving circuits and bumps. The officer in charge of the station wished to take over and give the instructions, believing that it may be too much for Katie. However, Katie asserted herself, stating that she was trained

at Cranwell. The officer let her get on with it and she ensured that she did it perfectly. The training took approximately two hours. At the end of it the officer just stood up and said "thank you" and left.

Katie remembers that some men were killed during the initial tests. Many of them were from New Zealand and Australia. They panicked during the initial training and were killed. Katie states that there was a shortage of flyers, so they did not get the training that they deserved. They used to be taken to the flat fields to train, where there were a limited number of hazards, such as water.

Those men that refused to fly were stripped of their ribbons in front of everyone and publicly humiliated. Katie never attended, as she "could not have born it." The men were put in to an army prison with the bare essentials. Katie described them as "weak as kittens" when they came out. Their first cigarette on release would make them sick.

Katie remembers that some men could not take the pace, which was not their fault. She says that money and time had been spent on their training, however, people cannot tell what they can bear until it happens. Katie remembers that there was a very strict army prison in Scotland. There were nets to catch the men if they tried to jump and commit suicide.

Katie remembers that at the dances, anyone there who could play an instrument did. The aircrew used to drink, so they did not know if the women could dance or not, which Katie described as an advantage to the women!

Katie's life after the war.

After the war, Katie gained a scholarship for an acting academy in London. She was there for approximately one-and-a-half years. She has four medals for the four different areas of study which she completed. As a child, from about ten years of age, she had gone to a "lovely woman" in Leeds, who gave her private acting lessons. Therefore, she had been interested in acting from an early age.

After Katie and her husband married, they moved a lot. He was a Mason and the Masons helped them to settle into the different towns that they moved to. They used to go to the associated dances. Katie used to enjoy dressing up and the food and the company. The last Masonic Lodge that he belonged to was the London one.

Katie said that her husband never thought anything of moving. They had a few houses built. Katie was always happy to follow on. She remembers that it was always nice to go somewhere new.

Katie's husband was a Scottish orphan. His grandmother had brought him up. She describes him as very strong. He was from a mining village, but decided that he was not going to go down the mines. He 'got on his bike' at the age of fourteen and got himself a job in a large house as a butler. The house was owned by an MP. The job ceased at the start of the war when the MP returned to London. Her husband was in Africa and Egypt during the war. He had no leave for several years. His first job post war was via a friend of Katie's father and was based in London.

Katie lived in Cyprus for ten years. She had a house built out there. She really enjoyed her life out there and they had a

full life with lots of parties. Katie remembers that the Greek men used to have many affairs, however, when the divorce laws were introduced she said that life was better for the women, as the men had to be more careful!

On return from Cyprus Katie and her husband owned shops and employed on average two assistants. The first shop was in the south by the seaside. Each shop that they ran incorporated a post office. She remembers that they never stopped working. Katie used to do the balancing of the books every Friday evening.

Both Katie and her husband used to work within the shops. They had shops in four or five different locations, including the south and in Scotland at different times. They used to sell up and then move. They sold their Torquay business to a man who later stole money and ended up in prison. They used to specialise in books, pens and fruit. Katie misses that life. She used to enjoy chatting to the customers.

At one stage Katie lived in a village near Blackpool. She used to go to a lady for sculpture classes in the evenings. She had some free time as she was not working at the time and her husband was often away helping out in the post office that they had. Katie has photos of her at the night class. Katie has a very accomplished sculpture (bust) of a black male model that she created. She has an accompanying photograph of the model at the class which indicates how accurate the likeness is.

Katie has other beautiful sculptures that she has created both in clay and wood. She has several wood carvings, including a large one of a bird of prey and an Elizabethan style carving of a lady, reminiscent of a child's doll of the time. Katie states that the theme is linked to slavery. The woman is a carving of a lady from a very religious family, near to the crown. The lady

and her brother were slave dealers and prominent in English society. They were involved in bringing black men over from America and dumping them in the sea. Katie made the sculpture as she was interested in the combination of social status and the acts that they committed, which horrify Katie.

Katie made the sculpture of the nude reclining figure first, followed by the bust of the black male model, then the bird, followed by the Elizabethan style lady.

Katie made the clay bust of her son herself at home after the classes had finished. In it he is portrayed as being approximately four years of age, with curly hair. They lived near someone with a forge, so they partly baked it for her.

At one stage, when Katie was living in Stirling, she operated as a councillor. She was also a Bailey for the council of Stirling. She nearly became Mayor, but they moved house before this could happen. She lived in Stirling for about ten years.

Katie used to teach at Leeds College of music and after she married, she taught at different schools in Scotland and England. She used to teach English and acting. At one stage she used to travel from Stirling to Glasgow by train every day and then take a bus. Her husband used to give her a lift to the train. She initially taught in three infant schools and then in taught at three secondary schools, including one serving the Goebals.

When Katie taught in the Goebals in Glasgow, she remembers that the houses were being pulled down and there was water everywhere. She taught there for about five years. She describes the children as "lovely", some being not very strong, but Katie remembers that there were lots of good mothers who worked hard to keep things going. There were many

immigrants from Africa placed in the Goebals. Katie had to teach them English.

Two of Katie's students from the Goebals won the yearly prize for public speaking, run by the local newspaper. She used to get the children to do a lot of choral speaking, where they were in choirs but spoke the words. The children would get a certificate for their participation.

During the last few years of her husband's life, he and Katie gave up the shops and went abroad for holidays a lot. He was unwell, but they had a lovely time.

Katie - general

Katie attributes her small stature, leading to her nick-name of half-pint, to the lack of food in Yorkshire after the Great War.

Katie's sister was younger than Katie, but they were very close. Katie remembers that her sister went on holiday with her friend. They slept in the same bed, which was usual then. Her friend, unbeknown to her, had TB. Katie's sister contracted it. Her sister refused to go into hospital, so the family acquired a cottage in Yorkshire. Katie's mother nursed her. The doctors used to visit from Harrogate. Katie and her father used to visit at weekends. Katie used to cook and take her chicken. She died by the age of 21.