

Joan Lockwood

BY ANN BURNS (JOAN'S NIECE)©

At the age of 21, Joan Lockwood, born in Stockton-on-Tees, England, in May 1920, experienced a significant personal tragedy. Her boyfriend, John Ganner, a Fleet Air Arm pilot, was killed in a flight training accident off the coast of Scotland in 1941. Conscription of women aged 20 to 30 began that same year. John's death may have been Joan's motivation to join the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) rather than choosing one of the other services. Her posting took her to the RCAF Overseas Headquarters at Lincoln's Inn Fields in London, where her duties were clerical and secretarial. She worked in the same office as a young Canadian Air Force officer, Lieutenant Robert (Bob) Burns. Bob's brother, Ray, a lieutenant in the Canadian Army, came to the office one day and Bob introduced him to Joan. As far as Bob knew, it was a fleeting acquaintance. However, Ray and Joan saw it differently. They hit it off on that very first day.

Over the course of the next few months Joan and Ray had a whirlwind and often long-distance romance. If their friends knew of the growing relationship, Bob certainly did not. One day, as the story goes, he was wakened up early by a colleague in his quarters. A message had come in ordering Bob to get to Guildford as fast as possible. He was to be the best man at Ray's wedding. This was news to him, but he did as requested. It's not clear that Bob even knew who it was that Ray was about to marry.

On 2 March 1946, Joan Lockwood married Ray Burns in St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church at Guildford, just south of London. The wedding party included Bob as best man, and a WAAF friend of Joan's, Daisy Hall, as her maid of honour. Ethel and Joe Lockwood (Joan's parents) travelled from their home in Stockton-on-Tees for the wedding. Also in attendance was Joan's brother, Gordon.

Gordon was in the Royal Navy and was taking a course not far from London at the time.

Unbeknownst to Gordon, Joan had arranged for free accommodations for him at the home of a wealthy family at Swiss Cottage, not far away. He received royal treatment from the family, who entertained him as one of their own. At the small but lively wedding party following the ceremony, a waiter spilled a drink all over Gordon's uniform, an incident that has stuck in his memory ever since. The party consisted of a lovely meal and drinks, and undoubtedly lots of cheers and toasts to the happy couple.

As was Canadian Army policy, after the war, the soldiers and officers were sent back to Canada by ship. Their wives and any children could not travel with them. Separate arrangements were made for these women we now know as war brides. Ray sailed back to Canada on RMS *Aquitania* in April 1946 and moved back into the apartment his mother and sisters occupied on Lisgar Street in Ottawa. He had to wait patiently for Joan's arrival.



Joan Lockwood and Ray Burns, 1946

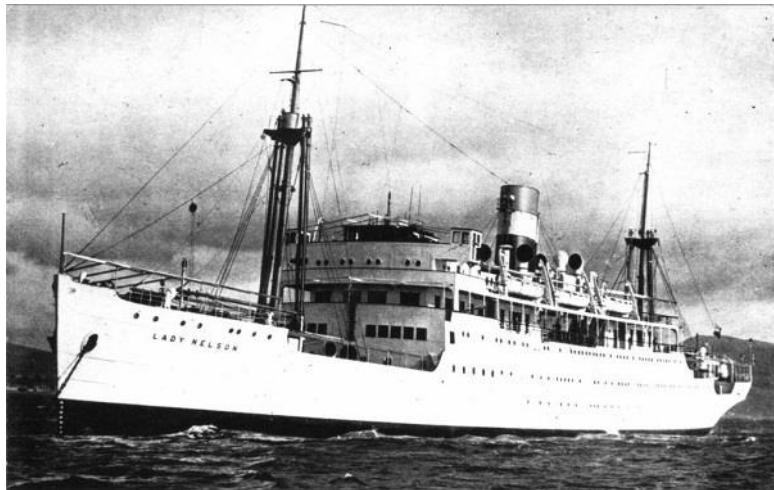
Source, family photos: author

There was a lot for Joan to do to prepare for her departure. Although she was looking forward to joining her new husband, Joan had to say good-bye to her own family. None of them knew when they would next see each other. For a close family, one can only imagine the feelings that were pulling Joan in two directions. Rationing was still in effect, money was anything but plentiful, but at least the journey to Canada for the war brides was paid for by the Canadian Government.

Shortly before she left England, Joan converted to Roman Catholicism. This was the first step towards acceptance by her new mother-in-law, which would not be won easily. This baptism was conditional, as she had already been baptized, and strictly speaking another baptism was not necessary. Joan had spoken to her cousin Catherine Warburton, who was a Catholic, about converting to that faith. Whatever the advice, Joan did convert, and it was a decision she never regretted.

Finally, the time came to leave for Canada. Joan was met in London by her brother Gordon, who saw her off at the train station. Just as she was saying good-bye, Joan gave Gordon a Canadian \$1.00 bill on which she wrote a note: "To my Dearest Brother with all my love, Joan." It is dated 9 August 1946. Gordon kept, and still has, that note.

The train whisked its war bride passengers off to Southampton for the Atlantic crossing on RMS *Lady Nelson*. Among its 355 passengers, along with Joan, were 15 other war brides heading to Ottawa. The crossing took several days, and the passengers disembarked at Pier 21 in Halifax on 19 August 1946 after arriving very late on the night of the 18th.



RMS *Lady Nelson*
Source: Tim Webb

Ready to greet the by-now-exhausted women, some with young children, were Red Cross volunteers. No war bride was left

on her own to figure out where to go next. Upon their arrival in Halifax, the women entered Pier 21, and then proceeded to the Immigration Annex building. Situated parallel to Pier 21, separated from it by railway tracks and accessed by two overhead walkways, the Immigration Annex was a single-story building resembling a medium-sized train station. It housed various immigration, transportation, and social services. While waiting to be processed by Canadian immigration officials, the new immigrants waited on long wooden benches. Additional entry procedures sped up processing. Halifax's Embarkation Transit Unit Movement Control, composed mainly of Red Cross workers, helped war brides find special trains scheduled to transport them to other parts of Canada and notified Canadian families to ensure that they would be waiting for the new arrivals. Joan was escorted to the overnight train for Ottawa.

The train carrying the war brides made a short stop in Montreal. So eager was he to be reunited, Ray met the train there. However, the brides were compelled to complete the journey to their stated destination. Joan reboarded the train and Ray made haste to get to the station in Ottawa.

Not every journey ends exactly according to plan. As the 16 women disembarked from the trains, they looked anxiously through the crowd for their husbands and new families. Fifteen of them were greeted as expected. Joan searched the crowd for Ray but couldn't spot him. A Red Cross volunteer kept her company, as her duty demanded. Eventually the crowd parted as an extremely late, very rushed young man sought his bride: that harried young man was Ray Burns. When he finally spotted Joan, he picked her up and whirled her around, to the delight of everyone in the station.

Joan knew that Ray would take good care of her. Immediately upon her meeting Rita, the wife of Ray's brother Bob, a long-lasting friendship was formed. Neither woman had a sister of her own and so they became sisters in spirit. This relationship remained strong over the following decades.

Meeting Ray's family was another matter. They lived initially with Ray's mother and sisters in a top floor Lisgar St. apartment. Reception by the family was rather cool but did warm up over time. In fact, in later years, Joan became great friends with Ray's older sister, Jean. As near as we can figure, the Burns women were quite fond of a previous girlfriend of Ray's and were slow to accept Joan into the family. Eventually, though, the family considered Joan to be one of them.

After a short period of time, Joan and Ray moved to their own home in the west end of Ottawa. Over the succeeding years they had five children. Ray died suddenly in 1980 and Joan never remarried. The grandmother of five and great-grandmother of two celebrated her 100th birthday on 18 May 2020 and passed away, much mourned, on 15 December 2020.

Tardy Husband Almost Misses Bride's Arrival

Talk about life's darkest moment!

When 16 Ottawa and district war-brides from the Lady Nelson reached the Union Station Tuesday evening at eight o'clock one of them stepped off the train to find no husband waiting for her with open arms. Accompanied by a Red Cross girl she walked anxiously down the long track platform until she reached the front of the crowd pressing forward toward the gate and then stopped to nervously search the sea of very strange shining faces.

Suddenly there was a ripple of movement through the center of the throng, people were shoved hurriedly to the left and right, and like a shot from the mouth of a cannon there burst out of that crowd a husband who shot across the intervening space, whirled his bride around through

the air, had her beaming with happiness in no time and brought a relieved smile to the worried face of the Red Cross attendant.

Mrs. Joan H. Burns, wife of T. R. Burns, 421 Lisgar street, enjoyed immensely her first Atlantic crossing and expects to fit into life here with no trouble at all.

Thurs.-Fri.-Sat.
Here's Butch ("Boys Ranch") Jenkins in another swell hit!

"Nation"
A CLARET
Starring MICKEY ROONEY
Second Big Hit! "OH MY I"

TODAY ONLY! "STRANGE" "JOHNNY C"

A THOUSAND THRI
WHAT A MAN FOR ACTION!
WHAT A MAN FOR ROMANCE!
WHAT A MAN FOR MUSH!

Joan's arrival in Ottawa

Source: *Ottawa Citizen*, Wednesday, 21 August 1946