



Kim Seary's story of
Patricia



My mother, Patricia Primrose Lazell, was born in Grays, Essex, England, on January 16, 1924. She was the daughter of Harry and Ethel, and the youngest of three children. Harry was a longshoreman at the Tilbury docks, and was a handsome 6'1" to Ethel's 4'11". Ethel had had polio as a child and wore a special boot. I remember my mother saying something about how her mother was bitterly self-conscious about her pronounced limp.

I only know bits and pieces of my mother's childhood. I do remember her telling me that she'd had her first period when she was only ten, and that she'd had "no idea what it was all about".

"Oh, Kim" she said, "I was such a brat, I drove my poor mother barmy!"

In her teens, Pat was athletic – a dancer and gymnast. She was also gorgeous with dark curly hair, fair skin, and dimpled apple cheeks. She loved anything to do with glamour and film stars. At sixteen, just before war broke out she was meant to go to beauty school, but as she said, "Everyone's life changed then, dear..." So, she stayed in Grays and worked for "Boots" a drugstore chain, and then she worked in a shoe shop. It was all a lark to Pat. She and her work-mate would go in the back, stifling giggles and practically peeing, while shoving a customer's shoes on "the stretcher" (which consisted of a broom handle), then Pat would return to the customer straight-faced, presenting the "stretched" shoes.

During the war, Pat joined a band as a singer and dancer to entertain the troops. There's a newspaper clipping of them – a trio of scantily clad young women; my mother with her gorgeous legs crossed.

She met my dad (a Canadian anti-aircraft gunner) on a blind date to a dance. "And that was it!" my dad says.

Pat and Syd were married in 1943, and my mother gave birth to my brother Andrew, in 1944. My dad was off fighting in Europe at the time. It was a torturous birth experience – Andrew was double breach without surgery. She said she'd had to "lay at attention" when the head nurse was doing rounds during her labour. Her newborn was unable to nurse, but the hospital staff insisted that he must. He was starving when she left hospital, until he was given "a proper formula" at home.

During the blitz, Pat refused to go down into air-raid shelters. It was dingy, and there were spiders down there! If the bombs started falling when she and her friends were at "the pictures", they would sit in the dark and wait until it was over, and the projectionist changed the reel. Nobody wanted to miss the end of the film!

After she had my brother, she would sit with her newborn under the stairs in her mother's home until the bombs stopped falling, gazing at him cooing and crooning, "Ah, you're a lovely boy. Yes you are. Yes you are." She was simply... intrepid.

When Andrew was just walking, she came to Canada in a convoy, as there were still enemy U-boats around. Upon arriving in Halifax, the war-brides were given baskets of fruit, and my mother marveled to see and taste a banana! She then went by train to Montreal, and then on another 50 miles, to stay with my dad's mother in a small town called Brownsburg in the Laurentians. I often wonder what it was like for her then. She was so far from home, with a toddler in tow, and my dad still away in war-torn Europe. She never spoke of that time.

My dad finally did arrive home, and she promptly got pregnant, giving birth to my sister Susan in 1946, and then eight years later in 1954, due to an accidental hole in the diaphragm, there was me. I was named after the film-star, Kim Novak.

I was so proud of my beautiful Mommy – with her sweet sing-songy English voice. She was a Tawny Owl in Brownies, she taught tap-dancing, organized fashion shows, sang a beautiful soprano in the church choir, and did water-ballet with all the girls at the little spot where we swam during the summers. All the kids in the neighbourhood would come to our door for a candy from Mrs. Seary. Everyone loved her. As a child, the only time I remember her being really serious and solemn, was when she was a flag-bearer on Remembrance Day.

She didn't get to go back to England again until 1964. She missed "home" so terribly. I remember her playing her Vera Lynn record and crying. (I still know all those songs.) But these were rare moods, at least that she let me see. Her best friend Winnie, another war-bride, lived down the street. She and mommy would spend hours on the phone talking about the "rotten snow" and the "filthy cold", and then laughing uproariously at the idiosyncrasies of their Canadian husbands.

When I was twelve, mom learned to sew and by the time I was in high school, she was sewing all my wild sixties outfits. She used to tell me that she "lived through" me. She would sit transfixed listening to my intensely fraught teenage poetry and then say, "I don't understand you at all dear." But, I told her all about my boyfriends, and we would giggle and go in the bathroom to smoke, blowing it out the window – hiding from my dad. She was like a teenager herself really. When my friends came over, it was to see her as much as it was to see me.

Mommy had a wonderful kooky sense of humour. At our local legion, I snuck in once and caught her performing a strip-tease in a ski-doo suit – She had on the helmet and goggles and mitts, and stripped suggestively right down to the long underwear. She was hilarious!!!

Pat made a lovely clean, warm, home, and a glorious garden in the summer. She really had no desire for an outside job. Our main meal was at noon. She cooked all the traditional English food: steak and kidney pies, stews, roast beef and Yorkshire puddin' on Sundays. There would always be cake or apple crisp. In the summers, she would pack elaborate picnics for road trips. I remember her telling me a story about when she first came to Canada, and tried to make my dad a cake. The measurements being all different, the cake was "like a stone". She said she cried and buried it in the back yard.

Just after I gave birth to my daughter Rebecca in 1981, she came from Montreal to stay with us for two weeks. I had severe post-partum depression, and my mother was wonderful. Off we'd go for walks that early spring, with Rebecca in the snuggly and me crying. She gently drew my attention to the blossoming trees and the sweet breeze, and while the baby slept, we marveled together at the miracle of this perfect new life. She never reproached me for not being married to Rebecca's father. She just loved us. She was so very good at loving. She always seemed to know just the right thing to do when someone was in pain of any kind.

My mother was devoted to my father, although she did complain about him – mostly that he never seemed to get around to cleaning out the back basement, where he stored all his "junk". I remember going for walks with them and they would hold hands like kids, and stand gazing up at a bird they'd spied up in the trees. After her children were all gone and far away, she and my dad enjoyed traveling together.

In her later years, she did some phenomenal needle work. She was always making something beautiful. But she seemed completely unaware of how special she was, and how good she was at doing things.

She was proud of one accomplishment, though. She could still touch her toes without bending her knees right up to her last year when she was in a nursing home. She suffered from dementia, and would relive many of the horrors that she'd never expressed about war-time. I was with her once when she 'went inside a picture' in her mind. It was a card that was tacked on the wall beside her bed: An English garden, with a thatched roof cottage. She seemed so happy there, and I was so glad to be with her in that moment of that gentle delusion.

She died in the summer of 1999, and at the time, I felt like all the love had gone out of the world. ... I still miss her. Oh, mommy. I just wish...that we could sit together again in the kitchen, having one of our chats, sipping cups of lovely hot sweet milky tea.