

Days in the life of a country girl

By Nathan Wilbur

WORTHINGTON — Vitality is a precious resource in any person. It is the sum of one's physical strength and mental vigor, and in it is contained one's capacity for leading a purposeful life.

Lois Ashe Brown of Elderberry Lane possesses a full measure of vitality.

"I really think that I have the most exciting life of anyone that I know," she said, "and that I'm living in the most exciting time in history." Mrs. Brown should know, for she has kept a diary of her life, and the lives of people around her, for 44 years.

Raised on a farm

Born on Sept. 25, 1919 in Lancaster, N.H., Mrs. Brown was raised on a farm in nearby Lyndon, Vt.

"My heart is still there," she said. "We moved from Lyndon to Pittsfield in 1936, when my father came to work for General Electric at the end of the Depression. I was a country girl, a junior at Pittsfield High, and was very lonesome.

"At our first Christmas (in Pittsfield), my uncle gave me a nice leather-bound diary. He said, 'You're starting a new life, and you should keep a record of it, not missing a day.'" Mrs. Brown began her diary then, and has kept it faithfully ever since.

Inscribed therein in a clear, precise hand are her experiences as a student in high school, at North Adams State College, and at the Pittsfield Secretarial School (now defunct); as an employee of the General Electric Co. in Pittsfield "through the war years," and as the wife of Harold E. Brown, with whom she recently celebrated their 30th anniversary.

A coinciding distinction was granted her by her neighbors. "One of them told me," said Mrs. Brown with a laugh, "that after 30 years I was finally a citizen of the town."

Active in town

Indeed she is. Mrs. Brown is a member of the Worthington Historical Commission, the Worthington Historical Society and the town Board of Health. As a correspondent for *The Eagle* she reports on town events, and she plays an active role in town politics.

"I've helped pick the selectmen here," she said. "I try to find candidates who are connected with old town families,



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DISPLAYING HER DIARIES is Lois Ashe Brown of Worthington, who has kept detailed records of her experiences for the last 44 years. She has willed her diaries to the town library.

who are educated and articulate, and who are well-known and liked. I have to sell the idea of being selectmen to them, because the good candidates wouldn't go after it on their own. It's the ones who run of their own accord that you've got to look out for."

Mrs. Brown also works as a sales representative for Smith Monuments of Westfield, selling headstones and monuments "for all of the hilltown cemeteries," and serves as chairman of the scholarship committee for the Hillside Agricultural Society, the annual sponsor of the Cummingtown Fair.

When not occupied with these duties, she cares for her husband (who works for the General Electric Co.), her invalid mother, and whichever of her three sons (Willard, 16; Benjamin, 24, and Lyndon, 28) happen to be about the house.

And, each day, she finds time to write her diary.

One entry, that of Dec. 8, 1941, recalls the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor: "Monday — Japan made an air raid on Honolulu yesterday. U.S. declared war on Japan today. Bought another bond. Leah Cox Smith (a friend from Lyndon, Vt.) had a son recently. Blackout on Pacific Coast. Still mild weather."

For Mrs. Brown, these short sentences unlock the archives of her memory.

"I was 20 then," she said, "working in the plastics division of GE. I was already doing war work part time four hours a day, and I immediately went to work full time six and then seven days a week with no time off. I ran a machine that stamped the letters 'GE' in gold on the plastic faces of radios.

"I knew a North Adams girl," she continued, "who married a

Williams College student in the Naval Reserve just before Pearl Harbor. They were married on the Saturday before the attack, and went out to the West Coast on their honeymoon.

"The next day, the attack came and he was called immediately. She flew back from the coast and returned to work at GE. They had no married life together, and she didn't see him for four years. We all shared her concern."

In the course of filling 12 books with her reminiscences, Mrs. Brown has sought to produce an account of historical interest.

Everyday occurrences

"I've tried to relate everyday occurrences and town and world events," she said, "and to weave it all together to make a running account of life in these times. I just hope that it will be a valuable reflection of the ordinary life of a country girl." With that hope, she has willed her diaries to the town library.

For anyone who has experienced Mrs. Brown's direct and candid manner, however, the entries in her journals would seem only pallid evocations of her personality.

"Someone asked me once," she said, "how I could get along with a woman with whom I worked on a town committee, who was so bossy and superior. Without a second thought, I blurted out, 'Because I'm a Vermonter, and no one is superior to a Vermonter!'"

"Now that I'm older, I know better than to say such things," she added. "At 60, I'm much younger than when I was 18. I was a serious child, but now I see the humor in every situation. I'm very aware of the exciting life I lead."

It's a pity that although Lois Brown's diaries may be preserved for posterity, her energy and spirit cannot.

2 in Worthington receive diplomas

WORTHINGTON — The Misses Joan Mollison and Barbara LaRock received diplomas at the graduation exercises this week at St. John's Institute of Business in West Springfield. Both are 1979 graduates of the Gateway Regional High School.

Joan is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Mollison of Windy Hill Farm, and Barbara is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leroy LaRock of Clark Hill.