

Peel Bury Bk July 12-78 MT

When it all falls apart and you're middle aged...

By **BETTIE BRADLEY**
Times Community Editor

Fiftyish, fighting cancer, recently divorced after a 32-year marriage and starting all over. It reads like a bad novel, but it's a nightmare that Constance Burns Crossley has lived through and is surviving as she experiments in reshaping her life.

"I'm not a heroine," she insists again and again. "Of course, it's traumatic, but most of the time I'm glad to be alive."

Middle-age divorce is a modern-day phenomenon that has swelled to proportions of an epidemic and Constance feels that the only purpose in telling about her past year is to reassure other women that they aren't alone.

"I'm learning to be on my own, but I think I hide from men. But don't misunderstand me. I don't think being alone is a good idea. I like things in twos."

IT STARTED IN ENGLAND

She married at age 19, leaving England with her young husband and baby to try life in Canada. They settled first in Vancouver, arriving on Canada's birthday "and had our first taste of strawberry shortcake", but Alan was lured to Ottawa as a deputy chief architect and planner. He had attracted attention by showing his dislike of neat, checkerboard, North American-style planning and introducing European-style curves and crescents in city planning.

By the time the Crossleys moved to Toronto, six-and-a-half years later, they had four children.



Times photo by KEN KERR

THE DIAGNOSIS: CANCER

This past spring, she was beginning to put her new, single life in order when she became ill. "In dreadful pain, I went to the hospital at 1 a.m. on Good Friday morning and got a lecture about the beds being full."

She demanded an X-Ray and to be admitted "and more to humor me, they finally agreed to an X-Ray."

She says it took six doctors five days to take her illness seriously, "but my diagnosed stomach flu miraculously changed to a tumor, which turned out to be malignant and I underwent massive surgery."

After recuperating, she fled to Paris with her daughter, returning to "hide out at the Ramada Inn," where she even had her meals sent in. She woke up one morning and decided life had to be faced, asked her banker for \$500, and went out and found the small apartment in Port Credit.

"If I have a message, it's that life is pretty good. I learned things about myself. I found that you can think you're coping intellectually but you can be doing yourself enormous emotional damage, which usually translates into inflicting illness on yourself."

STARTING AGAIN

She will return to England briefly this month, then come back to Mississauga to set up a household for her and her

Times photo by KEN KERR

"I always worked with Alan, doing his interior design and some architectural drawings as well as developing my own painting." Her background fitted perfectly. Constance had been addicted to color and form since she was a child, demanding a little box of two-penny paints in return for baby-sitting her five brothers and sisters.

"My brother taught me how to use the dregs from the teapot to get color. Now, I sometimes use left-over coffee, pouring it on wrinkled paper to get a parchment effect."

She looks around her small apartment, crowded with her paintings. "It's never been a hobby. But now it becomes important — part of my survival."

Peel Biog Bk
LIFE AT OXBOW

The good years centred around Oxbow, the lovely home on Mississauga Road with the connecting studio that is so familiar to many in the City. Twenty years ago the Crossleys designed and built it from stone and beams from old barns and homes and it became an art centre in Mississauga. (It was a House of the Month in The Times in 1976).

Constance formed the Mississauga Arts Society and she and Alan held the first art show at City Hall, showing 200 of their paintings and pieces of sculpture.

Last year she published the Oxbow House Cookery Book.

"I go back to Oxbow House occasionally, but I find it so difficult to take things away. Everything there seems to belong — things have taken on a life of their own and that life is at Oxbow."

The house no longer belongs to either of the Crossleys, but "we have leased it back from the government and are appealing the price they intend to pay for it."

youngest daughter.

"You can't be bitter. I like men. I like the concept of being married. In fact, I deplore the thought of never marrying again."

She is learning to think of herself, "I've been the pivot of my family for so long," but says it is sad to know that never again will she have the energy to build with a man from scratch as a woman does in a long-term first marriage.

"I'm persuaded men fear domination. Perhaps a second marriage would have to preclude my own work."

In the meantime, she is organizing a new future that very much includes a career.

"I'm a good writer, I paint and I will start on my pottery again. I intend to work hard — I always have."

To arrange to see her paintings, call Constance Burns Crossley at 274-7418.

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