



Spotlight on ACL Female Volunteer & Former Cadet



A Lifetime in Blue

FROM AIR CADET TO FAMILY LEGACY

For Mary, a former member of the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, a childhood fascination with aircraft would grow into a lifelong connection to aviation, service, and community, one that now spans generations.

Long before joining air cadets, Mary's story began near an airport, where weekends were spent alongside her father watching aircraft take off and land. That early exposure sparked a fascination with flight, one that would quietly shape the course of her life.

In 1974, Mary and her family immigrated to Canada, settling in Victoria, BC. The transition wasn't easy. That first summer felt isolating, with few friends and long days at home. Looking to lift her spirits, her Dad brought her to the Abbotsford International Airshow, a moment that would prove pivotal.

While exploring the airshow, Mary found herself repeatedly drawn to the Air Cadet booth. Though too shy to approach, her father noticed her interest. Soon after, he reached out to a local cadet squadron to ask if the cadet program accepted landed immigrants. Encouraged to join, Mary took that step and, as she puts it, "the rest is history."

Mary enrolled with 89 Victoria Pacific Squadron in 1974, beginning a five year journey that would shape her identity and future. Her father even became the Chair of the sponsoring committee for close to 10 years (1979 to 1987) at 89 Victoria Pacific.

Through the air cadet program, she developed confidence, leadership, and a sense of belonging. In 1978, she became a Canadian citizen, a milestone she credits in part to the support and structure provided by air cadets.



Her cadet career included summer training at several well known Cadet Training Centres. In 1975, Mary attended basic training in Penhold, the first year girls were officially allowed to attend camp. Marking the 50th anniversary of girls in the cadet program last year (2025), Mary is proud to have been among that first generation. She returned to Penhold for Junior Leaders in 1976. In 1977, she travelled to CFB Borden for technical training, where she discovered a passion for photography. By 1978 and 1979, she returned to Penhold as staff, serving as an Air Cadet Corporal (A/Cpl) and beginning her transition into leadership.





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Mary's commitment continued as she became an Officer Cadet in 1979, completing Basic Officer training and the Leadership and Training Qualification (LTQ) course at Patricia Bay. She later returned to Penhold in 1980 and 1981 as an Acting Lieutenant (A/Lt), serving as a Basic Course Flight Commander and mentoring the next generation of cadets.

During this time, Mary met and later married Chris Higgins, also a former Air Cadet and a member of the Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force. Their journey together took them to Moose Jaw, where she continued her involvement with 40 Moose Jaw Squadron. As their family grew with the arrival of two sons, Sean and Thomas, her participation paused, but the cadet connection never faded.

Years later, that connection came full circle when her son Sean joined 746 Cloverdale Squadron (now 746 Lightning Hawk Squadron) in Langley, BC. When the unit needed staff, Mary stepped back into uniform, once again giving her time and experience to the program that had given her so much.

Moves to Winnipeg and back to Victoria brought periods of hiatus, but cadets remained a family constant. Both of her sons joined 89 Squadron and later 6 Jim Whitecross Squadron in Winnipeg, while her husband also served on staff. The Higgins family's involvement highlighted just how deeply rooted and instrumental air cadets had become in their lives.



***keep going, do the best that you can, find the small things that you enjoy doing and build on those skills**

In 2015, Mary joined the Air Cadet League of Canada (Manitoba Provincial Committee), taking on roles that supported cadets from the civilian side of the program. From running provincial raffles to serving as a Squadron Liaison for 176 Boeing of Canada Squadron, she gained a new perspective, one that reinforced her appreciation for the program's impact.

For Mary, the Royal Canadian Air Cadets has always been more than just a youth program. It has been a lifelong community. Through it, she formed lasting friendships, discovered passions, and even met her husband through shared cadet connections.

Today, that legacy continues. Her youngest son Thomas met his future wife while both were cadets at 6 Squadron in Winnipeg. Now married with two daughters of their own, the next generation may soon follow the same path.

For Mary, Air Cadets has never just been an activity. It is a family tradition, a foundation, and a lifelong bond that continues to shape generations.

