

# SENIOR TIMES

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## FEATURING



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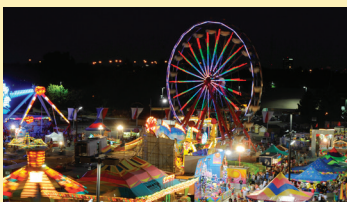
**Still connecting in their 60's**

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### COLUMBUS UNCOVERED

## Columbus senior's 9/11 emergency landing

By John Clark

The thought of an emergency landing on a return flight from Europe didn't bother Shirley Brooks-Jones so much. The 65-year-old Clintonville resident was a seasoned traveler and one who didn't worry easily.

Besides, the captain's voice was so reassuring. His announcement went something like, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have a little problem here. One of our instruments appears to have failed. Nothing to worry about. But out of an abundance of caution, we will not be landing in Atlanta tonight, but rather in Gander, Newfoundland. We'll keep you updated from the cockpit."

Shirley thought, "Well, I've never been to Newfoundland. This might be kind of interesting."

But it was late in the day, already. And Shirley knew it would be several more hours before arrival; so she made herself as comfortable as possible and waited. Then, about 11 p.m. Eastern Time, as their plane began descending, passengers caught glimpse of an incredible sight – 20 or more commercial jets from airlines around the world huddled together at this tiny Canadian airport. This was September 11th, 2001, and they were soon to hear about the horrors of that day.

"Folks," the captain said (paraphrasing), "that part about the broken instrument was a ruse, and I do apologize. I didn't want to alarm anyone at the time. But there has been a terrorist attack in the United States, and the military there has closed the country's entire air space. Looks like we'll be here for a little while."

Shock spread throughout the passenger cabin. Some crying, too. Of course, Shirley was concerned about her husband, Ron, back in Ohio. But she also knew things would work



Shirley Brooks-Jones

out. They had to. They always did.

The Vinton County native had moved to Columbus with her family about 1939, when she was four years old. They were poor, and it took an early teacher of Shirley's to notice that she had trouble seeing. That teacher's call to a local Lions Club chapter led to Shirley getting the eyeglasses she so desperately needed.

Right out of high school, Shirley took a staff position at Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, where she was highly respected. Only after retirement, 35 years later, did she take the opportunity to become a student – graduating from OSU with a degree in English literature and art history. She had waited about marriage, also, tying the knot with Ron Jones about 1991, when she was 55 and he was 59.

After graduation, Shirley got involved with People to People, an organization

begun by President Eisenhower to foster friendship and better relations between countries. She was attending a People to People conference in Denmark just before the



Order of Newfoundland

9/11 tragedy.

Sitting in an airplane seat for 28 hours, parked at the Gander, Newfoundland, airport, was a lot to bear – even for the pilot, who eventually made his

way to the passenger cabin to take a nap among them.

Wednesday morning, September 12th, the passengers – along with those from almost 40 other planes began stepping outside and making their way through immigration. Next, school buses shuttled the 7,000 or so "plane people" to temporary shelters set up in Gander and the dozen or more tiny communities surrounding it. And everywhere they went, the Canadians couldn't have been nicer.

Shirley's journal entry for Thursday morning reads, "People are so wonderful and warm and friendly. And they are incredibly organized. They gave us anything we wanted to eat and drink. No charge at all."

The Newfoundlanders also found passengers a place to stay until they were allowed to re-board their planes Friday morning. Shirley and her fellow passengers were assigned to the Lions Club building in the tiny town of Lewisporte. As soon as she saw the sign on the building, she began to cry for joy. "Here are the Lions, taking care of me again! So, all my life, I've been grateful to the Lions for helping me."

At the Lions building, "plane people" found cots with blankets and pillows, plenty of food and drink, toiletries and more. They were also given access to showers at a nearby school and laundry facilities. The friendships and the

bonds that were made between the passengers and their hosts would never be broken.

When Friday finally came and the "plane people" were in the air again, See 9/11, page 10