

Writer and Artist meet after 54 years

By Frank A Healy

Many months before the allied invasion of Europe – D Day – a young Canadian naval reporter met up with a young Canadian war artist as they went through their naval officers' familiarization course at HMCS Cornwallis. Both had a lot in common: to bring to Canadians the human as well as the frightening side of war. Posted overseas, they went their separate ways until meeting again aboard a Canadian destroyer – HMCS Iroquois – in the summer of 1944, as the allies began defeating the Germans on land and sea. Aboard the Canadian destroyer, both shared – for pen and brush – exciting actions off the West coast of France, mainly in the Bay of Biscay.

The artist, Jack Nichols, went off to express himself on canvas. The writer, Frank Healy, headed as usual to his typewriter. It had been a short-lived friendship, because their paths never crossed again. They pursued further adventures until the end of the war. One didn't know if the other had survived.

But all's well that ends well.

In April 1978, Nichols' drawings became the subject of an exhibit at the Canadian War Museum. It was the first complete public showing of his war art on paper from the museum's permanent collection.

And, unbeknown to artist Nichols, writer Healy (now a retired public servant) was asked to introduce the artist at the opening reception. Healy's participation was kept secret to the very last minute.

Emotion ran high as Nichols and Healy spotted each other for the first time in 54 years.

Needless to say, there was a touching embrace. A picture is, indeed, worth a thousand words.

Addendum by Francie Healy:

Frank A Healy was also a subject of interest at the Canadian War Museum in the form of sketches of him by Elaine Gobel, and also by his appearance in a photograph on VE Day that has become almost iconic. Frank A Healy is second from the right.

More about Jack Nichols: <http://www.cabbagetownpeople.ca/person/jack-nichols/>

