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Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777-601 PAREDE

**A tribute to Miss Joan Croft de Moura MBE
(23.06.1925 - 25.08.2007)**

Joan was the eldest of four children born in Lisbon to Ines and Thomaz Custance Croft de Moura. Thomaz was a Portuguese national and his wife was the youngest daughter of the Rev. Robert Lithgow, Minister to St Andrews Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Lisbon, and his German wife, Adèle.

After four years at the German School in Lisbon Joan was moved at the outbreak of World War II to the Collège Féminin Français also in Lisbon. As from an early age she was conversant in German, French, English and Portuguese, a gift that stood her in good stead throughout her life.

After she had finished her Portuguese Secondary School studies, Joan's parents took an unusual decision for the times: to send her to Lisbon's Instituto Superior de Agronomia to take a degree in agriculture!

A close friend of Joan's family at the time was Miss Margery Withers, the British private secretary to Dom Manuel, the only male member of the Portuguese Royal Family to have survived assassination. Miss Withers was so impressed by Joan's fluency in four languages that she encouraged her parents to send her to Mrs Hoster's Secretarial College in England. Joan passed with top marks but in post-war Britain it was not easy for foreign secretaries, even with good linguistic skills, to find jobs. However, luck was on Joan's side, and she was engaged by the BBC's Portuguese language radio broadcasting service. While with the BBC Joan was seconded to work for three days at Buckingham Palace on the occasion of the State visit to Britain of the President of Portugal, General Craveiro Lopes.

A keen cook, Joan became involved during her stay in London with the foreign diplomatic wives' cookery club and

her demonstration of Portuguese specialties at Earls Court was a great success. Through her diplomatic connections Joan received an invitation from Lady Fermoy, lady-in-waiting to the Queen Mother, to prepare some Portuguese dishes for a cookery display at the Kings Lynn Art Festival of which she was President. The Queen Mother, who was at Sandringham, visited the Festival and enjoyed Joan's "pasteis de bacalhau" so much that she had her housekeeper write down the recipe so that she could have them served at her drinks parties. The photograph of the Queen Mother shaking hands with Joan is a treasured family memento.

After a spell at Forte's Portuguese restaurant in London Joan returned to Lisbon to take up a senior secretarial position at Mobil Oil's head office.

Joan took early retirement and became deeply involved in voluntary work. One of her first tasks was to wind up the affairs of the "International Home" in Lisbon. This Home had been founded by Joan's maternal grandmother, Mrs Robert Lithgow, to provide shelter and care for elderly foreign women who had been working in Portuguese families as governesses and language teachers. Mrs Lithgow's good work was carried on by Joan's maternal Aunt, Mrs Ada Johnson. The only remaining British resident in the International Home when it closed down was Mrs Lemos, the widow of a Portuguese diplomat, and it was Joan who arranged for her to be moved into the British Community's new Retirement Home at São Pedro do Estoril. From then up to 2003 Joan devoted much of her time and boundless energy to Quinta da Fonte and to her work as a loyal BRH Committee member.

Joan served on many committees and always took a close personal interest in Anglo-Portuguese and British institutions. These included St George's Church of which she was Church Warden from 1983 up to 2007; the British

Cemetery Committee; the British Historical Society; the Trash and Treasure Charity Shop in Carcavelos; the Fact Finders of which she was a founder member; and the Women's Royal Voluntary Service.

In recognition of her dedicated service to the British Community Joan was awarded the MBE in 1989 at a ceremony at the Residence hosted by the British Ambassador, Mr Michael Simpson-Orlebar and his wife, Rosita.

A devout Christian, Joan was a carer and a giver. Single all her life she "mothered" and cared lovingly for everyone: for her sister Mafalda and for Mafalda's children and grandchildren; for her youngest sister Rita; for her late brother Tomás whom she and Rita nursed at home until his untimely death; for her many dear friends; for the aged; and for those in need.

This remarkable lady will never be forgotten: St George's Church Hall is already called the "Joan Croft de Moura Church Hall" in recognition of her years of supervising and hosting church events and making sure everyone had a nice hot cup of tea or coffee after the service; a Memorial Plaque will shortly be unveiled in St George's Church in her memory; and the WRVS and the British Retirement Home are planning to have her favourite rose tree planted in Quinta da Fonte garden.

We are all the richer for having known the late Miss Joan Croft de Moura MBE.

Memories of Portugal in England

In 1953 an elderly cousin Elfie Sertorius who lived in England hired a balcony in Regent Street so that her young cousins should be able to watch the Coronation procession. Mafalda and Rita were in England at University but I was in Lisbon. I promptly handed in my resignation at Mobil Oil and went to England.

After the Coronation I began looking for a job and in January 1954 joined the Portuguese section of the BBC. In June of that year the Portuguese Embassy contacted me with the request that I represent them at a meeting at the Gas Council. The object of the meeting was that the Gas Council wished to demonstrate gas cookers at the forthcoming Food Fair, and therefore had approached a number of Embassies hoping they would be willing to man model kitchens and decorate them with their countries' artefacts. The entirety of the Embassies (16) got expert cooks from their countries. Portugal was the only one that had to make do with anyone in London who might know how to cook. I was approached under the impression I was Mafalda who had taken a degree in household and domestic science but had already returned to Portugal. However, nothing daunted I said I would organize a team and would take on the job. The Gas Council bore all expenses. The Fair lasted ten days and it proved great fun.

At the end of the Fair, Dame Vera Laughton-Matthews, ex-head of WRNS, one of the heads of the Gas Council invited the heads of each national team plus the respective ambassadors to a celebration dinner. Lady Fermoy, a great friend of Dame Vera, was present. It was at this dinner that an International Kitchen Club was formed. Both Dame Vera and Lady Fermoy attended many of the dinners held by IKC members. When it was my turn I had to borrow the Casa de Portugal in Lower Regent Street!

Another great opportunity came my way in 1955. In early October whilst at work at the BBC I received a phone call supposedly from Buckingham Palace. The head of the Department who took the call and then called me just said, "tell your friends not to joke when they call you here". I took the phone and in Portuguese ticked off the caller and then asked for the name. A rather stiff voice asked if it was Miss Joan Croft de Moura and added that he was Flight Lieutenant Blount calling from Buckingham Palace. The purpose of the call was to ask if I would be willing to act as interpreter at the Palace during the forthcoming visit of the President of Portugal, Craveiro Lopes. Needless to say I jumped at this wonderful chance. I spent the three days of the presidential visit at Buckingham Palace acting as interpreter to part of the President's entourage.

On the day of the arrival I was allowed to watch the coach coming up the Mall, my vantage point being windows of the balcony where the Royal Family usually appear. I was behind the curtains!

All the people at the Palace were charming and I was shown round the state rooms and also part of the private suite. On the day of the State Banquet, Flight Lieutenant Blunt, equerry to the Queen, took me to see the banqueting hall which is usually the ballroom. It was a magnificent sight: the walls were hung with panels of red velvet on which were displayed gold salvers. The table glittered with crystal as the chandeliers were lit and the flowers were all golden, white and bronze. I was introduced to the Duke of Hamilton, the Lord Steward, who was making sure everything was in order.

As a thank you for my work I was invited to dinner to be followed by a party on the last day. All the higher staff attended including Nurse Lightbody.

During the President's visit I was contacted by BBC Television with the request that I demonstrate a Portuguese

dish on "Woman's Hour". I was off duty the morning of the second day so off I went to Lime Grove to give my demonstration, which was a success.

My luck continued to hold for in 1956 Lady Fermoy, chairman of the King's Lynn Arts Festival decided to include cookery among the arts. She invited four countries to participate: China, Holland, Italy and Portugal. So the four teams of two persons each went off to King's Lynn as guests of the Arts Festival Committee. Demonstrations took place at the old Guildhall on two days. The Queen Mother, as Patron, would be visiting on one of those days and all four teams would be presented to her. I was in luck for she came on the day Italy and Portugal would be giving their demonstrations. The Queen Mother brought with her her housekeeper. Pastéis de bacalhau was one of the dishes I prepared and after trying one the Queen Mother asked me to give the recipe to the housekeeper as they would be lovely to serve with drinks if made smaller.

I have a lovely photo of the Queen Mother shaking hands with me.

J C de Moura